

Natural Resources Committee

DRAFT Minutes

Jan 27, 2014

Committee Members: Lynn Bisbee, Peter Grant, David Hamilton (Vice-Chair), David Ludwig, Andrea Ochs (Chair), Ed Payne, Mark Pumiglia, Paul Wagner, Kent Wright

Present: David Hamilton, Ed Paine, Mark Pumiglia, Paul Wagner, David Ludwig

Staff: Kevin Behm

Guest:

David H. called the committee to order at 7:05.

VT Gas pipeline Phase II responses to ACRPC questions

Committee members were unhappy with the comments made by Ben Marks, an attorney representing the Town of Cornwall, at the last commission meeting. Generally, the members agreed that he should have identified himself and his role at the beginning of the meeting. He did identify himself prior to entering into the discussion. David mentioned that the Executive Board had discussed the issue and decided to ask for a roll call at the beginning of each meeting which includes public attendees.

Ed stated that when the pipeline was first proposed it was headed directly from Middlebury to Rutland. He felt the route to the paper mill was a distraction from the Rutland destination. Even though VT Gas is leveraging the Ticonderoga route to help pay for transmission to Rutland, a direct route would be easier to support. Mark added that there is not enough housing or commercial density in Addison County to support the pipeline costs. Ed stated that many of the commission delegates were pretty upset with VT Gas's lack of a response to the commission's questions. Kevin noted that the Addison Independent's article on that meeting was well-written. He also noted that VT Gas had provided several documents addressing the Commission's questions a week or so after the meeting and they have been emailed to the Committee.

David H. said that the Committee had previously decided to recommend the same guidelines to VT Gas as had been offered under Phase I, but asked the Committee whether there was any additional concerns based on the VT Gas answers.

Ed understood that a bentonite based mud slurry would be used in horizontal drilling and to coat the pipe interior and is concerned about the lasting effect of any chemicals in the slurry on farmland and the lake. He asked that this concern be added to the previous concerns. Paul stated that the pipeline infrastructure could be used to transmit bio-methane rather than natural gas if the price of gas increases and farm methane is encouraged. Ed concurred and thought that the pipeline could actually enhance a renewable energy option if fossil fuels were curtailed or became unprofitable.

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David H. noted that the energy issue is also being reviewed by the Energy Committee and they will provide a recommendation to the Commission. Mark and Ed agreed that a gas pipeline will enhance the development possibilities in Addison County. David L. felt that employment opportunities in Rutland may be enhanced. Paul noted that only about 60 homes in Shoreham would be eligible to switch to gas and that not all of those will pay for the cost of conversion. Kevin stated that the Gaz Metro-owned Green Mountain Power is promoting solar energy generation in Rutland as an economic development tool that will help meet the State's renewable energy goals.

David H. asked to review the Air Quality Goals in the Regional Plan since VT Gas's response specifically claimed that the proposed pipeline is consistent with that section (4.6).

Goal A. [maintain and improve air quality] Committee members felt this Goal clearly applies to the pipeline proposal. Reports provided to the PSB under Phase 1 from parties with opposing positions both agreed that natural gas is a cleaner burning fuel at the point of combustion. Their positions differed in the extent of GHG gas that escapes or is burned-off at the wellhead and through leakage. The Committee agreed that residential and commercial conversion from fuel oil to natural gas would reduce current GHG emissions within Addison County. The question of GHG emissions from escaped or burned-off gas at the wellhead and during transmission was a more difficult question and the Committee agreed that the 'best available science' was unclear and requests expanding to Phase 2 the PSB's requirement under Phase 1 to implement a GHG reduction program in Addison County (Docket 7970 CPG item #11). In addition the Committee requests expanding to Phase 2 the PSB's requirement for GHG monitoring and tracking established under Phase 1 to track natural gas purchases, consumption and unaccounted gas (PSB Docket 7979 item #328 p. 101-2).

Goal B. [land use planning and transportation efforts to reduce air pollution] Committee members agreed that this Goal had limited applicability to the Phase 2 proposal and deferred to their comments under Goal A.

Goal C ('E' sic) [regional and state multi-pollutant collaboration and expansion of monitoring] Committee members agreed that this Goal had limited applicability to the Phase 2 proposal and deferred to their comments under Goal A.

Goal D ('F' sic) Committee members agreed that this Goal had limited applicability to the Phase 2 proposal and deferred to their comments under Goal A.

The Committee agreed that the VT Gas Phase 2 proposal meets the Air Quality Goals of the Regional Plan with the understanding that the volume of natural gas that is currently unaccounted for may be of a sufficient amount to actually increase GHG emissions and requests the expansion of the tracking and efficiency programs mentioned above.

The Committee adjourned at 8:50.