

Minutes:

Stowe Electric Commissioners' Meeting:

June 28, 2023 at 8:30 am at Town of Stowe Electric Department Conference Room with remote participation available via Zoom.

Present:

BOARD MEMBERS: Larry Lackey, Chair; Heidi Scheuermann, Vice-Chair (via Zoom) and Sara Teachout, Commissioner

STAFF: Jackie Pratt, General Manager, Brent Lilley, Director of Operations; Sarah Juzek, Director of Finance; Michael Lazorchak, Manager of Regulatory Compliance; Amber Ives, Clerk of the Board

GUEST: Wendy Crosier, Clean Energy Innovation Fellow

Call to Order: L. Lackey called the meeting to order at 8:33 am.

Agenda Approval:

S. Teachout moved to approve the warned agenda, the motion was seconded by H. Scheuermann and was approved.

Approval of May 24, 2023 Meeting Minutes:

On a motion made by S. Teachout and seconded by H. Scheuermann, the minutes of May 24th were approved.

Presentation by Wendy Crosier: Clean Energy Innovator Fellowship:

J. Pratt notified the Commissioners that W. Crosier had been working for Stowe Electric Department (SED) since September of 2022 and that W. Crosier is a Clean Energy Innovation Fellow from the Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education. J. Pratt informed the Board that W. Crosier had been working with M. Lazorchak on a variety of projects and that W. Crosier has been incredibly helpful in finding grants to help fund these projects as well as other projects throughout Lamoille County.

W. Crosier explained that there are three Clean Energy Innovators working in Vermont as there is a lot of interest in the Tier 3 system and expanding that information as

Vermont has such spectacular goals for renewable energy. W. Crosier informed the Commission that the Clean Energy Innovation program is set up to allow emerging energy professionals the ability to work with utilities so that the Fellow can learn while helping the utility, as well as increase community involvement and facilitate additional capacity for equity and inclusion.

W. Crosier indicated that SED is perfect for the Clean Energy Innovation project as the Fellows are primarily looking at innovation and how people are finding creative new ways to assess their surroundings and fine-tune their renewable energy projects to reflect sense of place in communities.

W. Crosier familiarized the Commission on her involvement with WindowDressers, a volunteer-driven, non-profit organization dedicated to helping Northern New England residents reduce heating costs and carbon dioxide pollution by producing low-cost insulating window inserts that function as custom, interior-mounted storm windows. W. Crosier explained that she is working with the Stowe Energy Committee, Hyde Park Energy Committee and the Town of Morrisville in order to help provide these custom inserts to low-income families who are struggling with high heating costs. W. Crosier praised the program for providing a quick, easy, community-based solution and informed the Board that there are currently thirty Stowe homes enrolled. W. Crosier reported that the Lamoille County Planning Commission, especially Victoria Hellwig, has been extremely helpful with coordinating the project and that a grant awarded through the Grassroots Foundation would help fund the Lamoille County WindowDressers build.

W. Crosier spoke with the Commissioners about her grant-writing background and how this skill set has helped her find different funding opportunities for the various renewable energy and community-based projects that SED is currently working on. W. Crosier expressed that discovering innovative grants for this project has been extremely interesting and educational as SED's project is unique due to pairing a historical property with new technology. J. Pratt explained that the grants W. Crosier has applied for are all encompassing as SED is trying to maximize and leverage non-ratepayer funding as much as possible for the Moscow Mill Revitalization project.

W. Crosier informed the Commission that SED was awarded a grant from Vermont Healthy Communities that will provide 80 hours of consulting in order to help with data collection and understanding, community-led decision-making and advancing health equity.

J. Pratt and W. Crosier explained that the small, community-based grants that have been awarded to SED will ultimately help SED earn large dollar grants in the future as these grants help create excitement around the project and provide SED with additional resources and talent that prove support for the project.

