

Buckland Energy Committee

Meeting Minutes: 12 August 2020, 7:10 p.m., (held via Buckland Zoom account)

Present: Committee Members: Ellen Kaufmann, Michael Novack, Penny Novack, Margaret Olin, Harvey Schaktman; Guest: Kate Lindroos Conlin

Facilitator: Margaret Olin

Scribe: Margaret Olin

1. *Open the meeting.*
2. *Review and approve minutes from 17 June 2020 meeting.*
 - Approved unanimously as written.
3. *Discussion of solarize programs – past, present, & future – including state/federal incentives for residents, businesses, and municipalities, community solar initiatives; moving forward with awarded META Grant for Community Shared Solar feasibility study and approved proposal from Northeast Solar (currently in Phase 1)*
 - Residents who participated in Solarize program have begun to get this year's SREC checks.
 - META Grant Community Solar: due to restrictions around pandemic, delayed; Town and NESolar looking into zoning around one potential town-owned site
4. *Discussion of local and regional energy-related issues, including:*
 - MCAP
 - Rail transport of fossil and other fuels; concerns about derailments, remaining railroad ties and debris along tracks
 - State-proposed energy legislation, including proposed “woodlands partnership”; response to Northern Pass; PACE Program & Green Works
 - Alternative electric power suppliers; regional municipal electricity aggregation plan updates
 - MassSave program updates
 - New Massachusetts programs: (through Mass CEC and DOER; Center for EcoTechnology --CET)
 - Municipal lighting/streetlights
 - Recycle-able/biodegradable plastic bags; single-use plastics
 - Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership: *Note: this item was moved to become the 2nd item on the agenda.*
 - Buckland resident Kate Lindroos Conlin attended the meeting to discuss this topic and share a statement (*see attached*)
 - Group discussed the need for responsible, active, science-based forestry practices to preserve the health of our woodlands, potential environmental/economic issues around biomass production, questions/concerns about the legislation itself No votes taken.
 - Vote on whether or not Buckland will join the MTWP will occur at a future STM; discussed possibility of holding public informational forums on the issues before that STM

- ° Municipal Electricity Aggregation Plan:
 - For more information, see press release in 02 July *Recorder* (Greenfield newspaper); the Buckland page on the Colonial Power website is: <https://colonialpowergroup.com/buckland/> and Buckland posted this FAQ page on 28 May: <https://www.town.buckland.ma.us/home/news/community-choice-electricity-rates-approved-buckland>
 - Discussed possibilities of public informational forum via Zoom, inviting Colonial Power to participate—preferably in early October
 - Several residents contacted us about difficulty contacting Dynegy right after receiving letters: probable under-staffing issues (Currently, communications seem to be going smoothly, and they’ve established a separate department to handle Massachusetts.)
 - By September BEC meeting, Colonial should have information about Buckland’s participation in the program
- ° Municipal lighting/streetlights – Green Communities Grant (GCG) / Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) Grant-funded streetlight project:
 - Discussed 11 August Select Board Meeting, where the municipal lighting project was on the agenda.
 - Meeting attended by numerous Buckland residents there to get more information, ask questions, and voice concerns
 - Project history & current status described and questions answered by Heather Butler and by George Woodbury (the consultant for the project)
 - For detailed information, suggested that those who were unable to attend the meeting view the meeting video posted on Buckland’s website <https://www.town.buckland.ma.us/select-board/links/meeting-videos>
 - In summary: the purchase of the lights from Eversource has gone through, the fixtures/bulbs have been purchased, and installation is scheduled to begin 12 August and run through early the following week.
- ° No updates on plastics, though the current Massachusetts restrictions on customers bringing their own bags has been lifted; Buckland’s plastic bag guidelines are not currently being strictly enforced.

5. *Update on past Green Communities Grant applications; planning for 2020*
 - *continue discussion on potential projects to include in future applications, especially those that will bring us closer to the 20% reduction in energy use marker*
 - *DOER updates?*
 - See discussion of streetlight project above.
 - Note: until the 2019 GCG for the streetlight project is finished, we can't apply for any future Green Communities Grants.
6. *Continue discussion of future public events, including:*
 - *Future winserts workshop? Public forum on energy issues?*
 - *Fall/Winter 2020 film series and/or discussion groups;*
 - *budget for events*
 - Due to pandemic, no such public events are possible at this time. However, perhaps there could be Zoom meetings around the Municipal Electricity Aggregation (Community Choice Power Supply Program) with rep from Colonial Power or Dynegy participating.
7. *Update on MVP Grant current and future; Hazard Mitigation Plan Update*
 - Note: planned 07 April public forum – and planned recorded follow-up public comment period – did not occur due to COVID-19 precautions. Forum is in the process of being rescheduled
 - Because of the pandemic, completion deadline has been extended to 31 December 2020.
 - Earlier drafts completed before pandemic: need to update draft to include possible information on pandemics as a potential hazard?
8. *Report back about other meetings/ activities in which committee members participate.*
 - None
9. *Other items not reasonably anticipated*
 - None.
10. *Choose facilitator and scribe for next meeting.*
 - (Regular meetings discontinued while state of emergency in effect; during this time, meetings will be called & posted on an as-needed basis, and held via teleconference.)
11. *Adjourn meeting*

I recently attended a virtual Climate Action Now event held on May 19th "To Cut or Not to Cut..." concerning the management of our state woodlands. This group has taken a firm anti-management stance in order to prioritize carbon storage. This single-minded focus ignores important aspects of forest health such as resiliency, biodiversity, and habitat/species loss.

