

Maple Corner Community Center Board Meeting May 5, 2022

Present: President Dirk Van Susteren, Jamie Moorby, Andrew Nemethy, JC Myers, Peter Burke, Bill Powell and Carolyn Morton via Zoom, Tim Maker.

The board met with the top issue on the agenda being to address concerns about the existing oil-fired furnace that heats the center. At the previous meeting in March, Center Manager Jamie Moorby reported the aging furnace had issues the previous winter and raised concerns about future service and parts. Treasurer Bill Powell, whose role as energy specialist at Washington Electric Co-Op makes him very familiar with heating systems and energy sources, offered to explore possible replacement alternatives. Invited to join in the discussion was local wood-energy expert Tim Maker, who consults on wood-fired alternative energy projects and installations.

Powell told the board that replacement costs for new systems vary widely in cost and presented the board with a list of potential options ranging from \$8,700 to more than \$15,000, using systems for oil and propane gas in a furnace or boiler, or a modern wood-pellet heat system. That launched a broader discussion of cost versus which energy source to use for the future.

Maker noted that any new system might expect to have a

20-year lifespan and considering uncertainties about oil supply, cost and the energy shifts occurring with climate change, he said he felt it was not wise to replace the system with another oil furnace. “I just think that that’s not a good idea,” Maker said.

JC Myers, a former member of the board also savvy about heating systems, agreed. He noted that the sticker shock of a wood pellet system, the most expensive option. should be viewed in the light of the lifetime cost over 20 years.

Considerable discussion ensued over how pellet systems work and how their maintenance and operation differs from an oil furnace, both concerns for the center, which can go for long periods when it is not open or being used. Whether a pellet system could provide instant warm up like oil for users of the center was also discussed, as was who would do any maintenance or repairs.

Powell also noted a concern he had that in case of a winter power outage, the pellet boiler would not be able to run and provide heat. He suggested any replacement should include plans to get a backup generator. Jamie Moorby noted that issue has long been true with the oil furnace as well.

Another issue raised with a pellet system was the need to install a small silo outside on the south side of the building

where wood pellets would be stored. Access for pellet delivery and how they flow to the furnace were also raised as possible complications.

Maker explained that the modern pellet furnaces are well-engineered systems in wide use. He added in response to a question about the environmental impacts and sustainability of the wood source that the fuel is a renewable resource and is primarily waste product from wood processing so it is not environmentally harmful to forests.

After considerable discussion, there was a consensus that the board felt the responsible step was to look more in depth at a pellet fired boiler for environmental and climate change reasons, as well as from a sense of the community and the center's own long-term goals.

“What I’m hearing is, get off fossil fuels, and whittle down our options,” said Van Susteren.

Powell agreed to the board's request to sharpen his pencil and come back to a future meeting with fewer options and clearer sense of the costs.

CURTIS POND DAM

In other business, the board voted unanimously to authorize sending \$20,000, as agreed in previous

meetings, to the group organized to repair the dam on Curtis Pond. The money is part of \$30,000 that was set aside many years ago when plans to repair the dam were first floated. Engineering plans being drafted for dam replacement and active coordination and participation by the town of Calais are advancing hopes the dam replacement will finally occur. The money will help fund the roughly \$100,000 needed before actual construction can begin.