W. Crosier voiced that building community connections, especially as it relates to hydropower, has been an important aspect of her Fellowship at SED and that she has

been able to positively interact and reinforce relationships with various committees and non-governmental organizations in both the County and State.

J. Pratt informed the Board that due to W. Crosier and M. Lazorchak's success with writing and winning grants, that they have been invited to present at the Northeast Public Power Association's Energy Connect Conference. W. Crosier and M. Lazorchak will share their expertise with other municipal utilities while reinforcing SED's relationships in the public power community.

As a follow-up to W. Crosier's presentation, L. Lackey requested that the Commission be provided with a summary of the grants applied for along with a description of the corresponding project, purpose of the grant and potential funding amount.

Financial Reports:

S. Juzek reported that SED is continuing to see favorable savings in purchase power costs and as a result of this, SED will be issuing refunds to ratepayers for the difference between the filed rate increase and the approved rate increase once the Public Utility Commission (PUC) finalizes the percentage. SED staff explained that this refund would be based on actual kilowatt usage beginning February 1, 2023.

Fiscal Year 2024 Operating Budget:

S. Juzek provided the Commissioners with an overview of SED's operating budget for fiscal year 2024 while highlighting the differences between the projected fiscal year 2023 financials and the fiscal year 2024 budget.

L. Lackey thanked S. Juzek for the information and inquired as to what expenses staff were estimating, as well as what expenses were discretionary. J. Pratt explained that the budget did not contain a lot of discretionary expenditures as SED staff had made great efforts to trim the budget prior to presenting it to the Commission.

The Commission and Staff discussed details of the budget, reasonableness of earnings according to the PUC, the interruptible load tariff and how the final determination of the rate case will affect the budget.

The Commission and Staff reviewed the timeline for the budget presentation and review going forward as the Commissioners requested to have more time to analyze the budget. J. Pratt suggested that next year SED staff could present the Board with the budget in May in order to allow time for questions and discussion prior to voting on the Operating Budget in June.

L. Lackey and J. Pratt discussed the level of information that the Commission would like shared with them regardless of whether it falls under the domain of the General Manager or the Commissioners according to the Stowe Electric Utility Commission Charter.

S. Teachout moved to approve the fiscal year 2024 Operating Budget. The motion was seconded by H. Scheuermann, all were in favor and the motion carried.

General Manager Highlights:

J. Pratt notified the Commission that SED had received the American Public Power Association's "Energy Innovator Award" (EIA) which honors utilities that have developed or applied creative techniques and technologies to improve the efficient delivery of energy services in their communities through the implementation of new projects and programs. J. Pratt informed the Board that SED had received this award due to SED's ongoing partnership with the University of Vermont and through this innovative partnership, SED has been able to provide valuable educational experiences for students while receiving important input and research that helps lay the groundwork for implementation of SED's multi-phase revitalization plan for the Moscow Road parcel.

J. Pratt apprised the Commissioners that two of SED's Congressionally Directed Spending requests were advanced by Senator Sanders in the FY2024 Appropriations bill. The two projects selected still need to make it through further negotiation and discussion before a final vote takes place on the FY2024 Omnibus bill.

J. Pratt informed the Commissioners that SED's Cady Hill storage barn project is scheduled to go before the Development Review Board (DRB) on August 1, 2023.

The Commission and Staff also discussed the Dump Road Garage, the review of existing insurance policies, title updates, leadership training with SED supervisors, implementation of the local option sales tax, the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP), net-metering, battery storage and Operations workload.

J. Pratt spoke to the Board about SED's community involvement with Stowe Elementary School's egg drop, the 4th of July parade, the 'Dog Days of Summer' campaign and SED's partnership with Efficiency Vermont at the Stowe Farmer's Market.

Other Business:

The Commission and Staff discussed the date of the August Commissioner's meeting and whether it needed to be adjusted due to a staff scheduling conflict. The Board and Staff decided to keep the currently scheduled date of August 23, 2023.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:58 am.

Respectfully Submitted,



Amber Ives
Clerk of the Board