

**TOWN OF BOONE
SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2020
5:30 P.M.**

Members Present:	Chairperson-Brooke Kornegay, John Prickett, Lee Ball, Ballard Reynolds, Nikai Speight, Margie Mansure, Joan Brook, Luanna Nesbit, Terry Cirone and Sustainability Scholar-Ella Jennings
Town Council Liaisons Present:	Nancy LaPlaca and Dustin Hicks
Staff Members Present:	Christy Turner-Senior Planner, Mike James-Senior Planner, and Marlene Crosby-Board Secretary
Others Present:	Cole Kiziah-Watauga County Recycling Coordinator

Call to Order

Chairperson Brooke Kornegay called the Boone Sustainability Committee, virtual meeting via WebEx, a video conferencing software, to order on November 12, 2020 at 5:39 p.m.

Adoption of Agenda

Chairperson Kornegay made a motion, seconded by Member Prickett to adopt the agenda as written.

Vote:

Aye – All

Nay- None

The motion passed.

Board Training

It was the consensus of the committee members to table this agenda item to the next meeting.

Approval of Minutes

Chairperson Kornegay made a motion, seconded by Member Brook to approve the October 8, 2020 meeting minutes as written.

Vote:

Aye – All

Nay – None

The motion passed.

Composting Discussion

Chairperson Kornegay explained that she had invited Mr. Cole Kiziah the Watauga County Recycling Coordinator to this meeting to update the committee on the Watauga County recycling program. Mr. Kiziah said the engineers have staked out soil drilling sites and on Monday, November 16, 2020 the engineers will send the soil samples they took from the drilling site and

send them to the State. The State will test the soil samples and if approved, the test results will be presented to the County Commissioners.

Member Mansure asked Mr. Kiziah the purpose of testing of the soil samples. Mr. Kiziah explained that there is a LCID Phase 1, 2, and 3 that are all in the same area which is the proposed area where the new facility will be located. Mr. Kiziah said this proposed area to be clear of the LCID.

Chairperson Kornegay asked Mr. Kiziah how the Sustainability Committee can help the county with the recycling program. Member Brook suggested that the Sustainability Committee propose a resolution after good soil sample results come back from the State. Ms. Christy Turner, Senior Planner explained that the Sustainability Committee would need to have definite steps outlined in the proposal to Council which would require that Staff create an action request to be submitted to the Town Clerk who would place it on the Council agenda. Ms. Turner further explained that the Council would need to approve the proposal before any action can be taken with the County. Council Liaison Hicks asked if the Sustainability Committee created a resolution of support. Ms. Turner said yes but the Council would need to endorse the proposed resolution of support.

Discussion ensued on providing education on composting in the Town. Mr. Kiziah said he felt that the community does not realize how simple that composting can be and what can be composted. Mr. Kiziah suggested getting composting information into the hands of the community. Ms. Turner said that this type of information can be included into the utility bill mailings and on the Sustainability Committee webpage of the Town website. Ms. Turner explained that the utility bills could be used to point the community to the Town website. Member Mansure asked Mr. Kiziah if he was thinking of using backyard composting or using a composting service to pick up the compost from composting bins. Mr. Kiziah said he was thinking of both types of composting. Mr. Kiziah said that the County had applied for a composting grant and he just heard that this grant is going to go through. Mr. Kiziah said if the Town decided to move forward with a residential composting collection service that would use a five-gallon bucket or have drop sites that are bear proof. Member Mansure said that the North Carolina Cooperative Extension has done composting workshops in the past. She noted that a video could be easily done on backyard composting and the video could be placed on the Town website on the Sustainability webpage. Ms. Turner noted that the proposed backyard composting video idea would also need to be included in the action request to Council. Ms. Turner noted that there is a limit to what the Town website can hold and she will find out what that limit is how much it can be expanded and let the Sustainability Committee know.

Chairperson Kornegay asked Mr. Kiziah about the information that was in the composting grant. Mr. Kiziah said they asked for 150 each of the 82-gallon composting bins that would come with education flyers on how and what can be composted. Mr. Kiziah said this grant was submitted on October 30, 2020.

