

## TOWN OF BLOOMFIELD

### Conservation, Energy, & Environment Committee (CEEC)

There was a special meeting for the above referenced committee held on Thursday, January 11, 2024 at 4:00 p.m. in a hybrid meeting style. The in-person meeting location was Bloomfield Town Hall – Conference Room 5, 800 Bloomfield Avenue, Bloomfield, CT, and the virtual location was via Zoom.

Committee Members Present were: *In-person:* Paula Jones, Chair; Nancy Bowden; David Hager; and Jessica White; and *via Zoom:* Robert Dickinson

Committee Members Absent were: Quentin Jones; and Zellene Sandler

Also present were:

*In-person:*

- **Town Staff:** Dan Carter, Director of Public Works; Jonathan Colman, Building & Land Use Assistant Director; Justin LaFountain, Building & Land Use Director; Lynn Weisel, Recording Secretary
- **CEEC Regular Attendees:** Claudia Gwardyak; Carmela Garofalo
- **Other Guests:** Britt'ny Bettis-Allen, Operation Fuel; Lori Brown, Connecticut League of Conservation Voters; Lea Chayes, Windsor Conservation Commission; Kevin Gough, Trails Committee; Julie Henry, Windsor Conservation Commission; Marie MacDonald, past CEEC Chair; David Mann, Trees for Bloomfield & Design Review Board; Sharon Mann, Trees for Bloomfield & Bloomfield Beautification Committee; Susan Miller, Windsor Climate Action

*via Zoom:*

- **CEEC Regular Attendees:** Don Weight
- **Other Guests:** Davida Foy-Crabtree, Third Act; Heather Geist, Farmington River Watershed Association; Aimee Petras, Farmington River Watershed Association

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 p.m.

### Priority Setting Session

*i. Part One: Input from Town Councilors and Town Staff*

Ms. Jones introduced the session and the goal of developing a list of potential committee priorities for the next one to two years. She highlighted recent committee priorities and initiatives.

Mr. LaFountain shared that this is his last CEEC meeting as he is leaving the Town of Bloomfield, and noted his thanks for CEEC. He then shared priorities and perspective from the Department of Building and Land Use:

- The Environmental Planner position has been cut and it doesn't look like it is coming back. Bloomfield received Sustainable CT certification in 2019, but it lapsed in 2022 without an Environmental Planner. They are working to regain certification, but time to work on this

project is an issue, and they welcome CEEC help. Bloomfield previously had bronze certification, but they think they can easily get silver certification.

- The goal from the Climate Emergency Resolution and Climate Emergency Energy Plan is to create a taskforce. He would like CEEC involved. Once the taskforce is created then priorities will be set. Ms. Jones noted the possibility of the Town Manager appointing the task force as department representation was recommended, and highlighted that engagement and commitment from departments is needed.
- Mr. Colman updated the committee on the CRCOG regional action plan, noting that there had been limited response from town departments. The proposal they submitted is for electrifying the DPW fleet.

Mr. Carter shared priorities and perspective from the Department of Public Works:

- Nothing from the Emergency Energy Plan was included in the proposed Capital Improvement Program (CIP) budget for fiscal year 2025 because of limited funding. There is a goal to form the Emergency Energy Plan taskforce by July 1. He is hoping to have the Board of Education join the taskforce, and requested help from the committee, if possible, to help make this happen.
- The Town was awarded a VW grant for DC fast chargers for 330 Park Ave. and Town Hall. It will not retrofit current chargers, but cover 65% of parts and installation for new chargers. They did not realize when they applied for the grant that it had a matching aspect, and they have put \$60K in the proposed CIP budget to cover the Town's portion of the cost.
- There are RFPs for solar arrays at 330 Park Ave., both libraries, and a DPW fuel island canopy. All are being bid separately, and RFPs are due January 16.
- Lighting retrofits are in process in all Town buildings. In-house staff are completing the work, and they are projecting \$50K savings in fiscal year 2025 from the retrofit.
- Leisure Services has submitted a CIP budget proposal to hire a consultant to analyze the environmental aspects of artificial turf. Artificial turf is being looked at for Rockwell Park and also for a possible field replacement at Bloomfield High School.
- DPW has been discussing potentially aligning Town climate energy goals with that of the state. The state goal is for all electricity in the state to come from green sources by 2040, while Bloomfield's goal is to have all electricity from green sources by 2030. To meet the goal, Town buildings will need to be retrofit to carbon neutral heating and cooling sources, and the Town will have to provide carbon neutral electricity. It would be easier to reach the goal if the state is providing the energy. Another possible solution to meeting the town's 2030 goal would be to purchase carbon credits.

