

Sustain Mid Maine Coalition
Climate Change Public Policy Team
Meeting Minutes
March 24, 2014

The meeting started at about 6:35 p.m. at the Winslow Public Library.

Members present were: Tom Tietenberg, Ernie Grolimund, Jane Edwards, Elery Keene and Dick Thomas.

Minutes of last meeting accepted:

Motion was made by Dick and seconded by Jane to approve the minutes of the last meeting of the team (February 24, 2014). The minutes were approved unanimously.

Reports of activities by team members since the last meeting:

Tom reported on the "Climate Expo Summit", a statewide meeting in Augusta, on March 12th. Tom, Jane, Elery, and Dick had all attended. Unity College President, Steve Mulkey, gave the keynote address for the day long conference meeting. Mike Kelley had worked with others on planning for this day long conference, which consisted of three sessions of different small groups addressing what they considered to be the most pressing issues to address, related to adapting to climate change. A list of the most important (most generally agreed upon) issues was compiled and will be sent to attendees. The afternoon meeting was cut short due to a snowstorm, and an early departure, but members who participated agreed that it was a very good experience. There were many interesting exhibits, and also worthwhile shorter meetings, with interesting topics.

Tom also reported on the panel discussion that was held at Colby College on March 19th. Tom was the moderator. Jennifer Kierstead of Running Start Institute (collaborator with Sustain Mid Maine) was on the three member panel. The first two speakers discussed ways to mitigate the use of carbon, and Jennifer talked about the work being done in the local community. The first speaker discussed the carbon tax now used in British Columbia. It taxes auto fuel as well as fossil fuel used for making electricity and heating buildings. It works as a sort of tax swap, and people don't see it as a tax increase. The second speaker, Dylan Vorhees of Natural Resources Council of Maine spoke about the "cap and trade" system, used in the New England and New York region, in the power plant sector. This system is likely to be accepted in existing EPA regulations. It can be combined with some aspects of the carbon tax system, in the future, for other sectors of our economy. Jennifer spoke about the work we have been doing in our area, and how we may be a model for other communities in the Kennebec River valley. She mentioned that we have had "interns" from Colby College in the past. She described the grant which the City of Waterville won, with help from Sustain Mid Maine Coalition, to promote better weatherization of

buildings.

Tom said that Jennifer talked at length with the Colby College climate change coordinator after the meeting, and made good use of the opportunity to discuss possible joint projects in the future.

Later Dick said that he had been thinking about what Steve Mulkey said in his address on March 12. If the global temperature goes up five degrees, that is not "compatible with civilization as we know it." Dick said he wonders whether we are doing ENOUGH to prevent this. We don't want to be doomsday predictors, but something like 80 percent of the public is not convinced that climate change concerns are real. It brings up the question -- should we be encouraged to speak about our fears?

A discussion among members followed.

Tom has read that fear is said to "paralyze" people into inaction. We need to put our concerns into language that people can understand and can deal with. It is good to talk about some of the things that are going to happen. He said the latest issue of Science has an article that is a good example of addressing the issues openly and accurately.

Jane said that in past experiences she has had with "movements" that resulted in changing public opinion and involvement, things started out slowly with a small group of activists, and gradually grew to a critical mass, with much greater public awareness and much more acceptance of change, as things went along - until eventually the general public became educated and public opinion was able to influence a move toward change. She said that having state-wide meetings of people concerned with climate change, like the meeting in Augusta that we just discussed, is a very good step, and that things ARE moving.

Elery pointed out that many things are already happening, and people can become more aware through those events, like the storms in New York and New Jersey, and before that in Vermont. Things are happening, and the degree to which we are subject to them, and aware of them leads to an increased public knowledge. What we do now or fail to do now, is critical.

Ernie reported on his "meeting" with the EPA about proposed new wood burning regulations. He had a half an hour to speak, meeting with a policy staffer, and a mid-level engineer. This was mostly about the public health problem, but with some discussion about the CO2 effects of wood burning. They are saying that "biomass and wood burning generally are not carbon neutral. They also discussed carbon black soot. It's a very important part of climate change. The sequestration issue was also discussed; many of the pellets used in pellet stoves are made from chipping whole trees.

