

SUSTAINABLE ENERGY COMMISSION
Regular Meeting
Public Works Department, 4 Turkey Hill Road, Newtown
Thursday, September 21, 2023
Called to order at 7:00PM

*THESE MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO APPROVAL BY THE SUSTAINABLE ENERGY
COMMISSION*

Present: Kathy Quinn, Nicolas Lombardo, Carol Walsh, Robert Bohn

Absent: David Stout, Mike Oristaglio, Allen Adriani, Damian Bednarz, George Brown

Also Present: Director of Public Works Fred Hurley, BOE Director of Facilities John Barlow

Communications – None

Public Comments – None

Acceptance of Minutes – Tabled due to lack of Quorum

Update to Smart Power residential storage program – They are running an ad on the plasma screen at the Community Center and have fliers available. They are talking about doing a zoom on October 4th.

Eversource Municipal Programs – Eversource has upgraded their municipal program. The schools are utilizing the program for the heat pumps on Hawley School.

Southbury Energy Fair September 30 - Some SEC members will be going to the fair and try to collect vendors for the Earth Day fair in April.

Sub-Committees

EV Charging stations/10K Grant – F. Hurley reported that they are waiting on the sign off for the rebate for Edmond Town Hall. Once they get the acknowledgement letter they will order the equipment from Juice Bar. Then they will move onto EV charging stations at the Senior Center and Community Center

Energy Storage – None

Portfolio Manager – K. Quinn reported that her and M. Oristaglio have met and they are still trying to resolve some issues.

Status of solar projects

Buy All Program– F. Hurley reported that they will know mid-October if the 4 applications have been accepted or not.

Off site 1MW VNM – None

Other Solar Opportunities, Batchelder Site, Hawley School, High School Auditorium - K. Quinn has been in contact with Rob Sibley regarding Batchelder. To date there is very little work has been done. The basic remediation that was done was to remove aluminum dross but there is more remediation that needs to be done. It is a possibility that the SEC will take on the project. This means making a plan that has been acknowledged which is a solar farm and a possible anaerobic digester. An action plan and a funding plan needs development. Capping the site has also been discussed.

At the High School, J. Barlow is not against solar but the roof is in dire need of replacement. In looking at the solar opportunity, sometimes the contractors look at repairs or reroof with the solar. It is the same situation for Hawley school.

School Updates:

Hawley - J. Barlow reported that there is a substantial completion letter has been signed. There is also an addendum to the letter that lists 6 items that need to be followed up on. It is basically finished although they are waiting on the commissioning and final report.

Middle School – There is going to be an update at Public Building and Site next Tuesday. There is \$450,000 for engineering and when you do some number crunching, the HVAC could exceed \$25 million. He has proposed to the BOE an all in facility study.

Town Building Strategic Plan Committee – None

Municipal Energy Plan – None

Social Media – None

ADDITIONAL ITEMS TO BE ADDRESSED

Changes to recycling/composting efforts – None

Lighting at FFH – None

Tiny Forest/Wild flower meadows – K. Quinn provided articles on the benefits of wild flowers (att.).

Next meeting is October 19, 2023

Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:25pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Arlene Miles, Clerk

Tiny Forests With Big Benefits

Native plants crowded onto postage-stamp-size plots have been delivering environmental benefits around the world — and, increasingly, in the U.S.



By Cara Buckley

Published Aug. 24, 2023 Updated Aug. 26, 2023

Climate Forward There's an ongoing crisis — and tons of news. Our newsletter keeps you up to date. [Get it in your inbox.](#)

The tiny forest lives atop an old landfill in the city of Cambridge, Mass. Though it is still a baby, it's already acting quite a bit older than its actual age, which is just shy of 2.

Its aspens are growing at twice the speed normally expected, with fragrant sumac and tulip trees racing to catch up. It has absorbed storm water without washing out, suppressed many weeds and stayed lush throughout last year's drought. The little forest managed all this because of its enriched soil and density, and despite its diminutive size: 1,400 native shrubs and saplings, thriving in an area roughly the size of a basketball court.

It is part of a sweeping movement that is transforming dusty highway shoulders, parking lots, schoolyards and junkyards worldwide. Tiny forests have been planted across Europe, in Africa, throughout Asia and in South America, Russia and the Middle East. India has hundreds, and Japan, where it all began, has thousands.

Now tiny forests are slowly but steadily appearing in the United States. In recent years, they've been planted alongside a corrections facility on the Yakama reservation in Washington, in Los Angeles's Griffith Park and in Cambridge, where the forest is one of the first of its kind in the Northeast.

