



## Town of Manchester Sustainability Commission

Wednesday, March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2024

6:40 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

**Location:** Work\_Space (903 Main Street, Manchester, CT) & Zoom Virtual Meeting

### MINUTES

**Attendees:** Peg Hackett (Chair), Gene DeJoannis (Co-Chair), Geoff King, Oksan Bayulgen, William Chudzik, Jeffrey Schegelmilch, Rebecca Fowler, Shannon Baldassario, Victoria McBrien, Edwina Mik-Lumor

**Absent:** Zachary DelGaizo, Paris Bazemore, Patrick McKee, Terry Robinson

**Attendees (Other):** Austin Murray, Rachel Schnabel, Peter Millman, Elizabeth Lodge

#### 1. Introductions

##### a. Call to Order

Chair Peg Hackett called the meeting to order at 6:40pm.

##### b. Public Comment

Co-Chair Gene DeJoannis relayed several questions from Coryn Clark, who was unable to attend the meeting:

- Any news or updates on litter mitigation? Is funding from nip deposits available to support supplies or programs for neighborhood care groups?
- Are there funds available for assisting businesses to purchase and install bike racks and decrease single-use plastics?
- Are there grant funds available for building resilience from climate change?
- Are there funds available for trail maintenance of paved greenways and hiking trails?

Austin Murray and Rachel Schnabel will respond to Coryn via email with answers to those questions.

Gene asked if there was a group that maintains a record or list of all the trail segments in Town that are owned or maintained by different groups (the Water Department, Conservation Commission, Rail Trail, etc.). Geoff King responded that the Conservation Commission hears regular reports from each of the trail groups, other than the Water Department.

##### c. Communications

Chair Peg Hackett informed the Commission that the group still has one remaining vacancy for the Republicans to fill. She is working to connect with Director Peter Conyers on potential leads for the vacant Republican seat.

Austin Murray shared that the Sustainability and Conservation Commissions will be putting on a cleanup event on Saturday, April 20<sup>th</sup> for Earth Day at Center Springs Park.

Peg Hackett also shared that UR Community Cares, a recipient of ARPA funding from the Commission will be holding a ribbon cutting event on their new tech center on Monday, April 1<sup>st</sup> at 4:30pm.

Austin will look into creating a messaging platform for Commissioners to utilize instead of emails. Several Commissioners recommended Slack, and Austin will check with the Town's IT Department to see what they recommend.

**d. Adoption of the February Meeting Minutes [Town of Manchester, CT Public Documents \(ecode360.com\)](#)**

Gene DeJoannis moved to approve the February meeting minutes.

Seconded by William Chudzik.

An amendment was proposed to correct a typo, a misspelling of the "East Coast Greenway".

In Favor: Gene DeJoannis, Geoff King, Oksan Bayulgen, William Chudzik, Jeffrey Schegelmilch, Rebecca Fowler, Shannon Baldassario, Victoria McBrien.

Opposed: None.

Abstain: Edwina Mik-Lumor.

The motion passed.

**2. Sustainability ARPA Grant – Vote on Remaining Allocation**

Austin Murray presented a summary of the ARPA Sustainability Grant Program, which was a \$500,000 ARPA-funded initiative lead by the Commission for support to nonprofits.

After Round 1 of the initiative, which closed in November 2023, there was \$76,659 remaining to allocate.

Round 2 closed on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024 and the Commission's ARPA Subcommittee met on March 22<sup>nd</sup> to review, discuss, and score each proposal. The following projects were recommended for funding:

- Gentle Love Diaper Pantry
  - Gentle Love Diaper Pantry is seeking to establish a Car Seats 4 Kids Program that would provide 170 free car seats to income eligible Manchester families in coordination with the Manchester Police Department, Human Services Administration and the Department of Family, Recreation and Leisure. (\$25,000)
- Community Child Guidance Clinic
  - Technology (smart boards, iPads, radios) that will enhance our educational and mental health interventions with children and families in Manchester. We intend to invest in technology that will empower our staff to address the barriers that impact equitable mental health care. (\$23,759)
- CT Grassroots Community Collaborative
  - The provision of supportive spaces for consistent community engagement, support and training for community members to facilitate meetings themselves, and appropriate language access. Specifically, we will hold community meetings for Manchester residents, on at least a bi-weekly basis, specifically centering the experiences of those in our community of racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse backgrounds, as well as those facing socioeconomic challenges. (\$25,000)
- Manchester Land Conservation Trust
  - Purchase, delivery, and installation of native plantings at the Bush Hill Preserve to replace and suppress invasive species. The installation will include Serviceberry, Elderberry, Grey Dogwood, as well as various grass seed mixes, laying of topsoil,

installation of protective fencing and guide posts to protect and support the new plantings, and the laying of straw to protect the planted seed mixes and plantings.  
(\$2,900)

