

Maple Corner Community Center Board Meeting June 7, 2022

Present: Carolyn Morton, Andrew Nemethy, Bill Powell, John Rosenblum, Steve Sweeney, Jamie Moorby, Tim Maker

Meeting just a week after a momentous decision to give a preliminary go-ahead to install a \$35,000 wood-pellet boiler system to heat the center, the board met to get final details on a bid from Pellergy in Montpelier on purchase, installation, service and operating maintenance of the new heating system.

However the followup meeting quickly revealed considerable unease at the cost, and a host of remaining questions on financing the purchase, the timeline for installation, and whether the system was appropriate for a building that has only occasional use.

Carolyn Morton, filling in for President Dirk VanSusteren, started by saying the past week gave her time to think about the decision and her unease about it and remaining unresolved questions . “I feel like we’re getting ahead of ourselves a little bit,” she said.

Among those was a question raised by Tim Maker, a wood energy expert helping the board, whether the board might

benefit from a more formal bidding process for the furnace replacement. She also raised questions about financing the project, whose \$35,000 cost is not budgeted and would potentially hit the center's long-term income levels from its endowment.

She also noted that the pellet system would be used in a very different way from a residential home, and that there remained an important need to have a steady service contract with any unit the center installed. "Who is going to come out in an emergency? It seems to me that's key," she said.

On the flip side she said there was obvious urgency due to concerns the existing furnace might fail this winter and leave the center in a tough situation that could lead to frozen pipes and damage. Thinking aloud, she asked, "Can we put this off?"

Maker said self-imposed deadlines can be difficult to deal with but there are benefits to taking a longer "transitional path" and also to seeing if other pellet boiler installers might offer a better price with a formal bid. Jamie Moorby also noted that the board's procedures call for all purchases over \$1500 to be put out to bid.

As discussion continued, the rest of the board made it clear that they also had reservations about the price and appropriateness, despite a clear desire to get off fossil

fuels, of a system that costs \$35,000 and is very different from the existing heating system.

The \$30,000 keeps waking me up at night,” said John Rosenblum, adding “I’m probably as rabid an environmentalist as anyone,” but that the cost and whether a pellet heat system fits with the center’s usage outweighed his desire to switch to an environmentally more sustainable fuel system,

He also said he was concerned that the center’s membership might not appreciate spending around four times as much for a new heating system simply because it uses wood pellets.

Treasurer Bill Powell, who developed the list of heating alternatives and consulted with Pellery at length and spent time getting answers for the board on the pellet boiler proposal, said that Pellery had lowered its price and was ready to go with installation. He also made it clear that the Montpelier company had worked hard to answer board questions at length and he was not comfortable going back for another round of questions, considering the time Pellery had already devoted to the project.

Powell also reported that it appeared Northfield Savings Bank would provide partial financing for the installation, spreading the cost of the purchase out through a loan to

ease the hit on the center's finances.

In the end, however, the reservations about the system and the cost remained a stumbling block. The board voted 5-1 to reverse its decision the previous week to approve replacing the existing furnace with a wood-pellet boiler, with the lone dissenting vote cast by Powell.

Maker agreed to put out an RFP formally for the board to see if any other installers might offer a better price, and to try and arrange an inspection of the existing furnace to assess its condition and take some of the pressure off to make a replacement decision this year.