The committee began general discussion.

Ms. Bowden suggested advocating for the budget at budget time, particularly for DPW.

There was a question about electrifying Town vehicles and the potential to work as a region toward electrifying vehicles. Mr. Carter noted that electrifying vehicles is just one piece of the Climate Emergency Energy Plan, and that the technical components for large vehicles don't yet exist. He highlighted that availability is a big problem, and noted that the last time they went to purchase vehicles for the Police Department that hybrid vehicles were not available. He stated that he thought electrification may provide a stop gap, but that hydrogen fuel may be the answer. Mr. Colman noted the

financial challenge of electrifying fleets, and stated that he thinks the process, via lobbying efforts, will be through CRCOG.

There was a brief discussion about grants. Mr. Carter suggested the need for a full-time grants administrator, and noted the difficulty of searching for grants on top of daily job duties.

Mr. Mann suggested a periodic energy audit, noting that the last one had been almost 10 years ago, and requested a way for it to be managed on an ongoing basis. Mr. Carter stated that they have been somewhat proactive since the energy audit, upgrading lights via Ameresco, and then renovating and/or replacing older Town buildings. He noted that the new library will be LEED certified.

Ms. Jones noted that she invited the Board of Education (BOE) chair to attend, and that CEEC was invited to present at a future BOE meeting. It was suggested that CEEC consult with DPW before any presentation.

Ms. Foy-Crabtree encouraged CEEC to pursue strategies with the greatest leverage with climate change, suggesting: building requirements for new buildings, such as geothermal or solar requirements; composting efforts; and minimizing effort put into shredding. Mr. LaFountain shared that building code is determined by the state, but changes can be made via ordinances or zoning. He highlighted that the Town Attorney would have to be involved, but that there is the potential to require developments over a certain size to have certain features. Land Use currently talks with and encourages developers to have solar and geothermal, but there is no requirement, and there is a cost to these items for developers. It was noted that some developers are building with the opportunity to add geothermal or solar in the future, but not initially installing these items due to cost. Mr. Dickinson inquired about using suggestive language in the ordinances. Mr. LaFountain noted that they do not do this because suggestions create murkiness and potential legal ramifications. It is possible for them to create a separate brochure, but they do not want it confused with a legal requirement if it is only a suggestion. There was a conversation about the Plan of Conservation & Development (POCD), and including these goals in it.

There was another conversation about grants. Mr. Carter noted that the Climate Emergency Energy Plan would cost tens of millions of dollars to fund, and that grants will fill the gaps. It was noted that grants have cliffs when funding runs out, and that grants are for one-time costs, and not ongoing costs like personnel.

*ii. Part Two: Input from CEEC and General Community with Discussion*

Ms. Bettis-Allen summarized the session, and noted key themes, including: Board of Education; energy efficiency; zoning and building; bringing in more help/advocating for more help; funding; engaging with and leveraging other municipalities. She also encouraged the committee to keep in mind realistic goals.

Ms. Bowden noted that CEEC's distinction from other committees, in that nothing has to come to the committee first in order to proceed, and that CEEC projects are self-starting. She would like to see better communication with Town departments, was glad that more info on the POCD is coming, and was excited about the BOE invite and potential to get young people involved.

Ms. Jones noted collaborative opportunities, such as with the BBC, Farmington River Watershed Association, and others.

Mr. Gough highlighted the importance of the Environmental Planner position, and their role as liaison between CEEC and Town departments. He suggested that CEEC advocate for funding for the position, and noted that a previous Environmental Planner was responsible for creating the complete streets study.

Mr. Mann highlighted CEEC successes, including Solarize Bloomfield, the Bloomfield bike path, and the Trees for Bloomfield program. He noted that these programs took time, and that they also illustrated other environmental issues, such as invasive species. He suggested focusing on invasive species removal to prevent losing trees, and suggested involving Ron Pitts of the Connecticut Forest Council.

