

**Town of Vershire Planning Commission Meeting Minutes  
Special Topics Forum: Energy, 8/23/23 at 7pm at the Town Center  
There will be a remote option for this meeting via Zoom or by phone.**

Attendance: Gregory Wilson-co-chair, Eleanor Zue-co-chair, Justin Will, Gretchen Harvey-secretary, and David Hooke.

David Hook and the Energy Committee discussed the relationship between their committee goals and the effort to revise and update the Town Plan. The Energy Committee's initial charge when it was created in 2020 was to suggest strategies for the town to achieve net zero by 2030. Its work since then has expanded to address climate change more broadly.

The Energy Committee proposes that the revised Town Plan ought to include a framework that recognizes the predictable impacts of climate change and encourages efforts to mitigate its effects. BY doing so, the town plan would be recommending actions and policies that lower costs and risks over the long term, as well as lead to improving the quality of life for residents of Vershire. The Committee encouraged the PLanning Commission to integrate the following four goals into the town plan:

1. Reduce energy use/improve energy affordability & efficiency.
2. Reduce greenhouse gas emissions/including fossil fuel use.
3. Sequester carbon and promote eco-system health by encouraging best practices for conservation lands, forest management, and agriculture.
4. Improve climate resilience through the hardening of infrastructure, and adopt strategies and emergency response plans adapted to a changing climate.

D. Hook also offered some suggestions for points that could be incorporated under each existing heading;

*#3 Economic Development:* Promote localization where possible: home businesses, telecommuting, and perhaps policies such as tax incentives that promote the same. Additionally, Vershire has had a mixed history associated with supporting a local store as individual store owners have not found running a local store viable in the past. Perhaps a cooperative model of store ownership that would spread the risk, invest in a location, and allow residents access to basic grocery staples might allow for a general manager to make a living running the store.

*#4-Housing:* Promote older home weatherization workshops and fairs and encourage the free use of the Town Center building for this type of programming. Consider social media outreach/options as a 'go to" resource location for resources promoting energy efficiency and cost savings. Consider if policies or tax policy could assist residents with older homes afford retrofits and/or apply for EVt. credits to invest in upgrades. Encourage in-fill within the newly designative Village District if new flood mapping indicates that building within the river corridor remains viable. It would be important to understand the latest research on the kind of space the Ompompanoosuc river will need to overflow its banks in the future. Another consideration with respect to housing development is the consideration of placing limits on economic and

ecological burdens associated with the maintenance of an extensive network of roads in Vershire. Would limiting new development on class four roads be advisable, for example.

*#5 Utilities and Facilities:* Encourage the adoption of non-fossil fuel systems for all town buildings with primary systems to run on solar power.

*#6 Emergency Services:* Encourage new development on town-maintained roads and closer to the Village Center as a method of improving emergency responses. .

*#7 Educational Facilities:* Encourage facilities with ties to Vershire to encourage careers in energy resilience. Likewise, encourage primary and secondary school curricula to adopt more outdoor, experiential learning and ecological literacy. Find out what outdoor/environmental studies teaching goals K. Hooke has adopted for 8th graders for the Town Plan's section on education.

*#8 Transportation:* Residents have made it clear that a more walking-friendly and trail-friendly town is highly desirable. In addition to supporting a pedestrian bridge project that allows for safer crossing of VT Route 113, a crosswalk near the bridge location, and a lower speed limit through the Village District would improve safety for walking and biking. There is an existing trail from the TC to the Post Office that needs maintenance and review of permissions to cross private lands. Perhaps adoption of a tax break/policy for landowners who agree to host a trail crossing on their land would allow for trail expansion. Other methods of reducing carbon from transportation is to promote e-bike trails and car and van pooling networks. Social media could be used to create a local "ride-share board" for ride sharing. There is currently a discussion of a park and ride, but it's not clear that a larger, more developed lot is the right size for Vershire. It's possible that smaller, donated, informal spots on private land and kept plowed by landowners might serve this function.

*#9 & #10 Current and Future Land Use and Natural Resources:* There are approximately 23,000 acres of land in Vershire, a significant % of which is forested. The recommendation is that the Town Plan should encourage the preservation of forest blocks for carbon sequestration, for the preservation of biodiversity, and to accommodate migrating plant and animal species. It is also important to find out if current conservation easement laws actually work as originally intended—do they promote and preserve biodiversity and do they do this at a cost to human residents who are struggling with affordability and high residential tax rates.

*#11 Flood Resilience:* Promote the hardening of infrastructure and back-up energy systems. What are the impacts of long power outages and is having wide-spread back-up power (battery or other) at the resident level feasible. Newer battery technologies are promising and can even support the grid when it is being taxed by heatwaves, etc. However, mining for batteries and waste products produced are not without serious costs to the environment. The grid itself needs to be made more resilient especially to older and falling trees—and more of them will fall due to saturated ground. Might Vershire adopt the goal of managing these trees along power lines? Or,

is it feasible regarding costs now vs. costs later—to begin burying power/cable/fiber optic lines in Vershire?

*#12 Scenic and Historic Resources and Recreation:* Promote the maintenance and access to these areas, note the wellness benefits of utilizing these resources.

*#13 Energy:* Encourage the work of the Energy Committee and encourage community-wide conversations on this and related topics whenever possible.

*#14 Relationship to Other Plans:* The state has large complicated energy plans. The Vershire Town Plan should try to intersect with them where possible. One question to consider is how and where “preferred” locations for solar installations are established. If a Town Plans mentions a location as desirable for a solar installation, then it can become a preferred site. Currently, preferred locations include rooftops and brown fields. Is the Ely Copper mine site a good location and will it be remediated for a possible solar installation? The land is privately owned and negotiations and planning would need to take place. The Mountain School might be another location to approach as a preferred site. Development Ordinances would need to align with these requests.

*#15 Implementation:* What steps can the Energy Committee take to focus more pointedly on climate resiliency?

Plans for bringing in Land Use/Natural Resources experts in to discuss these topics at the September 27th topics forum concluded the forum, which ended at 8:10pm.