Present: Will Dodge, David Skopin, Natalee Braun, Phil March, Irene Wrenner, Brad Prior, Michael Gifford, and two special guests: Val Lafferty and Chris Lafferty from Boy Scout Troop 635. (Mike Gordon sends his regrets.)

I. ADMINISTRATIVE

Minutes: the minutes of the 12/11/2019 meeting were reviewed, but not yet approved subject to getting additional comments from everyone. The committee was reminded of the need to try to get draft minutes within 5 days of the meeting.

II. SUBSTANTIVE

A. ANNUAL REPORT FOR TOWN MEETING

As advertised, we sent in a 3-page report with pictures. This will be published for Town meeting. Tried to express where we succeeded, but referencing problems with lack of headway in Town government.

As many members as possible should go to Town meeting on March 2. We may try to focus on items in the overall Annual Report as a means of drawing attention to items like heating, gasoline expenditures, etc.

It was noted that the new part-time building manager has been hired. Members noted that this new manager should meet with the Essex Energy Committee.

B. CRESCENT CONNECTOR

At a meeting held on Tuesday, December 17 in Essex Junction, the town’s engineer presented all of the hurdles that they’ve gone through. There is one dwelling left owned by Bill Kalanges that needs to be obtained through eminent domain. Lawyer attended the meeting and made the argument against necessity, based on wrecking business. He has put the breaks on and will need to go through the normal channels to get the land. He is being given a separate entrance off of Park Street.

Some concern regarding a backfiring problem. Another concern expressed regarding whether five corners is becoming four corners, and whether that might make matters worse from a climate perspective. Might be better areas to get more carbon footprint reduction. The problem with the plan is whether there could be a backsliding of positive effects with backstreets. But there could be benefits through multi-modal transportation in the area as a way of preventing backsliding. Also, with pressures on moving towards EVs, this could help as well.

Action item: meet with Robin Pierce to see whether the committee could produce an op ed in Essex Reporter to explain the benefits and drawbacks from a carbon / energy perspective by improving the intersection, and to reduce idling.
C. TRANSPORTATION CLIMATE INITIATIVE

There is an item being worked on by ANR and VTRANS and Chittenden Regional Planning Commission involving a system to promote EVs and clean fuel as part of a multi-state compact. Takes place on February 6 between 6-8pm at Burlington, Contois Auditorium. There are problems if New Hampshire does not adopt because of the gas tax effects.

There is also an event that night for Suncommon – short climate films showing that night at Main Street Landing, 5:30 in Burlington.

Action Items: Committee members to go to one or another. The Committee should also promote both events on the website.

The Committee briefly discussed the Climate Change internship program through the Council on Rural Development. Might be a good Eagle Scout project.

D. FEB 25TH EEC / VILLAGE TRUSTEES / SB MEETING

David explained that this joint meeting of the Essex Village Trustees and Town Selectboard, Elaine Hanley asked him to speak regarding the major takeaways from the VECAN conference and what it means for the Town.

David explained in detail his concerns regarding the lack of acceleration by state and local officials in addressing climate change, broadly speaking. Concerns were raised that merely asking for laws / ordinances will only get bogged down.

Following a lengthy discussion on a variety of topics (including vehicle fuel sources and possibilities for EV and biofuel / CNG adoption by the Town, as well as utility-based incentives), it was determined that the Essex Energy Committee will prepare for the event as follows:

1. Mike Gifford to reach out to Jared Duval (with Rob Fish as a backup) to make an initial presentation as to where Essex stands in terms of GHG footprint / energy usage that will create a sense of greater alarm.

2. Will Dodge will reach out to Melanie Needle to gain assistance in trying to determine which parts of the fully-adopted Enhanced Energy Plan should be highlighted for immediate action / implementation. These might be areas like vehicles and transportation, buildings, awareness, lawnmowing frequency / sequestration, anaerobic digestion, etc.

   NOTE: members are encouraged to take a close look as well.

3. After reconvening at the next meeting, each member prepares a short section from the areas in question, and makes a short presentation to the Trustees / Selectboard.

4. We will give some discussion on whether to ask the Trustees / SB a tax or other penalty on itself for failing to meet its goals.

5. Overall, the idea is to give the Town options, but they should be phrased more like a demand in light of the climate emergency.
E. 2020 GOALS

1. Usage Data from Efficiency VT

Following up on meeting from last year to bring multiple account reps together, the consensus was that we ought to target the meeting for sometime after Town Meeting. We’re too late for any vote on any proposal for the 2020 Town meeting. Will will give Evan Teich and Greg Duggan a “heads up” as to a time to organize that meeting.

Mike Gifford pointed out that Mark Kelley is likely the account head at Efficiency VT. Greg will mention to Mark the idea of a full-meeting where he would attend.

Natalee pointed out that the new building manager should come to our meeting in February. Will will make the invite.

2. Solar RFP for the Town Landfill

Idea might be to place this on the items in the presentation to the Village / Selectboard. It was noted that there was some developer interest in this project.

3. Engagement with EWSD

Very difficult challenge: how to engage the School District to have better results with engagement. Brad pointed out that Suncommon had good luck with St. Albans district in solarizing rooftop and would be a good partner. Brad will reach out to Brian before leaving. Natalee was also told that Brian Donahue would be a good contact and will reach out re: sustainability.

The Laffertys wondered whether the Committee was more interested in speaking with the school or school administrators. The Committee explained why we need assistance with both sets of people. Students interested in energy / climate change – we want to know who they are and become allies. Will explained that the school bus experience did not result in an award to Essex. Mike explained the educational / career building component of an alliance with EWSD and student organizations. There are also significant opportunities for savings. Natalee points out that it would be great to have students attend the February 25th meeting.

F. EV EVENT

Brad expressed interest under “other business” in organizing an EV event for May / September. Transportation has the biggest carbon footprint impact, by far. The Committee members discussed the need for an emphasis on more “macho” electric vehicles – minivans, pickup trucks, muscle cars, motorcycles, electric forklifts, etc. Need to persuade folks that EVs are really fun to drive, and very safe. Consider biodiesel as well.

NEXT MEETING: Will take place on Feb 12th, all in preparation for the joint meeting on February 25th. The Committee may hold one additional prep meeting prior to the presentation.