There was general discussion about invasive species. Ms. Brown noted that the state did a report a few years ago that found that invasive species were the number one problem for conservation. She noted that the state has not been able to pass a law that can eliminate the sale of invasive species. Ms. Brown suggested focusing on food waste diversion, and noted that there is money for pilot projects. She also noted that she was disturbed lately in town around forest and trees, and suggested focusing on the management of both.

Ms. Gwardyak highlighted the Climate Emergency Energy Plan. She noted that CEEC is advisory and suggested that CEEC maintain a high-level approach, rather than becoming the taskforce that will implement the plan. She is afraid that the plan is getting forgotten and wants to focus on work that is ready to go.

Ms. Jones noted Mr. Carter's comments about the Town's energy goals as more aggressive than those of the state, and highlighted that CEEC may need to push the taskforce. She also suggested that CEEC should not be responsible for getting Sustainable CT certification, and that CEEC needs a commitment from the town to pursue certification.

Ms. Miller suggested the possibility of sharing an Environmental Planner with Windsor, and the mutual benefit that this could bring. She noted her concerns about land degradation and the need for land preservation and biodiversity protection. Douglas Tallamay and his organization, Homegrown National Park, was mentioned, as way to encourage homeowners to regenerate biodiversity in their own yards.

Ms. Foy-Crabtree expressed concern that the ongoing flooding in the North End of Hartford may be due to development and drainage in Bloomfield. Ms. Jones noted last meeting's presentations from Park Watershed and Farmington River Watershed Association, and how they shared the high percentage of the watershed that is in Bloomfield. She agreed that CEEC should think in terms of land use and flooding, and asked to put Park River on the list of CEEC priorities. Mr. Mann stated that Park Watershed is putting a plan together for North Hartford, and that the Park River's headwaters are in Bloomfield. Mr. Mann served on the Inland Wetlands & Watercourses Commission (IWWC), and expressed concern that there is always a way for a civil engineer to show that there is no impact on waters or wetlands. He suggested waterways be checked on a periodic basis by IWWC, and suggested that CEEC meet with IWWC to discuss status.

Mr. Dickinson suggested inviting the Bloomfield State Representative and State Senator to discuss legislation for some of the issues that CEEC has discussed, and noted that a lot of towns are facing the same issues. He also noted that he would like safety on roads for pedestrians as a priority, with 9% of people in Bloomfield and in the state not having motor vehicles.

Ms. Chayes mentioned upcoming development on Cottage Grove Road, and emphasized the importance of towns working together as each town's development impacts the others. She mentioned past forums on fracking and water that were impactful.

Ms. Jones highlighted the new regional land trust, Traprock Ridge Land Conservancy, and the possibility of working with them and Windsor groups to target land protection.

Ms. Bowden inquired about the status of the complete streets study. She also suggested that Bloomfield develop a hazard mitigation plan, noting that the unexpected needs to be expected and that the Town needs to be prepared.

Mosquitoes were briefly discussed, and it was suggested to plan ahead with ideas for this before mosquito season.

Ms. Brown shared that there is a movement of nature-based solutions for climate resiliency and noted that the Connecticut League of Conservation Voters is hosting their annual summit on 1/23/24 at the Connecticut Science Center with information that might be transferrable to CEEC's work. She also shared that a town in State Representative Gary Turco's district had a climate emergency planning document that helped prepare residents for climate-related disasters. Ms. Brown also expressed surprise that the Town was not doing more to tap into federal money, particularly as the Town has the data from the Climate Emergency Energy Plan. She noted that these funds will not last forever.

Mr. Mann noted that many towns don't have the staffing available to get the grants, and then not enough staffing to implement the funds. He highlighted the potential of towns to work together to get a staff person, and suggested CEEC think about moving forward with this. Mr. Gough suggested that such a position be full-time and shared between two towns.

There was general conversation about invasive species, and Ms. Mann highlighted an invasive species removal project at LaSalette Park in Bloomfield done in collaboration with DPW, BBC, Leisure Services and a local business. They are hoping to have it become a yearly project.

### **Approval of Minutes**

It was moved by Ms. Bowden, seconded by Ms. White, and voted unanimously to approve the 12/14/23 meeting minutes.

### **Public Comment**

Ms. Chayes noted the tree in her Trees for Bloomfield photo contest photo is in the open field on Cottage Grove.

Mr. Dickinson noted that he thinks CEEC should pick issues that can make the most difference on our impact to the planet.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 6:02 p.m.