Elery said that sometimes the wood we burn to generate heat comes from slash (limbs and small pieces) that is left in the forest. When it rots, it will generate carbon dioxide anyway. The trunk of the tree may be used to make furniture, or building materials that will last a long time. It may not break down into carbon dioxide for well over 100 years. Some will be used to make paper or some other product, which may have a fairly short life before it is burned or rots away – producing carbon dioxide. When a tree grows, to take the place of the one that was cut down, it uses carbon dioxide from the air for its growth. So many think that burning wood is carbon neutral. But if the wood is used to make something that has a long life, such as plywood, it may actually reduce the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

- Ernie spoke briefly about the use of wood pellets.

Jane told the group what she learned from the woman at the Maine Lung Association table, at the conference in Augusta -- they are discovering that many pellet manufacturers are mixing other material in with the wood for pellets, and that there are, at present, no regulations about this, nor any disclosure requirements. She said we will need to do something about this, and have a "pellet standard."

Tom said that some kind of glue is added to hold each pellet together as a pellet.

Elery spoke about a presentation by Revision Energy at a recent Sustain Mid Maine Energy Team meeting. Elery, Peter and Tom were there, and Elery has written a report about the meeting, to preserve a record of the information. The speaker gave a very complete and interesting report on the use of solar, and solar arrays, including how they can be financed, how the problems of generation and distribution can be successfully overcome, etc. Also they reported on some "model" projects that are currently underway, and funding resources that are available, etc. Jane suggested that Elery bring the report to this committee at some point, so we could discuss it and learn from it.

Elery also mentioned that he and Jane went to another statewide meeting, this one about "sustainable communities." They thought they might learn more about what some of the "transition towns" and other municipalities are doing to move toward a stronger local community, supporting local farmers, buying local, etc. Many of the participants spoke about developing a credit union which would invest local dollars in local projects, and about putting in place a system so that people could trade labor and skills without paying with cash, etc. Quite a bit of this seems to be going on in Maine.

One small group session was about forming groups like Sustain Mid Maine Coalition, to help develop a strong sustainable local community. Elery chaired the group and Jane took notes. There were just five participants (by then it had started to snow and some people left before this part of the program)

There were a couple of participants who were very interested in some of SMMC's accomplishments, and wanted to know how we got started, how we got things done, etc. We explained that we work with our local community governments, and told about some of our successful projects. Jane wrote a report of the discussion, which will be shared among meeting participants, later.

Reports on Legislation:

Tom reported on two solar energy bills. One of them, LD1652, sets goals in supporting solar energy. It has a committee recommendation that it ought to pass as amended, but hasn't made it to the House and Senate at this time.

LD1252, supporting solar energy rebates, would provide funding for solar from special revenue bonds, and from a small rate increase on the electric bill. It passed in the Senate, with an amendment, but it may not have enough votes to pass if vetoed by the Governor.

Wood Burning:

At this point we left off with these reports, because Dick had to leave, and we wanted to hear from him about the paper on "wood burning", etc.

Dick explained that he would like to combine the papers on heat pumps, natural gas, etc. with the one on wood burning, and he had realized that he didn't put the same information in the one on wood burning that was in the others. He wants to do more work on that and bring it back to our next meeting. We talked again about what Dick might do with the documents, and about using them to advise homeowners, if Winslow wins grant money for helping citizens improve their weatherizing and to install new heating systems. Jane said she had wondered whether we would need to take the one on wood burning to the SMMC board before it is distributed, as we did with the paper on heat pumps and natural gas.

It was suggested that we'd wait until the papers are done, and we know whether there will be a weatherization project, etc, before deciding what the papers will be used for. They can be distributed at conferences, etc.

More legislative news:

Jane mentioned following a bill before the Energy Committee about supporting tidal power (LD1781). She said she had asked the committee to support tidal power projects, and hydro power as well, and mentioned that there was interest in hydropower in her area, and possible use of an "Archimedes screw" technology. The committee was interested, and there was a lot of discussion about a specific project one company put before them, but it was not operating yet anywhere, and was "in development". The discussion about the

bill indicated that rate payers shouldn't be asked to support energy projects which were still in the development stages. (The bill eventually received an "ought not to pass" report from the committee. JEE)

Jane also described a bill (LD1750) which seemed to have been submitted because of a problem between the Department of Environmental Protection and the Energy Committee, over revised wind power regulations which the DEP put into effect without bringing them to the committee for approval. This seems to be an administrative issue between the agency (executive branch) and the legislative committee (legislative branch)

Date of Next Meeting:

The next meeting will be April 24 at 6:30 p.m. at the Winslow Library. The usual meeting date will Fall on Memorial Day in May. We will decide when to meet in May, at the April meeting.

Submitted by Jane Edwards and Elery Keene.