

**Minutes:**

Stowe Electric Commissioners' Meeting

April 21, 2021 at 8:30 a.m. at Town of Stowe Electric Conference Room

**Present:**

BOARD MEMBERS: Richard ("Dick") Marron, Chairman (via Zoom); Larry Lackey, Vice-Chairman (via Zoom), Heidi Scheuermann, Commissioner (via Zoom)

STAFF: Ellen Burt, General Manager; David Kresock, Director of Operations; Mike Lazorchak, Manager of Regulatory Compliance; Lily Burgess, Clerk of the Board

Dick called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m.

**Approval of the March 31, 2021 Meeting Minutes**

On motion made and seconded, the minutes of March 31<sup>st</sup> were approved.

**Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) Grant for Old Mill Building**

SED staff submitted a Letter of Intent (LOI) to apply to the Northern Border Regional Commission 2021 State Economic & Infrastructure Development Investment Program for grant funding for the stabilization of the west wall of the Mill building. In the LOI, SED presented the project, and the NBRC - Economic and Infrastructure Development (EID) review team determined it to be competitive. As such, SED was encouraged to move forward with the application submission. The Grant application is due in mid-May. What a great lift to SED and the Stowe Community it will be to restore the Old Mill. The mill is on the National Registry now and SED staff is always surprised how many people come to visit it and to take pictures. The full details about the competition can be found at: <https://www.nbrc.gov/content/EID>.

Ellen furthermore approached Congressman Peter Welch regarding a \$1.5 million grant and SED staff submitted a letter of interest for community project funding requests to his office. Michael is seeking letters of support from the Board and other individuals.

Moscow Mill Dam: Phase 1 entails the study and analysis of the present state of the dam, safety matters, hydrology for turbine selection, and stabilization of the west wall.

On April 8th, SED met with the engineering team, historic preservation expert, and SED's attorney responsible for regulatory and licensing matters at Moscow Mills to perform a site visit, coordinate activities, and to produce a time schedule of the project.

SED is responsible for the mill building and the dam. The stabilization cost for the west wall and dam is unknown as of yet. SED's local engineering firm has not been able to get under to the foundation and thus were only able to visually inspect the west wall. They will have to wait until the water flow is lower before being able to check the entire foundation. Unfortunately taking the dam down would also be very expensive.

The historical preservation expert, Chris Cole, stated that there is an imminent need to stabilize the west wall. If Stowe experiences another high-water event (such as spring run-off) or flood event this could damage the wall, which could cause the whole structure to collapse. The stabilization needs to be completed by the end of the 2021 construction season, ideally by this fall. Ellen elaborated that SED has known for a while that the west wall is fragile, since the last high-water event in November 2019 caused considerable damage to the Mill building.

The stabilization of west wall will need to be completed first, then SED can concentrate on the renewable hydro generation of hopefully a bit more than 500kW.

After the meeting, Brian from SLR Consulting prepared their scope and preliminary budget for the project. SLR Consulting will forward their full proposal to SED for review as soon as possible. At this time, the estimate will be for the engineering consulting services only and will only be a rough estimate until they can inspect the foundation. The cost of construction will be bid out based on the recommendations of the consulting service.

SED will not undertake any repairs or renovations until they have good estimates, and Ellen was able to discuss the scope of this work with the Board of Commissioners.

Larry asked which tasks as stated by SLR need to be completed before the NBRC grant application. Mike stated all Phase 1 tasks identified by SLR need to be completed by fall. However, the grant money will not be allocated before the PUC filing regarding the Moscow Mills Classification Report is due on or before August 10<sup>th</sup>. SLR compiled the PUC order and what is required to assess the Hydro feasibility for the up to 1MW turbine construction into one site visit. The previous owner of the property had the dam inspected last in 2006. Larry asked that SED send him a copy of the PUC order.

## **Operations Report**

Line crews continue their make-ready work for Stowe Cable. SED only has two service applications remaining to complete, one on Barnes Hill Rd and a big one in the Upper Pinnacle area. David stated that the make-ready work, which includes removing transformers and replacing poles, directly ties in with number of company-initiated outages this past month.

During his spring walk-through and comprehensive inspection of all 26 rows and 2,500 panels at the Nebraska Valley Solar farm, David discovered a cracked solar panel in row 19. He contacted Namaste to discuss when they can provide technicians to replace the

damaged module. SED purchased 25 spare modules during the initial installation to have on hand for this reason.

## **Regulatory Report**

Case 19-0856-RULE – Proposed Revisions to Vermont Public Utility Commission Rule 5.500: The Public Utility Commission (PUC) committed to revising this rule related to the construction and operation of Net-Metering projects from 1kW upward since 2019. The workshop held on Monday, April 19<sup>th</sup> was more of an informational session for transparency reasons and asking for input and insight of the changes they would like to see. PUC will be sending out an information request and SED is hoping to be given the opportunity to submit comments.

Case 20-3244-INV – Moscow Mills Classification Report: The PUC extended SED's reporting deadline to August 2021. This is the update that the DPS and PUC are requesting on the status of the dam and hydrology to fill in the reporting gap by the previous landowner.

Case 20-3304-PET - Department Petition for investigation re: a net-metering SHEI constraint mitigation grid adjustor: This is an ongoing investigation by the PUC regarding the SHEI constraint issue. The first comments are due April 23<sup>rd</sup>. SED is closely monitoring this petition.

Easements and Right-Of-Ways: Staff is working internally to update utility easements named in property deeds with new utility specific easements (with maps when appropriate). The goal is to be more transparent and explain utility easements ahead of time when there is a change of service, since traditionally the language in some older deeds was vague. Occasionally, landowners express frustration with the vegetation cut in the utility's Right-of-Way. New easements entered into will be cleaner and up-front, and more site-specific to the property.

### Workshops and Community Outreach

- SED continues to promote Tier 3 incentives for 2021 and has received two qualifying rebates for 2021 so far.
- Stowe High School reached out for support regarding environmental coursework in 2021-2022 academic year. This will likely be curriculum support and field visits to the Nebraska Valley Solar array.

## **Other Business**

Federal Grants and Help for Municipal Utilities: SED has not received any Federal help during this pandemic so far. Heidi suggested a preliminary informational session between the municipal government organization to talk about federal funds that will be allocated to Stowe once the Federal Government has the grant amount determined and shared the rules regarding the disbursement of these funds.

Union Contract Negotiations: SED needs to finish up one written item today in preparation for a conference call tomorrow with the Union and the shop steward. Larry Lackey questioned the raises for office staff in the Union. Once finalized, the Union contract will be ready for signature by the Commissioners.

The Board scheduled the next Commissioners' meeting for May 19<sup>th</sup> at 8:30 a.m.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:26 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Lily Burgess  
Clerk of the Board