

Green Advisory Board  
Minutes of Meeting  
May 21, 2009  
Town Hall Room 126

Members present: Kate Crosby (chair), Chris Schaffner, Eric Hudson, Tom Michelman (6:25 arrival), Carol Holley (clerk). Staff present: John Murray

The meeting opened at 6:12 p.m. Mr. Schaffner moved to accept the minutes of April 1, April 28, and May 7 as corrected, and Ms Crosby seconded. All voted in favor.

Ms Crosby related that Bernie Kosicki of OLEC had spoken with her. She noted that OLEC is not a standing committee, and Selectman Knibbe thought the GAB and OLEC could discuss being folded in together as they had some purposes in common. Mr. Schaffner offered to talk to Mr. Kosicki, but he felt that the OLEC's activities didn't have enough in common with GAB activities to warrant folding the groups in together – OLEC works to a large degree with design standards. Differences between the two groups were discussed, but it was noted that a similarity is that they are both advisory committees.

Mr. Murray talked about how he would like to work with the GAB and what he would like to do. He noted he had been with the municipal government for about 20 years, primarily in financial roles and as Assistant Town Manager. The Selectmen have asked that he be staff liaison to the GAB. He noted that the Selectmen do the “political stuff” with boards and committees, and staff are often inundated with requests for assistance from boards and committees. He will make sure that the right staff people are available to the GAB, while managing the staff priorities. It is important for staff to have committee needs coordinated.

Mr. Murray discussed zoning measures to help Acton become a green community – we need zoning to specifically allow manufacturing of alternative energy technologies. A draft warrant article was distributed that inserts the phrase “development and manufacturing of renewable energy or alternative energy (RE/AE) equipment and systems” into the Zoning Bylaw, section 3.6.3. This zoning change would need to be on the warrant for the June 23 Town Meeting. Mr. Schaffner moved to recommend this zoning change to the Selectmen, Ms Crosby seconded, and all voted in favor.

Mr. Murray noted the “stretch code” – an alternate building code for more stringent energy efficiency in buildings that a municipality needs to adopt to acquire “green community” status. He stated that the code is currently being reviewed by the building code enforcement officer to determine enforceability. Adoption would not require a Town Meeting vote – it is up to the Selectmen to adopt the measure. It was noted that, since this is an alternative state code and not a municipal regulation, 40B developments would also be required to comply with the more stringent standards.

Mr. Schaffner read off the requirements for green community status. It was noted that the alternative fuel/higher mileage vehicle requirement was waived for heavy equipment and law enforcement; the town does own some light trucks and inspection vehicles. Mr. Murray noted that, even once Acton gains that status, grants can come with strings that might not work for the Town – those grants would not be pursued.

A progress report on a potential Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) facility, to be sited at the transfer station property, was given. Mr. Murray stated that the meeting originally scheduled with a private

party and federal, state, and town officials had not taken place. Acton's share of the deal would have been donation of the land for the facility, but the financing had to come from elsewhere. We would need to have CNG school buses to bring up the fuel flow rate to make this project worthwhile. School buses are currently diesel and they are leased. The current CNG facilities are in Worcester and Lexington – too far away to refuel practically.

The town is also migrating to 40% biodiesel (B40) for heavy duty vehicles for the summer. In winter, 20% (B20) is used because of the coagulation factor. Some of the lawn mowing equipment is still on 20%. Biodiesel does cost more. The school buses use regular diesel. The environmental benefits of biodiesel, particularly regarding particulate emissions, was noted. Mr. Hudson discussed fully exploring the environmental costs of biodiesel, made from "virgin" as opposed to recycled biofuels, versus CNG, noting that, long term, biodiesel can be made from waste oils. Mr. Murray noted that the town started using biodiesel because of less soot. Ms Holley asked if there had been less staff absence due to illness since the soot was reduced – this hasn't been tracked. Mr. Murray reminded the group that the DPW garage is heated with waste motor oil and has been for some years. Ms Crosby asked about the decision making process with biodiesel; Mr. Murray agreed it was more expensive, but the initial research had to do more with cleaning up the exhaust. It's \$60,000 more, as an off- top-of-the-head guesstimate. The decision was made via a team approach of several staff members with varying points of view. Mr. Murray will provide the GAB with B40 pricing. He noted that since the town owns its vehicles, fuel types are easier to change, and thinks that the next round of school bus leasing to lead to migration to CNG.