Ms. Turner asked the Sustainability Committee what they wanted her to include in the action request to be considered by Council at their December meeting. Council Liaison LaPlaca

suggested submitting an action request to Council noting there is no time like the present to move forward on the items discussed at this meeting. Member Brook agreed with Council Member LaPlaca on moving forward now, she said that she was not sure what should be included in the proposal but she said at least the Council would know that the Sustainability Committee is thinking on moving forward with composting along with the education of it.

Mr. Mike James, Senior Planner suggested for the Sustainability Committee to begin to think about the cost of what they are proposing to Council, especially, with the budget meetings coming up around the first of the year. Chairperson Kornegay noted that the County's grant may come through with composters that would not need to be considered in the budget at this time.

Council Liaison LaPlaca suggested getting Mr. John Ward, Town Manager involved to finding out what is involved with possibly getting composters for the community and the cost of them.

Ms. Turner announced that we should be hearing very soon about the new Sustainability position. She said that this new person may be able to pull together the numbers on the cost of composters as well as the educational component. Member Speight asked about the Sustainability position. Ms. Turner said that the Sustainability position is a full-time position, but they would be working on part time on grants and other Sustainability projects.

Discussion ensued on the number of houses in Boone that would need composters. Council Liaison LaPlaca said the Town has 8,000 meters and she asked Member Ball how many of the 8,000 is residential, commercial or the University. Member Ball said that approximately 20 percent of the 8,000 are residential and this number would need to be verified. Council LaPlaca asked Member Ball to get the breakdown of number and percentage for residential, commercial and University meters or houses. Member Ball said since Blue Ridge Electric Company provides service to some of the residential houses would it be easier to get the number of houses from the water bills. Ms. Turner said that the Town has several accounts that are outside of the Town's corporate limits. Ms. Turner said that the Town's GIS system might can be used to help narrow down the households in the Town. Ms. Turner said the number of people listed in 2019 was 19,654 in the Town's corporate limits. Ms. Turner said she could ask the water department if they have a breakdown on who pays double rates and who does not pay double rates. Council Liaison LaPlaca said there is an issue with using the water meters because there is no way to tell how many people are served by each water meter. Ms. Turner talked about the non-conforming apartments in the Town that have separate meters, she said some houses have two meters.

Member Ballard suggested making your own compost bins made out of seven or ten pallets if you want doors on it, he said this can be done for the cost of the screws to put it together.

Member Brook said, when the 150 compost bins run out maybe there could be a way to incentivize composting to others that are interested in them. She also talked about another composting system that she has in her house that creates a composting tea by cranking it.

Motion and Vote:

Chairperson Kornegay made a motion, seconded by Member Ballard that the Sustainability Committee requests to make a resolution of support on composting in conjunction with Watauga County and to explore educational opportunities.

Vote:

Aye – All

Nay – None

The motion passed.

Energy Efficiency Discussion

Council Liaison LaPlaca said she has submitted an agenda item for the November 2020 Council agenda. She said that she is wanting to ask New River Light and Power to do a presentation before the Town Council in January 2021. She explained that NRLP is a State owner utility company and they can do whatever they want to do which is a very unusual situation. She said the Town has no energy efficiency, no weatherization, no home energy audits or no rebates for high efficiency heat pumps. She said we have no net-metering which is the reason that we do not have solar. She said that straight net-metering is where you send electricity into the grid and it is sent back which means you basically pay the same amount. She said we need retail net metering so when you feed electricity into the grid then the NRLP pays you. She talked about the benefits of net metering. She said that NRLP buys wholesale power from coal plants, nuclear plants, and gas plants for approximately 3 to 6 cents per kilowatt hour.

Council Liaison LaPlaca talked about the Solar Bill of Rights and because of it we can have solar on our own houses and get paid for it fairly. She encouraged anyone to attend the November Council meeting to support retail net metering. She said that she believes that we are in an abrupt climate change and noted the warmer weather we have been having recently. She suggested that the Sustainability Committee propose retail net metering to the Council now and to try to get ahead of the curve.

