



\* *Strafford Community Solar*: The project is under construction (installation of racks is planned for October). The passage of the Inflation Reduction Act and reinstatement of the 30% Investment Tax Credit (instead of 26%) for solar has improved the project economics for participants.

\* *Clean School Bus Program*: Worked with Butler Bus Service and the White River Valley Supervisory Union to submit an application to EPA's Clean School Bus program. If successful, the application would fund the purchase of an all-electric bus to replace a diesel bus to serve students of The Newton School. The grant would also fund the installation of charging equipment for the buses. EPA will notify applicants of decisions in October.

\* *IREC Steering Committee*: Met with the IREC Steering Committee on August 11 to discuss the significance of forests in meeting climate goals and to determine next steps for the IREC Climate Action Plan. Working groups for the two actions that IREC towns will be collaborating on over the coming year have been established and will be meeting in September. I am applying for a grant to make the IREC Climate Action Plan more engaging and user friendly. In addition, the IREC Program and the IREC Climate Action Plan have received print, TV, and radio coverage this month!

Discussion of whether or not Strafford and IREC towns are taking a strong enough stand on forest-carbon oriented practices; Susan T. reminded us that we've declared an emergency, but many older practices are embedded in policies that reign. Susan T. mentioned, for instance, if you're managing your forest for birds, as Audubon advocates, that's not the same as prioritizing carbon sequestration.

Matt is representing Strafford on the Building Codes task group. They had a first meeting on September 11. They discussed five potential proposals:

1. Longer range: Allow towns to institute "Stretch" or "Reach" codes, more stringent than state standards. In most states this is regulated by state rules. Research is needed to see what's allowed in Vermont.
2. Improvement in information sharing: Ensure that for all homes that are given permission to begin construction, the homeowners and contractors are given the up-to-date energy-efficiency code guide and documentation. (The Code is legally binding but not enforced, presently.)
3. Aspirational goal: At the point when people are given a certificate of occupancy, require people to certify that they have fulfilled the Code requirements.
4. In towns that have no permit process, the procedure should be established.
5. For rental properties, request self-declared energy-usage information that needs to be shared at the time of sale or lease. Montpelier is experimenting with this now and built a program: see <https://www.clearlyenergy.com/vermont/>.

Matt also shared an Efficiency Vermont RBES info-sheet: <https://www.efficiencyvermont.com/Media/Default/docs/trade-partners/technical-resources/efficiency-vermont-residential-new-construction-energy-code-assistance-brochure.pdf>

Jim shared a website from Rewiring America that promotes wider awareness of electric options for households: <https://www.rewiringamerica.org/>. **ACTION ITEM:** Jim will put this on the list-serv with a summary of its usefulness for homeowners trying to learn more about options.

**4. Forestry/Climate change:** Dorian proposes a book club about trees. Possibilities Dorian cited include:

- *Finding the Mother Tree* by Suzanne Simard
- *To Speak for the Trees: My Life's Journey from Ancient Celtic Wisdom to a Healing Vision of the Forest* by Diana Beresford-Kroeger (2021)
- *The Hidden Life of Trees* by Peter Wohlleben
- *The Treeline: The Last Forest and the Future of Life on Earth* (2022)
- *A Trillion Trees: Restoring Our Forests by Trusting in Nature* by Fred Pearce (2022)

- *Ever Green: Saving Big Forests to Save the Planet* by John W. Reid and Thomas E. Lovejoy (2022)
- *The Forest Unseen* by David George Haskell (recommended by Jim and Susan T.)
- *The Journeys of Trees: A Story about Forests, People and the Future* by Zach St. George

Discussion of what makes book discussions enjoyable and effective, in person and online. Facilitation (which can rotate) really helps a discussion stay focused and organized. Susan H. said: “I am in a group of 10 people on zoom calls, and we have found it helpful to have a list of questions ahead of time that helps us think and guides the discussion.”

Susan T. asked if this club would be done under the auspices of this committee using the town Zoom account? Or else there would be the 40-minute time limit. Susan H. has a paid account, and we could host this with the Strafford Climate Action group. ACTION ITEM: Dorian will inquire about use of the town Zoom and talk further with Susan H. about the possibility of co-hosting.

## 5. Sub-committee monthly updates:

### \* State Legislature: Susan H.’s report:

Susan noted that we can expect a rehash of the problematic Clean Heat Standard bill in the coming session.

A small group of people from Thetford and Strafford has started meeting with house candidate Rebecca Holcomb to make sure she is well-informed on climate issues, and help her however we can.

