

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE

Minutes

Thursday, April 16th, 2009, 7pm, Egcumbe Rec Center

Attendance: Gena Berglund, Tera Geiger, Craig Skone, Mary Davis, Steve Gorg, Melanie Peterson-Nafziger (co-chair), Michelle Crain, Rosa Maria de la Cueva Peterson

Guests: Timothy Denherder-Thomas (Macalester College), Hal Clapp (Greater MN Housing Fund), Louis Sudheimer (Green Peak Urban Solar Farm)

Melanie P-N called meeting to order at approx. 7:05 pm —we were able to start the meeting without having to turn any lights on!

Approval of March 2009 Minutes

Gena moved; Mary 2nd—motion passes

Native Gardens

18 entries last year; 17 won awards

Pilot project was not set up for longevity, although we knew we wanted to keep it as a permanent program

Changes/revisions: Melanie is still willing to create wooden signs for new entries; map will still be available online

KARMANN: only print native garden forms on ONE SIDE!

There will be a July 31st deadline, which is earlier than last year (will allow for more time to judge the gardens as well as to be able to see more of them while they are in bloom)

Possible walking tour—we'll need to contact Tom Ibsen, as well as Kris and Earl from master gardeners

Committee is interested in creating a "mentor" option for native planting. Gena moves; Tera 2nd—motion passes
Deadline is end of April

Native Garden program needs to be a NFTN (news for the neighborhood) highlight as well as in the capsule in the Villager.

CEF (Cooperative Energy Futures) Urban Solar Farm Discussion

Hal Clapp from the Greater MN Housing Fund introduced the idea of Cooperative Energy Futures (CEF) to the environment committee. CEF works by collaborating neighbors who live close to one another with local contractors. He spoke about 80 homes in Park Rapids, MN that were able to have weatherization, carbon footprint, energy audits and lowering energy costs because of a program made available by the Affordable Housing Corporation, which uses grassroots organizing to spread the word about home improvement options. CEF is looking to work with local folks who are interested in seeking out ways to use solar energy/cut down on the carbon footprint by creating a cooperative way of purchasing/creating this opportunity, and they saw Mac-Groveland as a great place to start. They are focusing on a community organizing approach which would include solar tours and renewable energy.

Ralph (didn't catch the last name), who is a contractor/installer has been working with Hal and is considered the 'solar power guru' in the twin cities, who is working with CEF on a solar alley generation project/potential LLC coop. The

idea is that there would be the capacity to sell power back to the electric companies and reduce costs for neighbors who buy into the pool for purchasing solar power collectively.

Timothy Denherder-Thomas, a Macalester College student, has been working on environmental issues on campus and has focused on biodiesel, but is interested to see if CEF has the potential to be cost effective as well as how much access the average person would have to be able to buy into the coop model.

Macalester College has something called the clean energy revolving fund which pays for sustainable/environmental projects. Money saved because of implementation of these projects goes back into the fund. So far, they've seen about a 40% return.

Timothy is looking into the bigger issue of how we take renewable energy and bring it to the household level? How do we work with sustainability and community organizing at a local level?

CEF is working with Senator Anderson at the legislative level to try to answer some of these questions as well.

Questions to think about as we move forward in this process:

How does the initial group (ex. MacGrove Homeowners) use energy?

How are they saving energy?

Participation: buy –in/ alternately generating energy

Working with existing/groups/churches/business associations

Light bulbs/weather stripping/full house/legislation/savings at scale with co-op

*Making it accessible/building support/create teams that include interested folks

Right now, in MN, the solar industry is pretty small. Those out in the forefront are: Spain, Germany, Japan and California.

Government subsidies → economies to scale → more efficiencies → more buy in distributes more energy → electrons in the grid can go all over U.S.; has to have grassroots support to succeed.

4 things we should stop doing:

- 1) Borrowing \$ from Chinese to
- 2) Send that money overseas to buy oil which
- 3) Creates a deficit that
- 4) Will need to be paid back to China by our children and grandchildren

Imported energy=\$700 billion PER YEAR, which is as much as passing just 1 stimulus package

The Neighborhood Energy Connection has a free energy audit for homeowners in St. Paul. There are also blower doors (air exchange), that were invented in St. Paul, that are now all over the country. These blower doors cost a couple of hundred dollars initially but you will begin to save money within one year.

