

Pittsfield Green Commission
Meeting minutes
Pittsfield City Hall, City Council Chambers
Monday September 26, 2011

Commissioners Present:

Joe LaRoche-Chairperson
Jim McGrath
Bruce Collingwood
Dan Bouvier
John Wood
Greg Yon
Nick Caccamo
Mike Ward
Nancy Nysten

Call to order

The Meeting was called to order by acting Chairperson Joe LaRoche at 6:00 PM.

1. Review the minutes

A motion was passed to accept the minutes from the October meeting.

2. Powering Pittsfield project update

Jim McGrath delivered an update on the Powering Pittsfield, community energy efficiency program. He informed the Commission that program has begun outreach along upper North Street, with technicians from CET (the Center for EcoTechnology) engaging building and business owners to identify opportunities for energy efficiency. CET will identify energy efficiency opportunities and marry them to available incentives offered by the utility companies with the installation work being done by utility approved vendors.

Jim also mentioned that he is developing a marketing and promotion plan to increase visibility and awareness in the community and to be able to cast recognition upon participating businesses.

Joe LaRoche inquired about utility approved vendors and access for residents and businesses. Jim explained that WMECO has a prepared approved vendor list and residents and businesses in the Powering Pittsfield program would be "handed-off" to these approved contractors by CET. Nancy Nysten added that she believes local contractors are used and that the opportunity for local contractors to become an approved vendor happens on a regular basis. Nancy also clarified that the role of CET is assess the participating building or business and to contact the appropriate vendors, making the process simpler for participants.

Jim summed up that the program is on track and will be expanding efforts over the coming months.

Jim also informed the Commission that the Powering Pittsfield program will begin targeting the residential neighborhoods of Morningside and Westside. Powering Pittsfield is currently working with CET to develop outreach strategies.

Nick Caccamo asked whether there are defined boundaries for the program.

Jim responded by saying, there are boundaries for the “targeted areas” of the Downtown area, North and South Street, and the two residential neighborhoods, but that anyone in Pittsfield is able to participate in Powering Pittsfield.

A motion was passed to accept the report.

3. Discussion on PACE financing program

Jim McGrath introduced the concept of PACE, Property Assessed Clean Energy, financing program. This program allows homeowners and building owners to pay for qualifying cost-effective energy efficiency and clean energy projects with a special property tax assessment. A major requirement of any PACE program is that annual projected savings must exceed the annual repayment costs. This qualification ensures that participants immediately realize meaningful savings. PACE was originally created in California in 2008 and has been implemented in several communities and authorized in 23 states, including Massachusetts in 2010. Jim supplied some background materials on PACE programs nationally and on the upcoming PACE program in Northampton. Jim explained that PACE provides a great solution to the major problem faced in energy efficiency efforts, and that is up-front costs and access to financing. He asked the Commission to learn about PACE and discuss further the possibility of implementing a PACE program in Pittsfield.

Responding to a question from John Wood regarding the source of funding for this program, Jim explained that the City would have to establish a PACE fund, and that funding for this could potentially come from a capital bond or funding through the state Green Communities Act.

Nick Caccamo asked Mike Ward if PEDA funds could be used for this type of project, and Mike explained that it would up to the City Council to make that determination.

Asked how this compares to other for-profit models offering similar services Jim explained that PACE is the municipal version of those financing schemes and that you can expect greater benefit, value and stability from the municipal PACE program than from a for-profit model.

Nancy added that the PACE programs tie the financing to the property allowing individuals the freedom of not being responsible for financing a project they may no longer benefit from if they have moved away. Nancy also suggested that someone from Northampton be invited to talk to the commission about their PACE program.

A motion was passed to accept the report.

4. Discussion regarding Green Commission Chairmanship

With John Krol stepping down from his position as chairman and member of the Green Commission it is necessary to elect a new Chairperson. John Krol was thanked for his service to the Green Commission.

It was proposed that Joe LaRoche be nominated for the position. The Commission voted and unanimously adopted Joe LaRoche as the new Chairperson of the Pittsfield Green Commission.

5. Adjournment

Joe LaRoche accepted a motion to adjourn the meeting.