Member Ball said that he supports Mr. Ed Miller from NRLP to do a presentation to Council. He suggested that a list of questions should be created to ask Mr. Miller. He noted that it is a generalization to say that NRLP can do anything they want to do because they are a regulated utility company. Council Liaison LaPlaca said that all that NRLP needs to do is file a rate schedule with the North Carolina Utilities Commission. He agreed that there is opportunity that should be explored to help better this situation. Council Liaison LaPlaca noted that she has already started working on a list of questions for Mr. Miller.

Council Liaison LaPlaca explained that there are two markets for solar in every state. She said that one is wholesale which is from one utility to another utility for example, Duke Energy sells to BREMCO who sells to NRLP. She said the retail side of it is the residential-customers, businesses or anyone who buys electricity at the retail cost. She said that this is where we need retail net metering which is the vehicle for small-scale solar or rooftop solar. Member Brook asked Council Liaison LaPlaca what she would suggest that the language to be. She suggested that the proposed language should said that the Sustainability Committee supports retail net

metering with no extra fee or limited extra fee up to \$5.00 per month. Member Brook asked Council Liaison LaPlaca if she had any of the retail net metering information written down. Council Liaison LaPlaca said she has multiple PowerPoints with this information. She also noted a website called, www.ratesofsolar.com. She said that this website shows what utility companies are doing except NRLP did not send them any data to include on their website.

Member Prickett said the only way to see any change with the utility companies is for them to work on a business model that will show how the utility companies will stay in business and function and do we get a reasonable deal. He noted that at this time, we do not have a reasonable relationship with the utility companies. He said his point is that we need a reasonable relationship with NRLP to get a good deal on an arrangement to get retail net metering.

Ms. Turner asked the Sustainability Committee if they wanted to include in their motion to Council that the monthly fee be no more than \$5.00 per month. Member Reynolds said that he would not give the option of the \$5.00 monthly fee and let the Council discuss it.

Mr. James suggested that the Sustainability Committee make their action plan a little more direct. Mr. James suggested to the Sustainability Committee be specific in their language to Council in their request that NRLP provide retail net metering within 120 days.

Member Cirone asked if the Town of Boone has a contract with NRLP for the supply of electricity and long the contract is good for and what the contract says. Ms. Turner said she would find out and let the Sustainability Committee know by the next meeting, if she cannot find out during this meeting.

Council Liaison LaPlaca suggested a friendly amendment to Member Reynolds to include up to \$5.00 in his motion because we are going to set a level of up to \$5.00 so the cost will not be wide open. She said a state law passed that says that the monthly fee cannot go up for a customer who installs rooftop solar. Member Reynolds accepted her friendly amendment.

Member Nesbit asked if no added fees could be in the motion. Council Liaison LaPlaca said the reason she would not suggest it is because so the monthly fee can be limited to \$5.00 a month. And she said it has been proven across the country that charging a \$5.00 a month fee is not an impediment and she also said that the \$5.00 charge helps pay for the wires and poles.

Member Brook said that she is was not sure that she wants to vote in favor of presenting to Council the same information that Council Liaison LaPlaca may have already presented to Council because the Council may not support the same language being presented a second time. Member Brook said she had rather vote in favor of something that will move the pendulum forward. Council Liaison LaPlaca said that this has nothing to do with but with good retail net metering policy. Member Brook said she agrees that there is consensus from the Sustainability Committee regarding retail net metering, but she wants whatever is proposed to Council to be heard favorably by Council. Member Brook added that she does not know enough about retail metering to propose a favorable motion.

Member Reynolds asked Member Brook what part of the motion she is not in agreement on. Member Brook said that she is not sure what Council Liaison LaPlaca has already presented to Council on said topic or what Council has approved. Member Brook said there is no use suggesting a proposal that has been met with resistant and she does not know if it has or not at this point. Council Liaison LaPlaca told Member Brook that the Sustainability Committee is proposing to change an entrenched system that is complex. Council Liaison LaPlaca said that a lot of things are needed to make this type of change which are experts on the topic, persistence, and a venue.