350VT is working hard to bring people together so activists can have a more coordinated effect in the coming session. But before that even gets under way, here are two situations going on that could use comments, as many as possible, as soon as possible:

1. Questioning the promotion of Biomass (see email below)
2. Commenting to the PUC in opposition to the petition by Vermont Gas Systems.

The Public Utilities Commission (PUC) needs to hear from us regarding a petition from Vermont Gas Systems to approve a so-called “renewable natural gas” contract with a huge landfill in New York State. Susan feels that this is a clear example of greenwashing that is not in the interests of Vermonters and will continue to increase carbon in the atmosphere. 350VT has explained the situation (see below) and offers some talking points for communications with the PUC. To understand the issue in more depth, Susan highly recommend Stuart Blood’s article <https://350vermont.org/vgs-virtual-rng-program/>, which includes at the end helpful details about how to file a comment (the PUC website is a bit difficult to navigate).

Susan also provided the following updates and links:

### \* September 14, 8:30 am: Meeting of the Biomass Task Group of the Vermont Climate

**Council.** <https://climatechange.vermont.gov/node/541/>. At this session, three global experts in forest carbon and biomass policy, Dr Juliette Rooney-Varga of UMass Lowell, Dr Bill Moomaw of Tufts University, and Laura Haight of Partnership for Policy Integrity, will present their research and recommendations to inform the Vermont Climate Action Plan. A public comment period will follow the presentation. Please make a brief comment in support of the speakers and against biomass electricity! **MORE INFO:** [Visit the Facebook Event](#) or send an email to [info@standingtrees.org](mailto:info@standingtrees.org).

### \* From Strafford neighbor Vanessa Rule from 350VT:

Vermont Gas Systems touts itself as a “strong partner in Vermont’s clean energy future.” So why are they petitioning the Public Utility Commission (PUC) to approve a “renewable natural gas” (RNG) contract with New York State’s largest landfill? Here’s what this contract would do:

— **Increase our costs as ratepayers.** [RNG is expensive to produce.](#) This cost will be passed on to Vermont ratepayers while increasing gas industry profits, without resulting in net environmental benefits.

— **Involve Vermont in harming the health of people and ecosystems in New York State.** RNG has [detrimental health and safety impacts](#) at the point of production, transportation, and combustion. The Seneca Meadows Landfill contaminates water supplies and air with per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), chemicals associated with a range of severe health effects. Vermont should not be meeting its energy needs by harming people and ecosystems in other states.

\* Read more about the health impact of PFAS [here](#).

\* Read more about the Seneca Meadows Landfill leaching of PFAS into drinking water supply [here](#).

— **Increase the use of greenhouse gas emitting fuels and delay a transition to solutions that are low-carbon, just, and renewable.** To avoid catastrophic climate change—and in order to meet the timeline that the state has already set through the Global Warming Solutions Act—we need rapid and substantial investments in technology that will eliminate our use of carbon-based fuels: weatherization, heat pumps, and geothermal energy. This contract would instead increase our investment in gas infrastructure.

**Mislead the public into believing that Vermont Gas and the State of Vermont are taking meaningful steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and meet the goals of the Global Warming Solutions Act.** RNG is responsible for significant greenhouse gas emissions in its production, [transportation](#), and combustion. It is a false climate solution that delays a transition to net-zero energy.

**Please let the Public Utility Commission know if you believe this contract is taking Vermont in the wrong direction by filing a comment with them about Case Number 22-2230-PET. Go to: <https://epuc.vermont.gov/?q=node/89>**

Click on either of the blue case numbers listed in the graph with Filing Number, Case number, Case Name. This opens a page with a box at the top that says “SELECT ACTION.” Click on “Add Public Comment” and add your short comment. **The PUC needs to see lots of Vermonters object.**

P.S.: To learn more about the details of this case, please read [Dr. Emily Grubert's testimony to the PUC](#) and [Stuart Blood's VGS's Virtual RNG Program](#). Talking points, more detailed information for how to file comments, and background information can be found [here](#).

P.P.S.: If you haven't already, sign up for 350VT’s October 1st [Organizing Summit!](#)

\* **Agriculture, forestry:** Susan T. asked if we could provide a list of continuing-education e-newsletters and information that committee members have found useful

\* **Community Solar/renewables:** Brief update from Doc on Alger Brook Solar.

**6. Question of whether we might resume meeting in person again?** David had asked about this at a previous meeting. Sense of the group is that meeting virtually is very

**Adjourned: 8:20 pm Next Meeting:** October 11, 2022, 7 pm via ZOOM

Enthusiastically submitted by Jim Schley, Recording Secretary