Shannon Baldassario asked if there was consideration given to organizations from round one to round two, for those that were approved the first time and looking for a second allocation? Jeffrey Schegelmilch responded that the Subcommittee did consider applications that had been funded in Round 1, but that they needed to be materially different from any initiatives that had received funding previously in order to be considered for Round 2.

William Chudzik commented that he was impressed with how the program was handled and he hoped the process could be repeatable and duplicated in the future.

Jeffrey Schegelmilch also commented that there were clearly many creative and important projects proposed, and every project that was suggested was worthy of funding in terms of its importance to the community. He continued that there is clearly a tremendous amount more good that could be accomplished by channeling Town funds into community organizations. The projects and initiatives that the Commission was unable to fund either due to lack of funding or due to the need falling outside of the scope of what the Commission was empowered to recommend show how much else there is to do if the resources are available.

Rachel Schnabel asked if the grant program run by the Department of Leisure, Families, and Recreation was still open and if some of the projects not funded by the Commission could find opportunities there. Austin responded that the amount for awards was much lower with the LFR grant, but that all applicants were made aware of that opportunity as well.

Jeffrey Schegelmilch recommended that the Town should not rely on external funding for these types of programs; that it could be funded regularly through the Town's budget.

Gene DeJoannis moved to recommend the following allocations to the Board of Directors:

- Gentle Love Diaper Pantry: \$25,000
- Community Child Guidance Clinic: \$23,759
- CT Grassroots Community Collaborative: \$25,000
- Manchester Land Conservation Trust: \$2,900

Seconded by Jeffrey Schegelmilch.

In Favor: Gene DeJoannis, Geoff King, Oksan Bayulgen, William Chudzik, Jeffrey Schegelmilch, Rebecca Fowler, Shannon Baldassario, Victoria McBrien, Edwina Mik-Lumor.

Opposed: None.

Abstain: None.

The motion passed.

### **3. Community Solar Advocacy Discussion**

Peter Millman, the VP of People's Action for Clean Energy (PACE) presented on the status of Community Solar programs in Connecticut and other states in the Northeast, including Connecticut's Shared Clean Energy Facilities (SCEF) program.

Peter explained that Connecticut is lagging behind other states in New England regarding the amount of solar installed per capita and the percentage of total electricity demand that is solar.

Peter reviewed the history and goals of the SCEF program, and explained how the original goal of the program was to develop 50MW of solar annually. For the first three years of the program, that limit was 25MW until the legislature raised it to 50MW. Another goal of the program is to provide savings to certain categories of rate payers (~60% for low/moderate income residents, ~20% for businesses, ~20% for those who cannot logistically place solar on their roof). There is no preference given to residents of communities hosting solar projects. Subscribers receive a \$0.025/kWh credit for the 20-year program, which does not increase.

Peter then spoke about the difference between Connecticut's program and other community solar initiatives in other states, with the major differences being:

- Higher annual goals in other states (50MW per year in CT, more elsewhere)
- Non-profits and for-profit organizations initiate the projects in other states, as opposed to solar developers in CT. These groups also enroll subscribers.
- Slightly less emphasis on low-income customers on other states regarding enrollment into the programs.
- CT uses a reverse auction bidding process to pay developers, whereas other states use "declining block tariffs"

In response to the main reason for his visit, Peter also recommended several things that the Commission could advocate for, if it chose to, at the State legislature:

- Raise or eliminate the current annual capacity cap of 50MW. CT needs more solar and we're not keeping up with nearby states. Looking at the energy goals for 2040, let alone 2050, we're going to need a lot more solar of all kinds.
- Incentivize battery storage with SCEF projects.
- Allocate at least some subscriber slots to residents of host communities, especially since many of these projects are being deployed in more rural areas.
- Move to a declining block tariff system of getting solar developers paid.

