

3. Discussion of changing patterns of energy use in the summer: No one here used to have air conditioning but now many people do, or use their heat pumps in the summer. There are different expectations about “comfort.” Dorian never uses her heat pump for cooling; prefers open windows and fans. All her solar credits from her tracker go to covering the expense of the heat pump in the winter. There is one month where she pays the full monthly rate.

David observed that Burlington Electric is now “100% renewable”: they have the McNeil wood-burning power plant, they have wind from Lowell, and they have a hydroelectric site on the Winooski River. Vermont generally has two peaks: the coldest day in winter, and the hottest day in summer.

If people use electric loads (for instance EV charging) off-peak (at night, or in the morning) there’s no real hardship for the utility. Regular customers can also get the special off-peak rate (12 cents per kWh instead of 30 cents). **ACTION ITEM: David** will do a list-serve post about this option to sign up for the off-peak pricing. There’s a good blog post from a Rutland solar company called Same Sun that David will ask to repost.

Additional note: Midway Station in Sharon is being renovated to be a new “community hub,” and they have applied for a grant to have a high-speed EV charger.

4. **Survey update and informational table at Coburns’ store.** Sixty-three responses so far, plus ten at Town Meeting. Highlights:

Electric lawncare equipment: more than 60% are now using these, with about 30% saying no.

For EVs, it’s the obverse: slightly over 60% saying no, and a little more than 30% saying yes.

E-bikes: Only 27% have them, of these respondents: most use them for recreation.

Majority of people still heat with wood or use wood for backup; propane is also a typical backup.

5. **Green Procurement Policy**: Dorian asked if this is now being used as a resource by the IREC member towns? David said that he didn’t see the Strafford selectboard seeking advice for purchasing choices, but this could happen more over time. We need to remind our select people that this information is available.

Intramunicipal Energy Coordinator: David has been impressed by the new coordinator, Harry Falconer. There are six towns participating, since Barnard dropped out. They’d hoped that Fairlee might join, but this proposal was voted down at their town meeting. Dorian noted that when towns are pressed for money, it might be tempting to cut the IREC commitment, but there are many potential savings and grants that being involved can allow for.

6. **Sub-committee reports**, monthly updates:

a. **Susan’s legislative report**:

350VT’s 2024 Legislative Session priority bills aim to:

- * significantly reduce Vermont’s carbon pollution by increasing the amount of low-emissions electricity and thermal (heating and cooling) sources (solar, wind, thermal energy networks) produced in the state and the region

- * make electricity affordable to low- and middle-income households

- * and reduce electricity and new heating demand through the adoption of municipal thermal energy networks.

Specifically, 350VT is asking the Vermont Legislature to:

1. Pass the **Renewable Energy Standard bill (H. 289)** with an expanded study for community solar done by an independent contractor to ensure our electricity is low-emissions, just, and community-based.

2. Pass the **Ratepayer Protection Bill (H. 668)** to protect low and middle income Vermonters from high electricity bills
3. Pass the **Thermal Energy Networks Bill (S. 252 and H. 669)** to provide low-emissions heating for Vermont's buildings and will decrease our need for electricity.

What else do we need?

→ **A program to incentivize affordable and well-sited community solar:** The current Renewable Energy Standard bill does not incentivize community solar and abandons the existing Group Net Metering program, which allows electricity users to pool their resources to build community solar projects and see reduction in their electricity bills as a result. The prices set for GNM electricity by the Public Utility Commission makes GNM uneconomical compared to large-scale utility-owned solar and wind. Finding a mechanism that would support community solar is critical to Vermont's transition to 100% low-emissions renewable energy because there is public support for it. The bill does set up a study to explore a low-income community solar incentive mechanism.

→ We also need to make electricity affordable because electricity bills will rise as we “electrify everything” and embrace a low-emission and just energy system.

Other bills 350VT Supports:

Appropriation for Land Access Opportunity Board
The Pro Act
Make Big Oil Pay
Climate Resilience

- b. EVs:** David reported that Norwich has two EV charging stations and they keep having connectivity problems; they are considering getting rid of the credit-card or app payment requirements and switch to “honor system” charging. David wondered if this would work in Strafford, maybe at the park-and-ride lot. Discussion of what kind of arrangement would work for Strafford. David also wondered, since our town doesn't have reliable cell service, if someone charging could read a QR code linked to a Venmo account, which would then transfer funds the next time you get a connection. Or requested payment “a dollar an hour.” **ACTION ITEM: David** could ask the Selectboard a little later this spring to consider installing a voluntary-payment EV charger at the park-and-ride lot or somewhere else in town.

7. Check-in on educational postings on the Strafford list-serv:

January: Heating (Matt)
February: Transportation (Transportation)
March: Lawn (alternatives) & garden / fertility, seeds and starts (Susan H.)
April: Building projects and standards (Matt)
May: Farming/agriculture, food (Dorian)
June: Recreation & travel: e-bikes, electric snow mobiles, etc. (____)
July: Electricity (Doc, David, Matt)
August: Household products & pets (____)
September: Fashion/fiber (Dorian)
October: Forests (Dorian and/or Susan T.)
November: Garbage & recycling (Jim)
December: Plastics, or redo holiday posting

Meeting adjourned at 8:14 pm. Next meeting is April 9, 2024 via Zoom.