

MINUTES

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: James Horwitz, Tracey Lane Russo, James Stirling

Also Present: Christopher Browe, Steven DeMaio, Charles Dumais, Tony Giampa, Jack Levine, Marianne Lippard, Jim Saisa, Thomas Hurley

A meeting of the MicroGrid Committee of the Amity Regional Board of Education was held on Wednesday, June 4, 2014 at 5:30 p.m. in the Superintendent's Conference Room at the District Offices.

1. Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 5:43 p.m.

2. Discussion on MicroGrid

It was noted that no representative from DEEP will be here tonight. Mr. Stirling noted that this meeting was planned to discuss the findings to date and determine what alternatives are available if Amity chooses not to participate in the MicroGrid project. The town of Woodbridge may be able to build the MicroGrid with or without Amity's participation. We are looking at alternative energy sources. We have a few options to consider: use the grant from the State and go forward with an RFP; use the MicroGrid grant and use UI alternative energy grant money for installing a fuel cell here; or go forward without the MicroGrid grant money and look at alternatives for generating electricity. We understand that Woodbridge is going forward with a small turbine generator at Beecher Road School. The Committee's charge is to decide whether to proceed with the RFP.

Mr. Horwitz said that he had hoped a representative from DEEP would be here today. It appears that there are alternatives to purchasing energy from the utility that may offer considerable savings and are environmentally friendly. If these options are available, we should consider them. If we can save money for our communities, we have an obligation to explore our options. Unless there were environmental problems or hidden costs, it makes sense to pursue these energy sources. After the meeting in Branford, it was his feeling was we ought to take advantage of the millions of dollars available to pursue the MicroGrid. We should look at our options.

Ms. Russo said that she hasn't seen a legal opinion concerning this matter.

Mr. Saisa said that there are some possibilities to be explored.

Mr. DeMaio noted that it is his understanding that fuel cells are not in the plan.

Mr. Giampa said that fuel cells have been proven to be too costly.

Ms. Russo said that the State is working on changing legislation so that we can have the benefit of net metering. Ms. Russo noted that it is her understanding that the District would be out some money if this deal doesn't happen.

Mr. DeMaio said that we have to vote on this on Monday. We should give Woodbridge an answer. He questioned whether Woodbridge would make all decisions if Amity agrees.

Mr. Stirling said that this is an open question.

Mr. Horwitz said that there is a question as to whether we give up control by going with Woodbridge. We need to maintain our legal rights.

Ms. Russo questioned what would be a valid reason not to go forward.

Mr. Hurley said that we need to maintain our legal rights as we are the 70 percent user. There is a basic clause in an RFP saying we may choose not to go forward.

Mr. Stirling said that this RFP could require a five or six figure development/legal cost.

Mr. Horwitz said that a realistic reason to walk away might be cost. It seems to make sense to save 20 percent or perhaps one-third the cost of energy. Possible expenses could be incurred if the equipment is faulty. We are currently locked in to using natural gas anyway. It is unlikely oil and natural gas prices will flip-flop. Based on what he has read, natural gas will continue to be a major source of power for the next 40-60 years.

Mr. Levine said that the cost analysis is based on certain assumptions. There could be differences if something changes with the technology.

Mr. Giampa asked whether anyone knows the amount of acreage on the roof.

Mr. Saisa said that there is shadowing on the roof, making solar difficult.

Ms. Russo noted that the trip to Branford to see their microgrid was very educational.

Mr. DeMaio noted that we would be tied in for 20 years with this plan.

Mr. Stirling said that the waste heat makes this system more efficient. There is not much advantage to going with Woodbridge.

Mr. Horwitz agreed, however, we need to look at the money available. If there is minimal or no economic benefit, then there is no reason to join Woodbridge. If there is significant money, then joining Woodbridge makes sense.

Mr. Stirling said that it is his understanding that \$3 million can be used towards the legal and engineering costs. Based on his analysis, the numbers seem to show a benefit to pursuing this without Woodbridge. It would seem to make sense to send a letter to Woodbridge giving the District equal rights with respect to this project. If we can get equal rights and the ability to pull out of the project, then we can move forward and participate in the RFP. The question remains as to whether we want to generate our own electricity. We need a written response from Woodbridge on these questions.

Ms. Russo said that she hasn't seen any data about how many days the High School has been shut down due to power loss.

Mr. Stirling said that while we have data showing whether or not the school was closed, we haven't been able to determine whether or not this was due to power loss. We have been told that we are in an area of high priority for power restoration. If a class three or four hurricane came through, we could lose power for a longer period of time than in the past.

Mr. Horwitz noted that Branford High is closer to Long Island Sound and they never lose power.

Mr. DeMaio said that we need to consider the costs if this power system breaks down.

Mr. Horwitz said that it is his understanding that this would be part of the maintenance contract. There are five independent turbines.

Mr. Levine said that there are three parties to the transaction: the State, Woodbridge and Amity.

Mr. Hurley said that Woodbridge has the grant. He hasn't seen documents naming Amity as part of the grant. Net metering should be examined.

Mr. DeMaio noted that the town of Woodbridge would like an answer. We need to provide an answer or a list of questions for their consideration.

Motion to ask the chairman of the Amity Board of Education and the Superintendent to communicate our questions to the town of Woodbridge (Mr. Horwitz, 2d Ms. Russo)

Mr. Levine asked whether a letter should be requested from the State showing that Amity has the right to get out of the agreement.

Mr. Hurley said that we would like to be able to get out of the agreement for valid reasons.

Ms. Russo noted that at this point we don't know what would be considered valid reasons. We would like veto power for whatever is on District property.

Vote in favor unanimous.

Motion passed.

Mr. Stirling said that once we have answers to these questions, we can report our findings back to the Board. We would like to know the tax impact of this proposal. This would generate money from UI to Woodbridge.

Mr. Levine noted that if the Board were to decide to pursue this separately, money will be needed for legal and engineering fees. Money would be needed in the reserve for this project.

Mr. Hurley said that we will not add money in at this point.

It was noted that this proposal is outside of our educational mission. A stand-alone RFP option was mentioned.

Mr. Stirling noted that it is his understanding that the middle school in Bethany has an ideal roof for solar.

Mr. Saisa said that a 10-page report is available for the Committee to consider.

Mr. Giampa questioned the cost of natural gas for feeding the units. Adding a simultaneous absorption chiller will add significantly to the cost. He questioned the location for the MicroGrid on the High School campus.

Mr. Hurley said that there is volatility in the market for natural gas. The best case and worst case for natural gas are probably not going to happen.

Mr. Stirling said that while there is a huge supply of natural gas, we can't make assumptions on the estimates.

Mr. Saisa noted that the MicroGrid would be located in the old ice storage area.

It was noted that the Committee appreciated the quiet operation of the microgrid in Branford. Ms. Russo also noted that there was no odor associated with the microgrid they visited.

Ms. Russo said that she will prepare a report of the Committee's findings. The town of Woodbridge will be made aware of the Committee's position.

3. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 7:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Marianne Lippard, recording clerk