Ms Crosby asked about the possibility of the town leasing roof space for solar installations; Mr. Schaffner noted that State Revolving Funds (SRF) funding had been discussed for solar installations. Mr. Murray said that using SRF funds was a project not ready for prime time before the Special Town Meeting. What's happened is that after some conversations – could we get an article ready in less than a week? He didn't think that was possible – the window just moved by too quickly, and SRF needs bonding votes before August 1. Mr. Michelman asked about SRF interest rates, which Mr. Murray noted to be 2.4% for 30 years.

Leasing municipal or school building components, particularly roofs to solar (and other alternative energy) companies, was discussed. Mr. Murray noted that in order to lease for more than 10 years, a Home Rule Petition would be required – there is a town meeting vote, then an act of the legislature. He distributed sample language and the applicable state law.

An 80 kilowatt project was deemed appropriate for most of the available roof space for a solar installation. An appropriate lease term was discussed for a PPA to use the space, since the legislation will need a term number. Mr. Hudson felt the town should be able to consider the opportunity to lease the roofs of the buildings for more than 10 years because there is a lot of work to do when installing solar panels. If a certain building doesn't have the right structural configuration, it can simply not be used for this purpose. Market conditions and their effect on lease terms was discussed. Mr. Schaffner noted that the "why now" question would be raised; the answer was determined to be because this is when somebody in the town got around to it.

Mr. Hudson volunteered to do a presentation to support this article at the special town meeting, should it get on the warrant. Mr. Michelman felt that this was a good idea because it would provide the town with an option. He asked if passing this legislation enables, but doesn't require, the town to do something. Mr. Schaffner noted that the States wants people to do this, but there are major legislative

hurdles. Once a contractor has committed to a project, in order to get rebates things have to be built within a year. Mr. Murray noted the other advantages for the town in passing this legislation rest with the DOER – we will have already made zoning changes to become a green community; the DOER can help lobby to get this legislation passed.

Mr. Michelman related that non-profit entities can't take advantage of the tax breaks that came out of the stimulus package. Mr. Hudson felt it would be interesting to compare two private companies doing this, as they can already do anything they want with their roofs. A certain square footage is needed to make the project worthwhile. Per Mr. Michelman, Sun Edison does this as a business. Mr. Hudson wanted to know why there aren't a lot of companies with big roofs asking people to install solar. Ms Crosby felt that commercial entities might buy their own equipment, but Mr. Hudson felt they might not be able to buy. Mr. Michelman noted that PPA's have incentives that might not be good enough. Mr. Schaffner asked if there are incentives for government buildings that might be higher than for privately owned buildings.

Mr. Hudson thought a Town Meeting article about leasing could be something good that the GAB could do really fast. This could be ahead of the long range planning effort the group hasn't started yet.

Mr. Murray stated he would need technical assistance with drafting an article – what is the correct term of the lease? What is the general sense of accessories required for a solar panel? Counsel can draft an article pretty quickly.

Ms Crosby was interesting in knowing what dates the group has to work toward; Mr. Murray noted he has a meeting with Steve Anderson next Tuesday.

Ms Holley moved to support a warrant article that enables the town to lease appropriate municipal and school properties for the purpose of installations. Mr. Hudson seconded and offered a friendly amendment – renewal energy installations, not just solar. All voted in favor. Mr. Murray stated he would get a draft article to the board. The GAB needs to be ready to present to the Selectmen why this is a good idea for the special town meeting warrant in June. Mr. Murray will put time for the conversation on the next Selectmen's agenda. He noted that conversations also need to be held with Jen Benson, Jamie Eldridge and Corey Atkins. Mr. Michelman took on that task.

Next meeting dates were set: June 22, a Monday at 6 p.m., then July 8 at 6 p.m., then September 9 and 23. Ms Crosby will work on rooms and posting.

Mr. Hudson felt that what group needs to try to do in a couple of key meetings is go through the learning and come down with a working group – what's the mission? What are we going to tackle? What five things are we going to do? Mr. Michelman thought the group needs to meet more rather than less until the tasks and missions are described. Mr. Hudson will discuss timing sensitivity and other matters regarding roof leases off line, to work on a draft for town meeting.

Mr. Michelman moved to adjourn, Mr. Schaffner seconded, and all voted in favor. Meeting adjourned 8:32 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Carol Holley