

Boxborough Sustainability Committee Mtg
August 11, 2021 – 7 pm

Members Present: Francie Nolde, Barbara Salzman, Chris DeLise, Suresh Jasrasaria, Richard Garrison

Also Present: John Markiewicz - BSB Representative, Warren Ryder - Boxboro Police Chief, Carter Terenzini – Acting Town Administrator, Johanna Choo – Town Resident

Minutes from 7-14-21 Sustainability Committee Meeting were approved.

Chief Ryder joined the meeting while on vacation which members offered their thanks. Ryder presented information about the town's Police Dept. fleet of vehicles as a basis for considering the practicality and purchase of electric or hybrid units in the future. Ryder opened by stating that the alarm bells sounded by the recently issued 2021 report by the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) convinces him that we need to take action to head off the impacts of climate change. Ryder stated he intends to research electric and hybrid vehicles so that he is better informed about the practicality of using them in the Boxboro Police Dept.

Ryder gave the following information about the Boxboro police fleet:

- Currently 10 vehicles – 5 patrol, 5 administrative and backup
- Normally buy 1 new patrol vehicle per year – high mileage cars shift over to admin use
- Patrol vehicles travel approx. 200,000 miles/yr.
- Majority of hours spent idling
- Use 13,000 gal. fuel per year

Ryder estimated that possible savings by using a hybrid vehicle would be:

- Save 1,362 gal/yr
- Save \$2.60 to \$2.75 per gallon
- 24,000 lb. of CO2 avoided

Police fleet converted to Chevrolet Tahoe from Explorer because of durability and performance issues with the Explorer. They had to retire the Explorer at 125,000 mi. but are getting 175,000 + with the Tahoe. Explorer avg. 5-10 mpg, Tahoe avg. 19 mpg (patrols 12-15 mpg).

Ryder stated that the “platform equipment” on the vehicles are specific to the brand. Common practice is to swap out the platform equipment between vehicles as needed. If they started to buy electric or hybrids it would be best to buy Chevrolet so they could continue to swap out the platform equipment. However, Ryder stated that Chevrolet does not offer a hybrid Tahoe at this time – perhaps available in 2024.

Purchase cost of 2021 Tahoe cruiser is \$55,000. Ford Explorer hybrid cruiser \$59,500.

Discussion about practicality of all hybrid/electric vehicle as police cruiser:

- It was noted that Acton just bought a hybrid cruiser – Ryder said he will reach out to learn more about how it is going for them
- Cruiser needs to be available in all circumstances – loss of electrical supply to charge the battery could be an issue
- Often need to keep a vehicle running to maintain temperature
- Nolde stated that concern is carbon emissions – can gas engines be turned off when idling and use the battery to run it?

Ryder agreed to research battery life span and overall durability of hybrids/electrics.

Ryder said if a grant was available to purchase an all electric vehicle he would try it out – perhaps for the detective or admin. use. Suggested Bldg. Inspector or Animal Control could also use.

Terenzini noted that monies from Green Community monies can only be used for the additional costs to buy hybrid/electric not the entire cost of the vehicle.

Ryder stated his request to purchase 1 new vehicle this year was not approved so he will need to request monies for 2 vehicle next year.

Ryder posed the question for all to consider “Would be better to phase in 1 hybrid/electric per year (piecemeal) or wipe board clean and start all over?” How will this be funded?

Salzman said electric vehicle technology is changing rapidly and would not recommend wholesale changeout yet. Jasrasaria suggested phasing in 1 hybrid/electric per year.

Ryder noted that the State Highway Patrol uses Ford Explorers which makes them somewhat attractive to local police personnel.

In reference to possible Green Community funding, Terenzini stated that it took 18 months to get approved as a Green Community in his previous town.

Discussion about Green Community funding ensued:

- Boxboro is not currently eligible to be a green community
- 2 separate bills pending at state level that could open the door for Boxboro
- Nolde explained Bill 2181 would allow Boxboro to adopt a .5 mil/KW charge to pay for Green Community funding
- Terenzini was optimistic that a bill will pass in the near future but said it would likely take another 3 years before Boxboro receives their first grant - 2024.
- Fire, Police DPW operational “heavy metal” equipment exempt from energy reduction required under Green Communities

Discussion turned to Boxboro's Sustainability Policy recently adopted by the Select Board and the Town's Master Plan 2030 which outlines sustainability aspirations and action plans. Nolde noted that Acton's Sustainability Policy has not been effective, it has not proved to be a living document – so the challenge is to make sure ours is.

Terezini explained that he has joined Boxboro on a part time basis and not here for the long term. His primary goal is to bring on a full time administrator. His impression is that Boxboro town gov. has very lean staff levels. He is tasked to create a staffing plan for the next 5 years.

Terezini offered the following thoughts and questions regarding the Sustainability Policy (SP) and Master Plan (MP):

- How realistic is the SP?
- Who is responsible for implementing? For tracking implementation?
- Typically, a town's planning department would take the lead in implementing sustainability goals.
- Given the lean staffing throughout Boxboro town government, there are no staff available to implement the SP or MP.
- Having trouble filling Bldg. Inspector position – wears too many hats.
- The SB is not an administrative body and cannot be expected to implement

Salzman asked Terezini how the other town's he has worked for has staffed sustainability projects – Terezini said in Sutton they hired someone, in Grafton used in-house staff.

Garrison recommended hiring sustainability staff based on the dollar savings they can achieve through their work. Terezini suggested putting best foot forward at Budget Planning process – coming up soon! Finance Committee drives this function in Boxboro.

Terezini asked what are the priorities of the SC? One answer was to keep the Sustainability Policy a living document. Terezini's recommendation - KEEP IT FRONT AND CENTER!

Salzman stated that only about 600 hshlds. In Boxboro use natural gas – all others use oil and are not eligible for MassSave grants and funding. Also, Boxboro uses a MLP which exempts town from Green Community funding Need legislation that could fix this.

Terezini suggested we communicate with National Grid to problem solve how Boxboro could tap into their grid to overcome barrier to Green Community eligibility.

Garrison said he would reach out to National Grid to start this conversation.

Discussion (Salzman and others) turned to building codes –

- It was noted that the Beaver Brook (Sisco) property has been sold and town needs to get ahead of any future development with a sustainable building code.

- State has signaled interest in moving to Net Zero Stretch Code by 2026. Some 5 towns, including Acton, have jumped out front of state and passed Net Zero Code already. However, there has been some push back to this.
- Sen. Eldridge has filed legislation that would allow towns to have own building codes e.g. “could only build homes that are fossil free” if they chose.

It was noted that 20% of Boxboro homes have electric heat so power outs could result in freezing pipes.

Garrison suggested SC members think about what they believe the SC priorities should be at this point in time and send them to Nolde. Nolde will aggregate them for discussion at the Sept. SC meeting. All agreed.

Members Jasrasaria and DeLise briefly discussed meeting to move the Mass Energize project forward.

Meeting ended approximately at 9:45 pm.