



City of Harrisonburg Environmental Performance Standards Advisory Committee

FA1 Work Session

**June 25, 2024 12:16-1:30 p.m.
Public Works (Ready Room)**

Members in attendance: Vice Mayor Laura Dent, City Council Representative; Andy Kohen, School Board Representative; David Powell; Doug Hendren; Ferwerdin Barzanji; Joy Loving; Rob Alexander, Jeff Heie, Bill Howe

Staff in attendance: Tom Hartman, Keith Thomas, Shayna Carter, Brittany Clem-Hott, Aliza Lokey

Others in attendance: Brian O’Dell, General Manager of HEC

Welcome

Rob Alexander began the meeting with some ground rules to set the pace for the meeting. Rob also mentioned future email correspondence procedure between staff and EPSAC members. Rob also noted that FA1 and EPSAC meetings are a time for members and staff to discuss implementation of the Environmental Action Plan.

Staff Presentation on Proposed Policy

Keith Thomas gave an update to the FA1 members Solar Implementation Plan. Keith mentioned that the plan is not complete. He noted that once the report is completed, EPSAC members will be able to review and comment on the plan.

Keith then explained the proposed policy for Municipal Net Metering for future solar installations. He noted that HCPS solar installations are not included in the policy. The school board and administration officials govern those systems and policies. He noted that EPSAC will not have a role in the decision-making process of those policies or installations. He also mentioned that the recently passed community goals are not applicable as the Net Metering Policy is for municipal buildings only.

Keith then discussed the background of utility billing. He used the stormwater utility fee as an example of how expenses and utility rates relate to one another. Keith then provided an overview of the differences between the stormwater utility fee and electric/water/sewer utility fees.

Keith provided examples of caveats that should be considered when reading the cost shifting studies provided by EPSAC members. He mentioned that these caveats mean the results may not completely represent the research and may reduce the replicability or external validity to draw conclusions outside of the study population. He then explained that the proposed policy does not limit the City to expand solar due to cost shifting, but instead use the City’s solar to benefit others.

Keith then began discussing the social value of solar and defined “social value”. He then explained the caveats that come along with the social value of solar. He noted that social value, while important to note, does not add actual money to a fund balance to be able to pay for necessary expenses. He also explained the relationship between the proposed policy and social value, in that it still provides a plethora of social value including economic revenue, opportunities for job creation/sustain jobs, public health benefits,

offset the need to purchase energy from volatile global energy markets, and will increase resilience in the Harrisonburg community. In regard to showing a return on investment, he noted that as a municipal government, we often provide services that have no financial return to City funds. He then noted several examples of other City projects or services that did not give a return on investment but are actions the City has chosen to provide anyways.

Q&A

Bill asked if the policy would clarify the future goals to potentially make money back on solar installations. Keith replied that there will be less energy use from the electrical grid, and that decrease in utility bill spending will accumulate over time which will provide cost savings for the City.

Doug Hendren asked if staff can be sure that the policy will further the Cities goals. He noted that some additional press around the policy may be beneficial for the public. Keith noted that staff can prepare something to highlight the benefits for the public.

Jeff Heie then asked if the Solar Implementation Plan included a component to outline financing strategies. Jeff asked if there would be mention of how future solar projects could be funded in the plan. Keith then mentioned that locations, size of installations, and cost for new solar projects would be mentioned in the Solar Implementation Plan. He noted that financing options will not be specified in the report because that would be dependent on several factors and would be evaluated by staff when we planned a project. He noted that staff would pursue grant funds and rebates as they fit in with the timeline to install a project. Keith noted that the proposed net metering policy is for after the individual projects are installed.

Joy Loving asked staff how the proposed policy will affect the ranking of projects in the Capital Improvement Plan in the City and the timetable of future projects. Tom Hartman replied that the policy will have little to no effect on the ranking of proposed projects in the Capital Improvement Plan because the net metering policy applies to costs after solar projects are installed and that the CIP only looks at the initial funds needed to install a solar project.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Keith concluded the meeting with a plan to revise the Municipal Net Metering Policy draft document and add it to the July EPSAC meeting for discussion and potential approval.

Adjournment