The iconic environmentalist Aldo Leopold writes, "If the land mechanism as a whole is good then every part is good, whether we understand it or not...To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering."

We know we are losing the cogs and wheels. Active management is the only way to preserve these pieces. In the face of climate change, it is more important than ever to maintain resiliency, along with continuing to sequester carbon, so that we are not sterilizing our natural areas for future generations.

There is a strong protest movement against forest management as you may be aware. I worry that this issue is misunderstood by the public, mostly because before I learned certain things I would have felt the same. I would have been driven by emotions rather than facts. I consider myself a progressive who cares about and values the environment.

Fear and distrust of how land and resources in general are managed in this country, in other matters, has perhaps bred skepticism in the minds of folks who don't want to trust seasoned scientists, woodsmen and women, who promote site-specific cutting for diversity and resiliency backed by science-based evidence that is indisputable and also supports carbon sequestration and keeps the woods wooded. I want to make sure that I raise my voice in my own town, which I love and daily remark on how grateful I am to live in such a beautiful place, so as to prevent something like that happening here --- I'm speaking of the protest movement which I find to be toxic and anti-science. Obviously, people are entitled to their opinions, but I believe this issue is one that is best understood by those with the scientific and working knowledge and that we should listen to them and their research.

Since learning the science of ecology, and the history of our woods here in Massachusetts (which in the early 1800s looked much like Ireland, cleared land with sheep and now has woods that are increasingly and unnaturally "even-aged" since these fields were abandoned at similar times) I have learned that cutting trees isn't always "bad," and to deem it so is maddeningly simplistic.

Our even-aged forest that has been heavily domesticated and fragmented benefits from management to produce a variety of habitats. Domestication of the land (damming of waterways, roads, prevention of fire, loss of beaver habitat, agriculture) has led to a decrease of varied habitats. Think chestnut-sided warblers that require thickets to protect themselves from predators. Think of the thickets themselves which are not shade tolerant. We have the lowest amount of young forest in a hundred years. A cut forest is "ugly" perhaps to a human who doesn't know that life is full on that ground and things will grow that are endangered or rare (and also will continue to sequester a lot of carbon). What looks good

to me doesn't perhaps look good to wildlife. When it concerns our woodlands, we need to consciously break away from our human-centric beliefs.

It's scary to see folks who are perhaps aligned with some of my other beliefs as a progressive toss out, or be exposed to, strong statements without truly knowing the science. There is a phenomenon whereby people can ignore science in the face of political interests. We're seeing that now with mask wearing. There is an emotional aspect that can't be ignored and I understand why people have a knee-jerk, human-centric, reaction here. As I said, I probably would have felt the same had I not been exposed to the science which prompted a shift in perspective.

In a paper put out by the Harvard Forest titled "The Illusion of Preservation" it is stated that for every 20 acres of Massachusetts forest not managed, 1 acre of primary forest (forest that has never been logged) is destroyed globally (in poor areas that often have less regulation and therefore it harms the environment and workers more in the process). Massachusetts imports more resources than it exports. We import 98% of our wood needs, according to UMass research. Affluent countries insist on not using their resources for aesthetic reasons using flawed interpretations of science to justify them. This is a strong accusation, but I believe this is white privilege and also suggests our land is "pristine and untouched" which couldn't be farther from the truth.

The idea that our forests can return to a once "wild" state is a racist idea rooted in colonialism and in the belief that native peoples had little to no effect on the landscape around them. It dehumanizes them. Native people practiced agriculture, which completely changes the land, made complex trade routes, used fire to promote species such as blueberries, huckleberries, inviting in pollinators, plants for deer to eat, and also to create clear lines of sight for hunting game, in certain landscapes, moving more efficiently through the woods and more quietly, they would girdle trees and wait for them to fall, they would gather fallen wood which changes the composition of the forest floor.

We can't just completely modify our landscape with homes, roads, buildings, farmland, power lines, and then stop short, believing that we can leave the forest that is part of a fragmented landscape "natural." There is no natural in the way that we like to imagine it. There is, however, science-based understanding of natural systems that informs management that promotes diversity and makes sure that the woods are alive and vibrant.

The best way to protect our forests is to engage them in our living and in our making a living, with knowledgeable scientists involved to ensure sustainably. For this reason I support the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership. I support any policy that ensures our woods remain wooded and protects our rural character and economy, and the landowners who choose to keep their land forested. Cutting trees means keeping the woods forested. We live in one of the great forests of the world. There are so many places that don't have what we have.