

Minutes of the Montana Renewable Energy Association
Special Meeting, January 14, 2009
Butte – NorthWestern Energy Division Office, Montana St., Butte

Note: Bold text indicates action items that require follow-up.

Present: (7 of 9 board members, 5 required for a quorum)

Dave Ryan (NCAT, Butte), President and Board Member
Chris Borton (Sage Mountain Center, Whitehall), Vice President and Board Member
Patrick Judge (MEIC, Helena), Secretary and Board Member
Kathi Montgomery (MT DEQ, Helena), Board Member
Tom Bishop (Sunelco, Victor), Board Member
Conor Darby (Independent Power Systems, Bozeman), Board Member
Rip Hamilton (Solar Plexus, Missoula)
Lee Tavenner (Solar Plexus, Missoula), "Board Member Emeritus" ☺
Orion Thornton (Independent Power Systems, Bozeman)

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order by President Ryan shortly after 3:00 pm.

Agenda Review: Patrick Judge explained that this was not the regularly-scheduled quarterly meeting, but rather a special meeting convened by the Board. Hence, some of the regular agenda items such as the approval of minutes, treasurer's report, "state of the state" technology discussion, etc. were dispensed with.

Safety Training Update: Conor Darby, Rip Hamilton, and others reported on the safety training that had taken place earlier that day. Once again, turnout was strong with about 30 people in attendance (including several new faces). John Jones has an attendance list. **It would be good for MREA to contact new potential members. Apparently the former safety-issue blog site (set up by John Jones) had some problems, so something new will have to be created that will allow for discussion and the transmission of documents.** The subject of the training was basic First Aid, and included a video presentation. The next training will be CPR. Conor and Rip reported that there had also been a broader discussion regarding licensure and regulation.

Permitting & Licensing Issues: The group discussed the current status of permit requirements, and the desirability of clear rules and reasonable fees for installers. In Missoula, installers must now obtain a "solar permit" and "structural permit" in addition to the electrical permit. The structural permit is based on valuation of the project, so can be quite expensive. On the commercial side, some of the other permits are valuation based as well, so the total cost can easily reach \$2500. The structural permit must be signed off on by a structural engineer. For installations on older buildings, this can be a rather involved (and expensive) process. Rip Hamilton promised to send around his "Inspector Guidelines" document (and later did so), which describes a reasonable approach to permitting fees for renewable energy installations. **This would be a good topic to put on the next MREA agenda.** As for licensing, Rip noted that many other areas have "endorsements" which allow renewable energy technicians to do installs, while also ensuring public safety. (In some ways, this is akin to a "motorcycle endorsement"). **The group thought that a meeting with the electrical inspectors would be a very good thing.** Apparently their next quarterly meeting in March actually has some space on

the agenda for these issues, and will include presentations / trainings by Bill Brooks and John Wiles. It would be very desirable for the installers to be officially recognized under their own license (as is the case in Oregon, Utah, Texas, and ten or so other states?), than to be regarded simply as “appliance installers”.

Progress toward a certification standard that qualifies installers for USB grants is being made by NorthWestern Energy. This could provide the basis for a statewide standard. NorthWestern has already hired a third-party to inspect many of the projects previously funded by USB. Conor Darby reported that utilities in some states (like Excel in Colorado) offer very valuable rebates, but also have strong rules to ensure the projects are appropriate (with minimal shading, etc.) and they inspect every one of them. The group discussed the advantages and disadvantages of this approach. There is an influx of new installers in the industry. MREA has a strong interest in ensuring that projects get done properly, in terms of safety, performance, etc. There was talk about adopting standards for MREA installer members that might track the NorthWestern policy. Businesses that meet those standards could display the MREA “Seal of Approval”. It was noted that the list of dealers on the montanagreenpower.com website is somewhat separate from MREA, but these same standards might be applied to that list as well (if John Campbell and other appropriate decisionmakers agreed). **Kathi Montgomery is still planning to get the updated list sent to Cathy Svejkovsky (NCAT).** The “findsolar.com” website is also a good way for consumers to get feedback on installers. The “wiki solar” site was also mentioned (this one? -- <http://solarphp.org/>).

MREA Budgeting Items: MREA currently brings in about \$3500 in annual income. The organization is prevented from spending more than 20% of its income on lobbying, which would be \$700. Patrick Judge noted that this amount of lobbying expense falls below the minimum level that requires an organization to register with the Commissioner of Political Practices. MREA and its members can lobby, and its members can also engage the legislature using their own funds (on their own behalf, i.e. NOT representing MREA). No final decision was made about whether to hire a lobbyist this session to work on a limited number of items. The Board did decide on a policy of freezing its sponsorships & gifts to other organizations until it reaches \$10,000 in financial assets (roughly twice the current level). At that point, the group hopes to hire a part-time staff person in order to build the organization and start a serious fundraising program.

Show and Tell: Chris Borton passed around a LED lightbulb that he had ordered from the Heartland America catalog. They sell for \$15 (\$12 if you buy 25 or more), and use just 1.3 Watts to replace a 100 Watt incandescent bulb. Chris vouched for the promotional numbers, having independently tested the bulbs with several watt meters. At Sage Mountain Center, the initial incandescent lighting load was 870 Watts, which had been reduced to 176 Watts with CFLs, and is now down to 28 Watts with these LED bulbs. The group was most impressed – by both the performance AND the affordability!