"It's just phenomenal," said Andrew Putnam, superintendent of urban forestry and landscapes for the city of Cambridge, on a recent visit to the forest, which was planted in the fall of 2021 in Danehy Park, a green space built atop the former city landfill. As dragonflies and white butterflies floated about, Mr. Putnam noted that within a few years, many of the now 14-foot saplings would be as tall as telephone poles and the forest would be self-sufficient.

Healthy woodlands absorb carbon dioxide, clean the air and provide for wildlife. But these tiny forests promise even more.

They can grow as quickly as ten times the speed of conventional tree plantations, enabling them to support more birds, animals and insects, and to sequester more carbon, while requiring no weeding or watering after the first three years, their creators said.

A couple was sick of mowing. Now their wildflowers are a local attraction.

'We started this as not wanting to mow grass, never expecting it would become what it has,' Jonathan Yacko said about his Vermont field



By [Cathy Free](#)

September 15, 2023 at 8:00 a.m. EDT

Jonathan Yacko was tired of mowing the lawn on the 5½-acre property that he and his wife, Natalie Gilliard, moved to in Chittenden, Vt.

"It would take a solid day to mow and trim everything," Yacko said, explaining that on some summer nights, he'd be out clipping grass until after 9 p.m.

"We knew there had to be something better we could do than maintain a lawn," Gilliard added.

But the couple didn't know what that should look like. Other than caring for a small patch of grass and a few boxwood shrubs at their former home in Long Island, they'd had no experience gardening or landscaping.

The couple mentioned to one of their neighbors, Hadley Mueller, that they were planning to look into some new landscaping ideas. Mueller happened to work for American Meadows, a Vermont-based seed company.

"Wildflowers," she told them. "I thought they had the perfect spot for a beautiful meadow."

Yacko, 36, and Gilliard, 34, were immediately onboard. They started by ripping out an acre's worth of grass, then they ordered a 50-pound bag of seed that would grow 27 varieties of wildflowers that thrive in the northeast, both perennials and annuals.

They plowed, ran a rake over it, and put seeds down.

He and Gilliard are among a growing group of homeowners who are sick of lawns and made a change with their own yards. Their story was first reported by by Vermont Public.

Growing a wildflower meadow or planting other alternatives to grass is part of a movement to use fewer resources, foster community relationships and help reverse the loss of insects.

"We had no idea what we'd be looking at after we first planted the meadow, but that was part of the fun," Yacko said.

"We'd been wondering whether it would work, and suddenly we were seeing these little white flowers called baby's breath," said Gilliard. "That was an exciting time for us."

The baby's breath was soon followed by yellow coreopsis, orange cosmos, red poppies, purple foxgloves and blue forget-me-nots, she said. Their colorful new field also attracted songbirds and bees.

Over the next several months in 2021, she and Yacko said people they'd never met started dropping by. Neighbors and strangers thanked them for planting the meadow. Many of them brought baked goods, left thank you notes and even small bouquets, Gilliard said.

"The meadow became this wonderful way to develop new friendships and feel like we belonged to something and were part of a community," she said. "A lot of people drove by during the pandemic and told us the flowers made them happy and gave them a boost."

The people didn't stop coming.

"Seeing what new flowers had popped up each day brought a lot of joy," Gilliard said.

Neighbors Jenna Baird and her partner Jacob Powsner were so inspired by the field of flowers that they decided this year to plant a patch of wildflowers on their own property across the hill, where they run a maple syrup farm.

"What Natalie and Jonathan did was so spectacular — we wanted to create a similar habitat for all of the wild pollinators," said Baird, 32.

"It definitely beats grass, and I was convinced we should do the same after the first glimpse of Jonathan and Natalie's meadow," Powsner added.

After he'd planted three-quarters of an acre, he took his tiller down the hill to help Yacko expand his meadow by another acre or so.

"We're now looking at about 2¼ acres of wildflowers," said Gilliard, "and we're planning to do more."

She and Yacko had spent most of their lives on Long Island, where they had fast-paced careers and little time for gardening or yard care, she said. Yacko was busy as an engineering manager, while Gilliard worked for a New York utility company.

They decided to move to Vermont in 2019 in search of a slower-paced life and a sense of community, Yacko said, adding that he and Gilliard found it difficult to make new friendships in New York.

He now works remotely for the same New York company, while Gilliard switched careers and is now a special-education teacher.