

# TOMPKINS COUNTY ENERGY TASK FORCE

Friday, October 19, 2018

Human Services Building (Beverly Livesay Room), 320 W. State St, Ithaca  
Final Minutes

## Attendance

| Member             |   | Member           |   | Member           |   |
|--------------------|---|------------------|---|------------------|---|
| Sharon Anderson    | P | Bob Howarth      | P | <b>Staff</b>     |   |
| Martha Armstrong   | P | Tim Mount        | E | Katie Borgella   | P |
| Cliff Babson       | A | Martha Robertson | P | Darby Kiley      | P |
| Fernando de Aragón | P | Brice Smith      | E | Kristin McCarthy | P |
| Brian Eden         | P | Jennifer Tavares | P |                  |   |
| Todd Fox           | P | Irene Weiser     | P |                  |   |
| Nick Goldsmith     | P | Gordon Woodcock  | E |                  |   |
| Curt Gooch         | E | Sarah Zemanick   | P |                  |   |

**Guests** – None

**Welcome**– Chair Sharon Anderson called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m.

**Comments from the Public: Round 1** – None

**Approval of August 17, 2018 minutes** – Fernando de Aragón moved approval of the Aug. 17, 2018, minutes. Bob Howarth seconded. Motion carried.

## **Value of Distributed Energy Resources (VDER) – Annalise Kukor, CCETC**

Annalise Kukor, an energy educator with CCETC, gave a presentation on the NYS Public Service Commission (PSC) VDER mechanism as well as the proposed moratorium on Phase 1 of its deployment. VDER affects the National Grid, NYSEG, Central Hudson Gas & Electric, Orange and Rockland Counties, Con Ed, and Rochester Gas & Electric utility zones.

Her full presentation is available on the Energy Task Force (ETF) webpage.

VDER was put into place because it was thought net metering might overload certain areas and undersaturate others; it incentivizes solar where it is needed during peak demand; and it mimics more accurately how kilowatt hours from distributed energy resources are valued on the grid. Issues have arisen, however, as the fluctuations in terms make it difficult for large solar installations and community solar farms to predict demand. Also, community distributed generation is broken into tranches based on when groups were created – the sooner in operation, the greater the financial incentive. As a result, electricity costs vary and giving consistent pricing discounts to those entities is tricky.

Many renewable energy advocates think the methodology behind VDER does not properly value community solar and discourages solar developers from investing in New York State. (The Solar Stack Calculator on the NYSERDA website allows users to determine a project's revenue under VDER. Also, VDER monetary crediting applies to community solar farms and not to individual rooftop panel owners.)

The New York State Assembly has passed a bill that would extend net metering to community solar subscribers until the end of 2021 and place a moratorium on VDER. The bill would direct the PSC to develop Phase 2 of VDER taking into account a new set of values. Similar legislation is up for consideration in the State Legislature.

Action alerts for the moratorium focus on projects and revenues that are lost due to VDER and not on attempting to explain the program itself. If energy experts such as ETF members struggle to comprehend VDER, how can the general public be expected to understand it?

Martha Robertson emphasized that any VDER moratorium policy proposals or resolutions brought before the County Legislature need to explain VDER in much simpler terms. Jennifer Tavares asked if a letter of support for the moratorium from the ETF would suffice in lieu of legislative action. She also suggested that running an actual project through different scenarios depending on the tranche would be a concrete way to illustrate how VDER methodology works.

### **Update on Energy Strategy: Second Report – Darby Kiley**

Feedback from ETF members at the August meeting, which was very helpful and much appreciated, has been incorporated into the scope of the Energy Strategy: Second Report (ES). The bulk of the ES will consist of high-impact, locally driven, and proposal-ready ideas for achieving the Energy Roadmap's goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) 40% from 2008 levels by 2030. Mirroring the Roadmap, the document will focus on energy demand reduction, transportation, and renewable energy resources. The County is assembling small focus groups to dive deeper into the report's development and has issued an RFQ for consultants to examine the feasibility of strategies generated through these focus groups.

### **Policy Committee Report – Brian Eden, Irene Weiser, and Sarah Zemanick**

Committee brainstormed topics for further investigation. These included carbon pricing, in particular the New York Independent System Operator and the New York State Department of Public Service (NYSDPS) joint initiative to examine the potential for carbon pricing in the wholesale energy market, and GHG accounting in relation to upstream methane emissions. The VDER moratorium is another possibility. Cooperative Extension staff could assist Policy Committee with work related to VDER.

Brian Eden and Irene Weiser added some background context to the carbon pricing discussion in New York State: In 2012, NYSDPS held a proceeding on natural gas expansion as the state thought it looked promising for building upstate jobs and reducing carbon emissions. The result was a policy that pushed gas expansion for utilities, one that is still in place. Today, when it comes to switching utility customers to renewables, there are some incentives to replace heating oil and propane with heat pumps but not much to persuade people to switch from natural gas to heat pumps.

Traditional GHG accounting focuses on carbon dioxide emissions, with methane receiving short shrift. Mr. Howarth and colleagues are advocating not for a total abandonment of traditional accounting but for a parallel accounting of methane. Cornell and Tompkins County have supported the idea, and further work is being undertaken to develop it into a policy the County might follow.

Ms. Zemanick asked for clarification of Policy Committee mandate. Expectation is that members will identify policies that could lead to action by the ETF or County Legislature. Ms. Robertson said to be mindful of political calendar when bringing policies before the Legislature and reiterated the need to use clear, direct language when explaining complicated technical matters.

### **2019 Meeting Topics, Schedule, and Location**

- Andrea Aguirre will report on Business Energy Advisors program at the December meeting.

- Ms. Zemanick will contact Natalie Mahowald, lead author on the recent U.N. IPCC special report on global warming, and carbon pricing expert Bill Schulze about speaking at future meetings. (Ms. Tavares later suggested inviting Peter Bardaglio to give a 2030 District update.)
- County staff will secure a location for the 2019 meetings.
- Members debated the pros and cons of the ETF meeting monthly versus bimonthly.

**Action:** Bob Howarth made a motion to return to monthly meetings as of January 2019. Martha Robertson seconded. Motion carried. Nick Goldsmith and Sarah Zemanick abstained.

### **Member Announcements**

- The Ithaca Tompkins County Transportation Council is hosting an initial public meeting Nov. 7 at TCPL on their 2040 Long-Range Transportation Plan Update.
- Cornell received a 2018 Green Power Leadership Award from the EPA.
- Tompkins County earned silver, and the Town of Ulysses bronze, certification as a Climate Smart Community. Tompkins is only the fourth community in New York State to achieve the silver level.
- Ms. Aguirre will lead a Business Energy Advisors workshop Oct. 24<sup>th</sup> at TCPL.
- Ms. Robertson is serving on the newly established Climate Resiliency Committee of the New York State Association of Counties.
- The latest 2030 District Building Performance Reports have been released.
- HeatSmart Tompkins, CCETC, and the Landlords Association of Tompkins County co-hosted a mini-conference on heat pumps for small commercial and multifamily dwellings.
- “Fast and the Furious,” a Science Cabaret talk on beneficial electrification, takes place Oct. 24.

**Comments from the Public: Round 2** – None

**Adjournment** – Ms. Anderson adjourned the meeting at 11:07 am.