Longtime market (someone who has the money to make the initial investment) vs. mass market (many people buy into it to cover the cost).

Solar energy—new technology idea to form block clubs, similar to 'stock investment' clubs that have become so popular. Electric power lines are currently located in the alley or along a property line and there are approx. 20-25 houses per block. If those homes have roofs that face E-W, the roofs would not be great for solar power; if those same homes have roofs that face N-S, they could be great for solar power. Classically 'ideal' spots may not work, but there might be other sites in-between (around garages, outside near the alley, etc).

Solar arrays are 3 kwh (kilowatt hour) solar panels 12' x 15' that rest on a pole (cemented into the ground 10-12'), which tracks solar rays (follows the sun) 24hours. 1 solar array costs \$40,000. The CEF folks are working on a formula for those who will potentially buy into the coop option that will include a certain percentage for federal tax credit, a rapid write off for a certain amount of years. There is also talk of something called the 'micro-energy loan law' which may help folks get more money to implement energy options for their homes. These solar arrays would not be going through individual meters. Each array can be turned on remotely at different times; has a battery pack that can store unused energy.

Publicity Plan

Like windmill farms (in rural areas), find the best possible place in the area
Moved through learning curve→ less maintenance→getting cheaper→machines getting bigger/better built
Creates jobs; economic benefits and cost savings

MGCC could talk to Todd S-K and introduce this information into a block club meeting for interested block club leaders.

Urban solar farm

Example: seek out and find 7 sites that could work per block

- 1) Publicity
- 2) Phone call of interest
- 3) Small group of committed members
- 4) Invite everyone on the block to a meeting
- 5) Say 20 show up→5-10 might be interested
- 6) Need to raise a certain % of \$ to create a test package for a pilot program
- 7) Each neighbor would get a percentage of what they put in (like a poker game)

Question that arises: How do we pay for the rest of the cost of the solar array?

Power Purchasing Agreement

Green Peak Solar will be the entity that negotiates the contract for everyone on the block with the local utility company (Xcel); would be looking for a 'peak' Power Purchasing Agreement. Solar gets the most energy in the summer, St. Paul likely to have energy shortages in the summer, Xcel has to buy very expensive, surplus power from other states in the summer—negotiations would include all of these facts in order to make the best deal for the consumers as well as for the utility company. Ideally, Xcel would agree to pay a certain amount per kwh for excess energy created from the solar arrays.

Sustainability zones

1000 arrays→average of 3 per block→300-400 block clubs

Gena wondered about the placement of arrays (we'd learn more about it as we move forward)

Property easements—land could be leased from someone if necessary.

Next steps: CEF is looking for a block to be a pilot to lay out actual numbers with interested neighbors. Xcel is also very interested in this and have a \$4 million smart grid partnership with CEF. New scopes of opportunity—assessing the basics/interest/neighbors who are interested in participating.

It was decided that there would be a sub-committee of the environment committee who would continue to work with Timothy and CEF to work towards the goal of the creation of this pilot project.

MacGrove Moves

Request for \$200 for GABA's printing/publicity will be on the May board agenda

Golden shoes will be hidden the first 3 weeks in May

May 1st Gena will hide one

May 8th Tera will hide one

May 15th Melanie will hide one

Bike hitches should go up along Grand Ave in May

RSVP Street Pavers

Steve Gorg has spoken with Barb Mundahl and she thinks this is an idea of value; Public Works will be looking to see buy-in from MGCC

Natural Lawn Care: UPDATE

Karmann sent out letters of invitation to Earthworm Lawncare, Hortilawn, Biolawn and Green Horizons, all of which have some form of organic lawn care options, on 5/13. The natural lawn care brochure has been updated as well.

Meeting adjourned at 8:58pm

Next meeting: Thursday, May 21st, 2009, 7pm, Edgcumbe Rec Center