Gene DeJoannis asked how many SCEF projects there are currently operating in CT, and Peter answered that there was only one. There are more projects being developed that have been selected, Peter would guess that number is around 40.

Oksan asked about opposition to projects in other states, and how it might compare to the opposition facing SCEF projects. Peter explained that a state like Massachusetts is more solar-friendly in general, whereas in Connecticut reluctance to green-light large solar projects lead to the use of the siting council.

Tory McBrien asked Peter about the role that Eversource and UI have in originating SCEF programs. Peter clarified that the utility companies do not originate the projects, but solar developers do. Utilities administer the program and receive bids. In places like Massachusetts, sponsoring organizations submit proposals for projects to the State's overall utility authority.

Gene DeJoannis asked about the reverse bidding process that the SCEF program currently uses. Peter explained that developers submit project bids, probably twice as many bids as will be accepted, and there's a maximum acceptable price (roughly \$0.13 per kilowatt hour). And then projects are approved from lowest to highest. On average the rates for the annual 50MW allotment of SCEF projects is ~\$0.102 per kilowatt hour.

Austin asked Peter to detail, if possible, what is currently being done in the current legislative session regarding community solar and if there is anything he would recommend the Commission or the Town's Board of Directors or Town Manager do to advance this cause or advocate for some of the changes to the SCEF program in its current form. Peter responded that while the Energy and Technology Committee has likely already decided on which bills will be considered, now is a great time to write a letter, especially in regard to specific elements of SCEF, such as raising or eliminating the caps/rates.

#### **4. Earth Day Planning**

Austin repeated that the Earth Day Cleanup Event will be taking place on April 20<sup>th</sup>, and opened the discussion on any other ideas for ways that the Commission can spotlight Earth Day and its efforts. He also mentioned that he is planning to synch the launch and advertisement of the Eversource Home Energy Solutions – Income Eligible program with Earth Day as well.

The Commission recommended putting information in Manchester Matters around Earth Day.

The Commission then discussed the Community Compost Program and Food Scrap Program. Rachel is hopeful that the collection units that have been installed will start to work with app in the coming weeks.

Oksan asked about the cost and logistics of sending flyers to every house in Manchester that outlines the sustainability programs offered, similar to the notices for the hazardous waste collection dates. Austin is looking into a doing something similar for the Eversource program with those grant funds, so he will be able to report back with a firm cost for that if it's something the Commission would like to explore.

## **5. Unfinished Business**

### **a. Eversource Community Partnership Initiative Working Group**

Austin informed the Commission that The Town has received the funding (\$10,000) and will launch the project via a press release with quotes from Peg and Mayor Moran. As a reminder, the goal is to push ~200 residents towards accessing the Home Energy Solutions – Income Eligible Program and ~10 large multifamily buildings to utilize the Multifamily Initiative program (eligible to buildings with 5+ dwelling units).

Austin has also begun working with Communications on outreach materials.

Austin reminded that Commission that both Oksan and Gene expressed interest in serving on a working group that has yet to be convened. If anyone else would like to join please let him know.

### **b. Long-Term Planning Working Group**

Austin informed the Commission that ISO document has finally been purchased, and Terry and Bill expressed interest in convening a long-term planning working group to cross-reference the new ISO document, SustainableCT criteria, Manchester NEXT, and CRCOG's regional climate plans in order to give the Commission more general direction. If anyone else would like to join in that effort, please let Austin know.

## **6. New Business/Items for Future Agenda**

Geoff King informed the Commission that the Conservation Commission is in the process of partnering with residents and an arborist to provide education and potentially new trees. Rachel added that it would be the result of funding from the Urban Forestry Equity Grant, so any initiative would need to focus on the distressed community tracts within Manchester. The Conservation Commission has also been working on its best practice recommendation for riparian, mowing and other maintenance of existing open spaces, and also forestry management.

## **7. Next Meeting – April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

## **8. Adjournment**

Gene DeJoannis moved to adjourn the meeting.

Seconded by Oksan Bayulgen.

In Favor: Geoff King, Oksan Bayulgen, William Chudzik, Jeffrey Schegelmilch, Patrick McKee, Rebecca Fowler, Shannon Baldassario, Victoria McBrien

Opposed: None.

Abstain: None.

The motion passed unanimously.