Member Speight asked Council Liaison LaPlaca what type of resistance that she has experienced with the Council in the past. She said that she would not call it resistance, rather she would say it is that the Council may not know a lot about it because it is complex.

Member Mansure noted that she thinks the Council is onboard with solar energy and they support clean energy. She said she does not think it matters what Council Liaison LaPlaca has said before. She suggested moving forward with a proposed resolution like Member Reynolds was suggesting earlier in this meeting.

Ms. Turner heard from Mr. Ward regarding the contract with NRLP. Mr. Ward told Ms. Turner that there is no contract but there is a franchise agreement to use a right of way to distribute power in our territory.

Member Brook noted her concern for including a dollar amount in the motion. She said when you include a dollar amount you are agreeing to that dollar amount or you are not agreeing to discussion. Member Reynolds said that it would be the Council's decision if they wanted to keep the \$5.00 proposed amount. It was the consensus of the Sustainability Committee to have a \$5.00 cap on the monthly fee to cover the infrastructure.

Council Liaison LaPlaca noted two ways that utility companies can hurt you on net metering. She said one way is that the utility company does not pay a fair rate for the electricity that you feed into the grid. She said the other way is the fee. She said if we say a maximum \$5.00 per month, we are setting that level and we are covering our two bases which are the energy rate and the monthly fee. She said these are basically the two ways that kill net metering. Member Prickett said another way the utility company can hurt you is charging you for a fee for the automated metering. Council Liaison LaPlaca said right now that automated metering structure is cheap and the utility company can make money on it. She also said that she did not think the automated meters are as much of a problem now like they used to be.

Chairperson Kornegay talked about inviting experts to the Council meeting to support the proposal for retail net metering. Member Reynolds agreed that having the experts speak might help with the education of retail net metering. Council Liaison Hicks agreed with inviting experts to the Council meeting.

Member Brook asked what will happen next, if the Council does not approve the recommendation made at this meeting by the Sustainability Committee, because of possible questions or concern. She said could the Sustainability Committee make a proposal to Council noting that the Committee would like to pursue conversations. She suggested making the process as easy as possible to get approval so the Committee can move forward. Member Reynolds said the Council did not ask the Sustainability Committee to make the process easier but to make a recommendation on what would be best for them. Member Prickett agreed with the proposed recommendation to Council but it is not approved, then, the Committee could follow up on Member Brook's suggestion.

Motion and Vote:

Member Ballard made a motion, seconded by Chairperson Kornegay to recommend to Council to direct New River Light and Power to support retail metering with a \$5.00 monthly fee cap and to make a presentation to Council on a potential pathway to retail net metering within sixty days.

Vote:

Aye – 1 (Brook, Cirone, Mansure, Nesbitt, Prickett, Reynolds, Speight)

Nay – None

Abstain – 1 (Ball)

The motion passed.

Discussion ensued on inviting solar experts to the next meeting. Council Liaison Hicks suggested that having experts on retail net metering at the Council meeting to speak about solar to support the retail net metering.

Ms. Turner said that she needed to know the number of Sustainability Committee Members that are coming to the December Council meeting because a Sustainability Committee meeting will have to be advertised, if enough members attend to make a quorum. She said the Sustainability Committee could limit the number of members that attend the said Council meeting.

Member Ball said he found out from Mr. Ed Miller at NRLP that there are 6500 residential meters in the Town of Boone.

Sustainable Transportation Discussion

Chairperson Kornegay suggested tabling this agenda item to the next meeting.

Informal Discussion/Other Matters

There were no other matters discussed at this meeting.

Public Comment

No individual requested the opportunity to speak during public comment.

Adjournment

Member Ball made a motion, seconded by Member Reynolds to adjourn the meeting at 7:28 p.m.

Vote:

Aye – All

Nay – None

The motion passed.

Brooke Kornegay, Chairperson

Marlene Crosby, Committee Secretary