Conference Reports and Next Meeting: Conor Darby reported on the Bioneers Conference, which was very successful. The MREA booth was quite popular, and he was also able to spread the word about renewables by serving on a panel. He showed the group the display boards he had made. Conor collected some email addresses of interested parties, directed them to the website, and encouraged them to become members.

The Sustainability Fair, which was not held last year, will be moving to Billings. Apparently the Judith Gap Festival of the Wind was cancelled.

The Harvesting Clean Energy Conference will be in Billings on January 25-27, but the group felt that the agenda was too busy to try to schedule an MREA meeting for that time period. Instead, the Board chose to cancel the January meeting and hold-off until April. The April meeting will likely take place in Livingston or Bozeman. Kathi feels that having a Board meeting prior to the member meeting is a useful approach; but some others expressed ambivalence, noting that everyone tends to show up together anyway.

Adjournment: Dave Ryan adjourned the meeting at 5:12 pm.

Addenda:

On January 18, 2009, Patrick Judge sent the following message to the MREA listserv:
Hi all,

At the last regular meeting of the Montana Renewable Energy Association, the group agreed to try to hold its next regular meeting in conjunction with the Harvesting Clean Energy Conference (which takes place January 25-27 in Billings).

Board members were able to discuss the calendar in Butte earlier this week (following the safety training), and it was decided that the HCE agenda was simply too full to try to accommodate a MREA meeting. Hence, they decided to cancel this month's regular meeting. MREA will resume its normal meeting schedule on April 8th, probably in Livingston or Bozeman. Stay tuned for more information.

Thanks everyone,

Pat

Patrick Judge, MREA Secretary

P.S. Apologies for the confusion!

On February 3, 2009, Patrick Judge moved that the MREA Board of Directors endorse HB 361, and allow its Secretary to write a letter of support. Conor Darby seconded the motion, and it passed with support from:

Chris Daum

Chris Borton

Kathi Montgomery

Tom Bishop

Patrick Judge wrote the letter and delivered it to Ben Brouwer at AERO in time for the hearing.

On February 13, 2009, Patrick Judge asked the board to vote on whether MREA should advocate for the introduction of LC 2221 (specific licensing exemption for NABCEP-certified renewable energy dealers and installers) this session. A majority of the board voted to do so, but by the time the final votes came in, it was too late. Rep. Paul Beck (D-Red Lodge) expressed interest in carrying the bill.

On February 20, 2009, the board voted in favor of having a booth at the Sustainability Fair in Billings, May 1-3. The cost is \$400, but we get \$50 for early registration. The motion passed with (at least grudging) support from all except Rip Hamilton. The Spring board and member meeting will also be held at that time.

On March 12, 2009, Patrick Judge sent the following email to the MREA board:

two items:

1) hopefully all of you saw Beth Berlin's notice yesterday about SB 257, which is being heard in the House energy committee tomorrow. I would move for MREA to take a position in opposition to the bill, and to authorize Dave Ryan to sign the letter asking Gov. Schweitzer to veto the bill if it makes it to his desk.

The bill can be read at:

<http://data.opi.mt.gov/bills/2009/billpdf/SB0257.pdf>

and I have attached MEIC's factsheet (note that the language allowing for maintenance and repairs to count has been amended out of the bill)

2) Montana Conservation Voters wants to arrange a meeting with Sen. Baucus on the subject of energy policy. MCV wants him to give us a big picture overview of the energy provisions of the recent stimulus bill, and to comment on his view of upcoming climate and energy legislation. MCV's Jeanne Souvigny invited MREA to be on the letter requesting the meeting (and felt that the meeting would be more likely to happen if a group like MREA was signed on). I would move that MREA authorize Dave Ryan to sign onto such a letter. (such activities are probably already within Dave's "executive powers", but it doesn't hurt to have the express consent of the board)

The board approved both motions, and Dave Ryan submitted an opinion editorial to Montana Newspapers. Two of the links follow:

Great Falls Tribune, March 27, 2009

“Bills add insult to injury on renewable energy front”

<http://www.greatfallstribune.com/article/20090327/DC5/903270349>

Montana Standard, March 28, 2009

“Bills ‘water down’ renewable energy law”

<http://www.montanastandard.com/articles/2009/03/29/opinion/hjjajghbhgjege.txt>

Dave also appeared in an article written by Mike Dennison of the Lee papers, which was picked up by the Missoulian and many other news outlets:

Missoulian, April 12, 2009

“Changes to rules on green energy draw ire”

<http://www.missoulian.com/articles/2009/04/12/news/mtregional/znews08.txt>

On April 19, 2009, Patrick Judge moved that MREA’s Bylaws be amended to allow for proxy votes (see below), and also that the board approve the minutes from the October 8, 2008 meeting and these draft minutes from the January 14, 2009 meeting. The motion passed with affirmative email responses from Borton, Daum, Hamilton, Ryan, and Darby.

ART. III. SECTION 11. QUORUM FOR MEETINGS

A quorum shall consist of five (5) of the members of the Board of Directors, or their duly appointed alternates. Alternates must be designated in writing (or email) prior to the meeting. Alternates for board members representing a business, non-profit, or governmental organization must be affiliated with the same organization. No person may be an alternate for more than one board member.

These Minutes were prepared by Patrick Judge, Secretary.