

## **Wells Energy Advisory Committee talk at 3/17/22 CPUC meeting**

Hello. I'm Beth Widmayer, the chair of the Wells Energy Advisory Committee. I'm here with committee members, Bill Franks, Jackie Quinton, Lisa Gatti-Arnold and John Lillibridge. We know how busy you are, so very much appreciate your giving us this time. Our mission here tonight is to tell you how important we believe it is to include Wells' energy goals in the Comprehensive Plan.

I apologize for mostly reading my remarks. I do this because I don't want to leave anything out.

The charge of the Energy Committee is to, (quote) "advise the Town Manager and Board of Selectmen on energy programs, projects and policies which through conservation and alternative energy use work to reduce Wells' reliance on fossil fuels". And a stated goal of the Energy Committee is to (quote) "develop more sustainable energy practices in the Town of Wells".

So, our commitment is to assist Wells residents, businesses and our municipality in moving forward to a renewable energy future, reducing, and eventually eliminating, our dependence on fossil fuel energy while making the most efficient use of our new energy sources. We, (like all of you) realize that the task will be challenging, but we are motivated to move forward by our concern for the health of the planet and all its inhabitants. And we're greatly encourage by the steady development and improvement of energy generating and energy saving technologies that we will need to accomplish this.

The members came to this committee with a strong interest in renewable energy and a willingness to work hard to promote energy saving in the town of Wells. We view this as a very exciting time when we have the tools needed to develop a plan to transition our town, the state, the world onto clean energy. We live in a time when solar energy has actually become more cost-effective than gas or oil, when the potential of on-shore and offshore wind is being utilized and comes with a price tag that drops every year. New and better technology is giving us exciting possibilities for energy storage to compensate for intermittent nature of renewable electricity generation. And all of this comes with clean air to breath vs the many health issues caused by burning fossil fuels. Picture Route 1 with all electric vehicles and trolleys. With walkers and bicyclists. The quiet. The lack of exhaust fumes.

Many of the changes needed in Wells in order to reduce our carbon emissions will actually save the town and town residents money. Examples worked on by the energy committee that are already in place are the solar electricity contract which will save the town and schools 25% on electricity, the LED streetlights (which have been saving the town significantly since their installation) and our first EV in the town fleet. Wells has made a good start. But we need a solid plan to get more of these measures enacted.

While we are an energy committee, we feel that Wells should expand our role into what is commonly called a "Sustainability Committee". This committee would be concerned with not only energy issues,

but with planning and acting on how best to prepare for the various changes and challenges that climate change will continue to present even as we move away from fossil fuel use.

Since Wells doesn't currently have a sustainability committee, we have taken the liberty of addressing sustainability and climate change related issues in the Comprehensive Plan.

Science tells us that climate change is a problem we need to address rapidly. We have a short time-frame available to make the changes needed to avoid likely dire consequences. The latest IPCC report has made this clearer than ever. For this reason, it's important that we address this issue in our Comprehensive Plan, a document that will take us 10 to 15 years into the future, the same timeframe in which we need to take measures to greatly reduce our carbon emissions

Many towns in our area and elsewhere have created sustainability committees and/or drafted "Climate Action Plans" to address these important issues, issues which affect most of the aspects of a town's management, commerce, community and character.

I would like to stress the importance that we believe these issues should have in the future direction of the town ... and to also advocate for the inclusion in the Comprehensive Plan guidance for the creation of a "Sustainability Committee" led by a staff person, a "sustainability coordinator", and able to address the broader environmental issues of which our energy committee's work is a subset. Additionally, a sustainability committee with a full-time coordinator would ensure that the Town is ready to utilize state and federal funds that are already in the pipeline to assist in energy and climate adaptation projects as well as maintain coordination with their counterparts in the surrounding towns and regions.

Unlike the issue of energy, the sustainability mission will have a much longer time frame than our mission of the move to renewables, but it is important that that work start now and it should have an important place in the planning for the time frame of the current Comprehensive Plan.

You are aware that we, as a committee, have submitted many suggestions to assist you in updating the comprehensive plan. This was done in our role as a future-facing group, charged with assisting the town in making the transition to green energy sources. We are focused on local, but our work is part of the larger effort in the entire state of Maine and beyond.

When we looked at the chapters for the Comprehensive Plan, we were hard -pressed to find any that weren't in some way related to our energy and sustainability future. Our committee has used your editing matrix and submitted our detailed comments and suggestions on most of the chapters. In the interest of time, I'll just hit the highpoints in a few chapters, those most related to our charge as the Energy Committee. Other chapter's thumbnail comments will be included in the written version of this talk which we will send to Steve.

## **Chapter 1 The Vision for Wells**

We envision a town that is quickly moving to sustainable energy sources and reducing energy use. Addressing climate change gives us an opportunity for action that will bring the town together as we find creative solutions for getting Wells off fossil fuels. Many of these creative solutions will help us to save money as we reduce our carbon footprint.

