

**TOWN OF BOONE
SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, JUNE 10, 2021
5:30 P.M.**

Members Present: Vice-Chairperson John Prickett, Joan Brook, Margie Mansure, LuAnna Nesbitt, and Benjamin Scarboro

Town Council Liaisons: None

Staff Members: John Ward – Town Manager
George Santucci – Sustainability & Special Projects Manager
Laney Pilkington – Administrative & Communications Specialist
Adam Zebzda – Administrative Intern

Others: Edmond Miller – General Manager, New River Light & Power
Marisa Mecke – Watauga Democrat

Call to Order:

Vice-Chairperson Prickett called the June meeting of the Sustainability Committee to order at 5:40 p.m. via WebEx; however, quorum had not yet been reached. Due to this, Vice-Chairperson requested that Mr. Edmond Miller deliver his presentation concerning the operations of New River Light & Power (NRLP) originally placed under “Old Business” while the Committee waited for other members to join the meeting.

Old Business:

“NRLP Green Tariff” Presentation by Mr. Edmond Miller

Sustainability & Special Projects Manager Santucci welcomed and thanked Mr. Miller for being present at the meeting. Mr. Miller proceeded to introduce himself and NRLP to the Committee, provide an overview of applicable utility regulations, and discuss the sustainability considerations NRLP has taken. Citing a survey conducted by NRLP in 2017 and 2020, Mr. Miller claimed that the entity’s customers had shown consistent interest in accessing renewable energies over traditional fossil fuels, even if it translated to slightly higher service costs.

To meet this demand, NRLP entered a contract with Carolina Power Partners (CPP) allowing for more flexibility in providing renewable energies to customers. According to Mr. Miller, the contract between NRLP and CPP goes into effect in January of 2022. Once in effect, NRLP will be able to begin offering hydropower to interested customers, pending final approval by the North Carolina State Utilities Commission.

Customers will be able to purchase as much renewable power as they’d like; however, Mr. Miller noted that this energy use would come with a premium. In total, Mr. Miller expects that NRLP will provide the equivalent of eight megawatts of solar power through hydroelectricity, or the equivalent of more than 40 acres of solar panels.

Mr. Santucci elaborated on the points discussed by Mr. Miller, specifically in regard to the renewable energy premium costs, which customers should not see a significant billing change from.

Committee-member Mansure asked Mr. Miller for clarification about whether or not a customer would have the ability to choose to receive hydropower. Mr. Miller affirmed that this would be the case and discussed legal restrictions placed by North Carolina General Statutes regarding universal renewable energy consumer access.

Town Manager Ward clarified to the Committee that the Town of Boone received its electricity through NRLP and Blue Ridge Electric. As part of its relationship with NRLP and Mr. Miller, Mr. Ward informed the Committee that the Town had committed to purchasing renewable energy to meet a portion of the energy needs produced by municipal operations and to advance previously established sustainability goals. Mr. Ward then discussed the significance of NRLP's new contract in allowing the Town and overall community access to renewable energy options.

Committee-member Mansure inquired about how she, as one of NRLP's Boone customers, would be able to purchase hydropower to meet her energy needs and whether other renewable options, such as wind or solar energy, would also be available for consumer purchase. Mr. Miller responded that NRLP would only offer a hydropower option at this time; however, future opportunities may develop depending on consumer support and the overall market. As for consumer purchase of hydropower, Mr. Miller stated that NRLP consumers would be able to fulfill all of their energy needs through the renewable source; however, the method in which customers could opt-in to the new service was still under development. Further, customers would not have the ability to opt-in until the NRLP-CPP contract went into effect.

Vice-Chairperson Prickett asked about the future consideration regarding electric vehicles and their corresponding charging infrastructure. Mr. Miller responded that NRLP will begin discussing the issue in the near future, depending on how the upcoming year goes.

Mr. Ward also discussed a potential dual-parking program with the Town and NRLP with an emphasis on electric vehicles as well as an information program to inform residents of the new sustainability initiatives. Renewable energy opportunities for Appalachian State University students living off-campus and other renters were also discussed by Mr. Ward.

Mr. Miller elaborated on renter opportunities, as a majority of the NRLP consumer base is comprised of renters, specifically those who use services for about four years.

Committee-member Brooks emphasized her excitement about the recent NRLP renewable developments and asked for additional clarification on potential wind, solar, and other energy opportunities. Mr. Miller again informed the Committee that other renewable energy sources would not be offered to customers currently; however, they may be accessible later on.

Committee-member Brooks also asked about the free home energy audit program offered by NRLP as well as potential methods to encourage its utilization such as mandating an energy audit for every home listed on the market prior to sale. Mr. Miller echoed the desire to expand the program but informed the Committee that it had not been popular among customers historically.

Mr. Ward informed the Committee that municipalities do not have the authority to mandate the audits mentioned by Committee-member Brooks unless authorized by the General Assembly.

Vice-Chairperson Prickett proposed charging a minimal fee for energy audits rather than offer them for free in an effort to encourage their use. Mr. Miller stated that NRLP will be examining methods of encouraging use with a variety of partners and shareholders.

Committee-member Mansure proposed the inclusion of energy audit information on utility bills and other similar documents. Mr. Miller welcomed the proposal and stated that NRLP was looking into the logistics of mass-messaging customers utility information through email or text messaging.

Mr. Ward commented that the Town may look into the logistics of providing similar information to Town water and sewer customers, a significant portion of which would likely also be NRLP customers.

Committee-member Scarboro inquired about the legality of the Town mandating that rental companies perform energy audits under its jurisdiction. Mr. Ward informed the Committee that unless the Town was granted explicit authority by the General Assembly to do so, it would be illegal.

