

Minutes of the Peacham Energy Committee – 12 May, 2025

Zoom Meeting hosted in Peacham, VT

Meeting Information

Event name	Peacham Energy Committee Zoom Meeting
Time	May 12, 2025, 07:04 PM - 08:01 PM (EST)
Participants	Charlie Byron (Chair), Tom Bryer, Bruce Courtot, Cedric Farrell, Jock Gill

Quick recap

The meeting focused on energy-related projects and challenges in Peacham, including discussions about community solar arrays, microgrids, and emergency preparedness. The committee explored potential partnerships with Green Mountain Power and other utilities, as well as the financial aspects of existing and proposed energy initiatives. They also addressed broader community concerns such as the future of the local school and the need for improved connectivity, while considering next steps for their energy-related efforts.

Next steps

- Bruce Westcott to send a copy of the Local Emergency Management Plan to Jock.
- Jock to call Josh Costingway again to schedule a meeting and understand Green Mountain Power's stance on microgrids and community solar projects, in particular Peacham's current one.
- Jock: Draft questions about microgrid scenarios and share with team members before sending to Josh from Green Mountain Power
- Jock: Send a note to the Efficiency Vermont report author acknowledging receipt and discussion of the report
- Jock: Send solar array pictures to Charlie for the Facebook recruitment post
- Charlie to distribute the draft minutes from the last meeting along with the minutes from this meeting at the next meeting for approval.
- Charlie: Research materials from other energy committees
- Neil: Send the Energy Resilience Pathways report to Robert Starbuck
- Neil: Share Robert Starbuck's contact information with Charlie
- Tom: Contact Rebecca about setting up email notifications for Energy Committee correspondence

Tabled Items

1. Tom and Jock will each contact members they know of nearby Energy Committees, to share approaches and priorities, once we are clearer on ours.
2. We will tentatively plan to invite Olivia Anderson, of the Washington Electric Cooperative Board, to attend the May meeting, to discuss prospective projects including micro-grids and the potential to establish all of Peacham as a microgrid in the event of a larger grid failure.
3. Charlie: Add "Contacting members of neighboring Energy Committees" to future agenda
4. Energy Committee: Consider organizing presentations at the library about weatherization and energy efficiency option

Detailed (Zoom-generated) Summaries

Peacham's Energy Path and School Closure

Charlie discussed the feasibility of a future path for energy and the potential for specific projects to provide immediate benefits. Jock suggested broadening the scope to break down silos between education, communications, and energy. He also highlighted the challenges posed by the potential closure of the Peacham school and the impact of proposed changes in grant funding for broadband projects. The committee agreed to wait for the school issue to be resolved before proceeding with their plans.

Defining Emergencies and Town Planning

Jock discussed the challenges of modern energy scenarios, emphasizing the need for high-speed connectivity and equitable distribution. Bruce brought up the importance of defining emergencies and the town's plan for refuge in case of emergencies, suggesting a public discussion on the topic. Jock agreed, noting that the shelter's design was for a cold weather shelter in case of a grid failure or heat emergency. Bruce emphasized the need for a town document outlining the focus of their efforts and the range of emergencies they want to consider.

Exploring Microgrid Potential for Energy Retention

The meeting involved a discussion about the potential use of the school as an emergency shelter and its energy production capabilities. Bruce Westcott expressed uncertainty about the school's future and the town's compliance with state energy standards. Jock proposed a focus on retaining energy dollars within the town, which could contribute to the school budget. Tom suggested decoupling the energy project from other topics, including the school's emergency shelter status, and exploring potential partnerships with Green Mountain Power. The conversation ended with a need for further exploration of microgrid possibilities and the financial benefits of such a project.

Microgrid Potential and Virtual Power Plant

Tom suggested learning from other Green Mountain Power customers who have partnered with them on microgrid projects. Jock shared that Green Mountain Power had expressed interest in Peacham becoming a microgrid around 10 years ago, but the project was not pursued. Bruce mentioned that Green Mountain Power's battery program is now available in Vermont Electric Co-OP and Washington Electric Co-OP. The team discussed the benefits of having solar and batteries, including the ability to disconnect from the grid and charge batteries during outages. They also discussed the potential for a virtual power plant using distributed energy resources.

Community Solar Array Challenges

Jock and Charlie discussed the challenges and potential solutions for implementing community solar arrays. Jock emphasized the need for partnerships with utilities to manage the upfront costs and suggested innovative financing options. Charlie questioned the necessity of community-minded investors and the impact of regulation on such projects. Jock explained that regulatory barriers,

including approval processes and zoning issues, hinder the implementation of community solar arrays. He suggested that reversing certain statewide policies could help accelerate these projects.

Peacham Solar Array Management Committee

Bruce discussed the Peacham Solar Array and its management committee, which he is a part of. He mentioned that the committee meets quarterly and is currently focusing on their contract with Dory Wolf, the developer of the site. Jock agreed to call Josh to discuss Green Mountain Power's stance on the project. Tom shared information about two microgrids in Vermont, and Jock committed to calling Josh again to understand Green Mountain Power's willingness to partner on the project.

Financial Situation and Legal Structure

Bruce Westcott discussed the financial situation of their project, mentioning that they have funds set aside for decommissioning and are considering a maintenance agreement. Jock Gill and Charlie raised concerns about the legal structure and excess funds, with Charlie suggesting the need for a secure interest-bearing account. The group also discussed potential issues with snow load on the panels and the need for regular maintenance.

Community Solar Project Financial Discussion

Bruce Westcott discussed the financial status of a community solar project, mentioning that it had generated over \$100,000 and was projected to have a neutral cash flow. He also mentioned the possibility of using some of this money for upgrades or decommissioning. Jock Gill suggested hiring young people to shovel out the berms without touching the array. Charlie proposed using some of the money to buy a battery, which he believed would yield more benefits over the 25-year life of the project. Bruce agreed to keep the group updated and suggested creating a website for the project.

Next Steps and Solar Array Proposal

In the meeting, Charlie led the discussion, with Jock and Bruce participating. They discussed the next steps, including Jock's plan to pursue Josh and Bruce's interest in the solar array proposal. Tom mentioned the lack of correspondence and Charlie proposed to distribute the draft minutes from the last meeting at the next meeting. The conversation ended with Charlie asking for any last words from Cedric, who expressed interest in the meeting with the Green Mountain Power representative.