### **Chapter 8 Transportation and Circulation Policies and Strategies**

This is a huge area where energy efficiency comes into play. Transportation accounts for the largest share of greenhouse gas emissions in Maine. Policies are needed that encourage electric vehicles for residents and for commercial use. Policies are needed that encourage the use of electric mass transit and provide ways for Wells residents and visitors to get where they're going on foot or by bicycle.

### **Chapter 10 Housing Policies and Strategies**

Develop an overall strategy that includes high energy efficiency requirements for all new construction, and accelerates the use of renewable energy sources. Develop a plan to limit new construction in high risk shoreland areas and to address existing housing in these areas.

### **Chapter 11 Public Facilities Policies and Strategies**

Develop a timeline to reach carbon neutrality (net zero emissions) in public and municipal buildings (including schools) and public and municipal transportation as rapidly as possible. Public education about these goals is also very important. If we are not forward-looking, buildings constructed now will need to be retrofitted for renewable energy sources and high energy efficiency. The cost of retrofitting is much higher than the cost of putting these features in place at the time of construction. Not requiring this now is a lost opportunity and a loss of savings for the Town.

### **And last, Chapter 16 Planning and Management Policies and Strategies**

Provide leadership and assistance to Wells residents and businesses so that they can make substantial progress toward carbon neutrality in terms of heating and electrifying buildings and transportation. Enact policy changes to incentivize, or better, require, highly energy efficient building and transportation.

I'll end with a quote I recently came across. It's from Thomas Edison, a guy who knew something about energy. In 1931, not long before he died, the inventor told his friends Henry Ford and Harvey Firestone: "I'd put my money on the sun and solar energy. What a source of power! I hope we don't have to wait until oil and coal run out before we tackle that."

We're happy to answer any questions.

**Below are "thumbnails" of our reviews of the remaining CP chapters:**

## **Chapter 2 Population Policies and Strategies**

Our goal should be to support the whole community in the transition to renewable energy with a plan for including lower income residents. And to ensure new growth in Wells takes place with energy efficiency and carbon emission reduction as a top priority.

## **Chapter 3 Natural Resources Policies and Strategies**

What we are able to accomplish in Wells to reduce our carbon footprint will unfortunately not save us from the effects of climate change. That will require communities worldwide taking similar actions. Since our beaches which are very important to our Town's economy and recreation are in jeopardy, Wells has a very good reason to be a leader and inspire other towns.

## **Chapter 4 Marine Resources Policies and Strategies)**

Like Chapter 3, Wells' move toward renewable energy will not stop the sea from rising 3 to 5 feet or more by the end of this century. We by ourselves can't stop the rising temperature of the Gulf of Maine. We can't stop the acidification of the ocean. But we can be a leader in coming up with a plan and taking action.

## **Chapter 5 Historic and Cultural Resources Policies and Strategies**

There's nothing directly related to energy issues here.

## **Chapter 6 Land Use Policies and Strategies**

Land use policy should go hand in hand with reduced energy usage. Policies that allow for more pedestrian and bike usage, fewer roads, and minimal tree cutting, for example, also reduce energy usage.

## **Chapter 7 Town Character and Appearance Policies and Strategies**

Wooded areas improve appearance and help us to absorb carbon. The character of the town is enhanced by increasing walkable areas and reducing the need for automobiles for moving around in the Town.

## **Chapter 9 Economic Development Policies and Strategies**

Converting to renewables and addressing climate change is good for the economy. For example, California, the 6<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world has invested heavily in reducing their carbon output at the same time their economic growth has soared.

As I mentioned earlier, a lot of the changes needed in Wells in order to reduce our carbon emissions will actually save the town/ residents money. There are economic costs of not addressing climate change. In Wells, the loss of tourism is obviously a major one.

### **Chapter 12 Open Space Policies and Strategies**

The Conservation Commission has covered this well in the paper submitted to your committee. The carbon output that we are trying to reduce by energy efficiency measures is also aided by the preservation of woodlands which absorb carbon.

### **Chapter 13 Public Utilities Policies and Strategies**

A plan is needed for Wells' adaptation options for drinking water, wastewater and stormwater utilities based on projected climate impacts. The coastal zones in Wells will be threatened by an increasing sea level rise of 3 to 5 feet, with some estimates as high as 8 feet by the end of this century.

### **Chapter 14 Fiscal Capacity Policies and Strategies**

This is not really an energy-related chapter, but some level of planning for possible decrease in property tax revenues with rising sea levels and other effects of climate change should be considered.

### **Chapter 15 Flood Hazard Mitigation Policies and Strategies**

Again, not directly an energy issue, but the coastal zones in Wells will be threatened by an increasing sea level rise as I mentioned earlier.

### **Chapter 17 Regional Coordination Policies and Strategies**

Collaborate with the State of Maine and surrounding towns to contribute to an efficient and effective regional plan that makes the best use of our collective resources to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change.