Mr. Santucci asked Mr. Miller questions submitted by Town Council Committee Liaison Nancy LaPlaca, who was not in attendance at the meeting. The questions submitted by Ms. LaPlaca were in regard to the net-metering of household solar energy use and more accessible information access. Mr. Miller responded by saying that NRLP had previously discussed net-metering at Town Council meetings but may discuss it further at a later date; however, Mr. Miller emphasized that the issues raised by Ms. LaPlaca were industry-wide issues and not those specific to NRLP.

Once all related discussions ended, the Committee thanked Mr. Miller for his time. Mr. Santucci then noted that quorum had been reached with Committee-member Scarboro joining during Mr. Miller's presentation, allowing the Committee to take official action. As such, the Committee took the following actions:

Adoption of Agenda:

By consensus, the Committee placed discussion of the 2020-2021 Recommended Fiscal Budget by Mr. Ward onto the agenda under New Business and approved the modified meeting agenda.

Approval of Minutes:

Committee-member Mansure made a motion to approve the April 08, 2021, meeting minutes as presented. Committee-member Scarboro seconded the motion.

Vote:

Aye – All

Nay – None

The motion to adopt the April 2021 minutes passed unanimously.

Old Business, Continued:

“Projects Updates” by Sustainability & Special Projects Manager George Santucci

Mr. Santucci presented a spreadsheet to track previously adopted Sustainability Committee goals and recommendations. An overview of information regarding ongoing Town projects was also provided to the Committee, this included updates on new faculty construction, purchase of hybrid vehicles, and other matters. Mr. Santucci also informed the Committee that

the Town's Public Works Department has made increased efforts to purchase electric equipment; however, this was being complicated by production disruptions.

Discussions then ensued about meeting parking increased parking demands for Town residents and visitors through joint ventures with Watauga County and AppalCART. Mr. Santucci also informed the Committee about AppalCART's plans to purchase multiple electric busses to meet local transportation needs sustainably.

New Business:

"Discussion of the 2021-2022 Recommended Fiscal Budget" by Town Manager John Ward

Mr. Ward began his presentation of the 2021-2022 Recommended Fiscal Budget by saying how proud he was of the work done so far by the Committee and Town Staff, as well as the Town's continuous pursuit for increasing the number of electric-vehicle charging stations. Mr. Ward further informed the Committee of new charging stations being unveiled by NRLP and Blue Ridge Electric.

Informing the Committee about the Budget's preliminary presentation to Town Council and scheduled hearing process, Mr. Ward emphasized a specific line-item budget section specifically for sustainability for the first time in Town history. Prior to the addition, Town departments would be allocated funds for department-specific sustainability initiatives. As an example, Mr. Ward told the Committee about the remote reading of water meters being pursued by Public Works improving efficiency, waste, and acting as a cost-saving measure. A transition to a hybrid vehicle municipal fleet, with the goal of reaching an all-electric fleet in the future, and expanding the use of AppalCART was also discussed.

Mr. Ward stated the approval of the recommended Budget would be considered by the Town Council during a meeting the following week.

Committee-member Mansure stated her support of the work done so far, including that done prior to her tenure on the Committee. This sentiment was echoed by Vice-Chairperson Prickett.

Mr. Santucci asked Mr. Ward whether it was appropriate to request that the Committee formally endorse the recommended Budget. Mr. Ward stated that it would be appropriate and Vice-Chairperson Prickett voiced his support of the proposed measure.

Mr. Ward also informed the Committee that it was appropriate for any Committee-member to reach out to specific Town Council members voicing their support for the Budget's proposed sustainability initiatives. Mr. Ward then left the meeting.

Vote to Formally Endorse the Recommended 2021-2022 Fiscal Budget:

Committee-member Scarboro made a motion to formally endorse the recommended Budget as presented with Committee-member Brooks seconding the motion. Vice-Chairperson Prickett proceeded to take a roll call vote:

Aye – All

Nay – None

The motion passed unanimously.

Vice-Chairperson Prickett inquired whether anyone present had any other matters they would like to discuss prior to adjournment. Mr. Santucci stated that he wished to discuss the development of the new Town website.

“Website Update” by Sustainability & Special Projects Manager George Santucci

Mr. Santucci introduced Laney Pilkington and asked if there were any specific items the Committee would like included on the Town website’s Sustainability Page. After providing those present with Ms. Pilkington’s contact information, Committee-members voiced their intention to individually reach out to Ms. Pilkington.

After discussions of the website concluded, Mr. Santucci informed the Committee about potential membership changes.

“Committee Membership” by Sustainability & Special Projects Manager George Santucci

Mr. Santucci informed the Committee about the resignation of Chairperson Brooke Kornegay requiring the Committee to designate a new Chair as well as ongoing efforts to recruit new Committee members due to various vacancies.

Other Matters by Committee-Members or Staff:

Vice-Chairperson Prickett asked Mr. Santucci when in-person Committee meetings would resume. Mr. Santucci replied saying he hoped that they would resume during the Committee’s next meeting in August 2021.

Committee-member Scarboro stated that he believed it would be appropriate to re-examine Committee composition as listed in its Charter during the August meeting. Vice-Chairperson Prickett stated that he also believed such a re-examination would be warranted.

Public Comment:

No individuals signed up for nor were present at the meeting to give public comment.

Adjournment:

After all discussions ended, Committee-member Scarboro made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Committee-member Brooks seconded the motion.

Vote:

Aye – All

Nay – None

The Committee voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at approximately 7:15 p.m.

Vice-Chairperson John Prickett

**Sustainability & Special Projects Manager,
George Santucci**