

These notes were edited after the event to remove duplications and loosely group items for ease of reading.

1. What are your community task force's *strengths* in terms of how it functions, its financial and non-financial resources, and its expertise and accomplishments?

Town-by-town

- Avon 5-town consortium \$250,000 from federal stimulus \$ to help write energy plan
- Cheshire every town project has to go through energy commission as defined by the revised Town charter, not just Planning & Zoning
- Guilford \$4M in capital funds next 5 years for energy investments. \$2M goes for the High School
- Lebanon Neighbor to Neighbor created a good foundation for community awareness
- Lebanon low cost green energy affinity program for residents
- Manchester signing up residents for clean power and low-income Home Energy Solutions audits
- Manchester promotes recycling
- Manchester has a master energy plan
- Manchester \$500,000 AARA (americans reinvestment act) grant to upgrade town buildings
- Mansfield has “Transitions” grassroots group getting involved
- Newtown support from the town government; a town employee is on the committee
- Portland nimble, identify low hanging fruit (e.g. promote income-eligible Home Energy Solutions audits when the funds are available) and willing to shift gears in the context of taking the long view
- Portland invites people to attend meetings, successfully gets volunteers, keeps it fun (shirts, parties!)
- Redding focused on a specific goal (get clean energy sign-ups, earned 3kWh)
- Tolland passed referendum passed bond for geothermal for municipal complex
- Vernon has an energy improvement district, so it has staff, budget, and rights per town ordinance
- West Hartford lots of initial success in state clean energy programs created momentum for adopting a written plan on town operations, regional energy manager grant, solar array installations
- Westport Neighbor to Neighbor Energy Challenge collaborated with 14 community organizations and human services department promoting income eligible Home Energy Solutions audits
- Weston universal support from Board of Education & Town officials

Well-functioning task forces

- Diverse skills and backgrounds (different organizations, political parties, parts of town government)
- Members who understand how town works or are politically involved in Town with connections to decision makers
- Being an “official” committee so connected to Town decision makers
- Members who have engineering/related backgrounds or otherwise have strong content background, e.g. connections with Yale University
- Having a charter, legal status, mission
- Small group of *committed* citizens really care and persist in the face of less than hoped for public and/or town leaders' support
- Chair is very organized, strong leadership of task force
- Part of a 6-town regional commission
- Council switched parties in a positive way
- Connections made at state and federal level
- Invested 1st year of committee in well researched background and agreed on goals
- Town Manager has been helpful finding technical information
- Various departments working well together and cross communicating, e.g. public works, Board of Education facilities, planning & zoning, etc.

Accomplishments

- Created sustainability guidelines for developments in Town
- Successful getting people to sign up for clean energy
- Visible, on the ground demonstration projects (e.g. solar installations, land protection/urban farm, citizen fundraising)
- Performance based contracting in schools and municipal buildings
- Got hybrid cars; looking at vehicle fleet fuel conversion
- Insulated municipal buildings
- Earned through the Clean Energy Fund, partnered with DCS Energy, and/or purchased solar panels
- Installed a water wheel
- Water pollution control authority changed all motors over to efficient ones (variable speed drives)
- Exterior lighting switching to LEDs
- Gathered all municipality energy data in *one place*, able to look at usage and total costs, and/or conducted benchmarking energy audit
- Accessed state and federal grants
- Energy projects that save money, and savings go into a line item just for more of these projects

Public engagement

- Transfer station is \$235,000 in the red annually, so creates motivation to work on these issues
- Residents having trouble with energy bills, so creating a receptive audience for our efforts
- Town budget struggles creating a receptive audience
- Form good relationships with local media to raise public awareness of energy efficiency and conservation through Neighbor to Neighbor Energy Challenge
- Worked with Connecticut Green Building Council marketing & communications committee
- Engaged high school students or more generally education through the schools
- Community energy fairs and/or public workshops have been well attended, with many sign ups and some immediate residential sales
- Did household competition for conservation with prizes from community groups
- Worked with houses of worship and/or IREJN “This Old House of Worship”
- Outreach to businesses
- 360.org 10-10-10 town event

2. What are your community task force's *weaknesses* in terms of how it functions, its financial and non-financial resources, and obstacles to achieving its goals and objectives?

How task force functions

- It's a new committee
- Need longer terms of service on committee
- Need more technical expertise in members
- Better long term organization, long term goals, prioritization
- After initial successes, how to maintain momentum (e.g. hasn't met, membership dropped)
- Organizational structure of committee, e.g. goals, minutes distributed, haven't selected officers
- Facing a Town imposed deadline for making recommendations
- Working with volunteers, so reality of volunteer commitment/availability
- Town appointed committees can't always quickly fill vacancies, need to adhere to process, take time, meet quorum minimum
- Change from energy task force to energy commission triggered limit on folks serving on multiple commissions, so lost great members

Local government political will and/or institutional capacity

- Two-year election cycle of local leadership leads to shortsightedness on any projects that have payback periods longer than two-year cycle
- Local government stonewalling, lack of political support
- Local branches of government in separate silos, e.g. public works, manager, and Planning & Zoning don't know what each other is doing, and/or Board of Education is independent
- Energy savings not a priority, e.g. storm preparedness bumped it, passed up opportunity to get LEED certification on middle school renovation, historical preservation criteria over energy efficiency
- Need to base decisions on good data; many towns don't have or track utility usage (including consolidated bills), how that translates in terms of carbon footprint, total budget
- Poverty, difficult to raise money locally – only been able to accomplish things through the state Clean Energy and Energy Efficiency funds
- Lack of regional cooperation, even regional governance
- Difficult to understand, know how to do it, and afford purchasing Renewable Energy Credits
- Finding good consultants, finding ones that aren't just selling their particular product/service
- Lack of getting “best practices”, are these new vendors any good, which technology application really is best, what models can other towns share? Need better communication of successes and step-by-step, so we don't reinvent the wheel in our communities
- Don't have a source of expertise
- Don't have a town energy policy/plan ... proposed plan sitting on first selectman's desk for two years
- How to get and protect funding, e.g. get a line item, have a good grant writer, identify grants

Public engagement

- Lack of public support and understanding, or just that they don't know what they can do so they focus on other stuff
- Task force's publicity to town is poor for attracting new members or what projects are going on
- Some of the state programs are difficult to explain to the public, e.g. clean energy options program costs more
- Get involved in politically charged discussion, e.g. carbon footprint conversations and/or sustainability context turns some off or is difficult to understand, so focus on energy savings for broader appeal
- Need the next big effort to focus on, i.e. get attention, maintain momentum

3. What external changes, issues, forces, etc. do you believe present opportunities or threats to your community task force successfully achieving its goals and objectives?

Funding and technical assistance

- Clean Energy & Finance Investment Authority has \$1B in incentives over 6 years for clean energy systems & \$100M for residential solar PV, much larger investments than past Clean Energy Fund stuff, and is willing to host seminars on how to tap into this.
- CT STEAP grant (Small town economic assistance program): funded \$20M for towns under 30,000 population, projects can include energy efficiency related projects
- Stay up to date on what funding is available early enough to respond and take advantage of it
- Clean Energy & Finance Investment Authority will host a "match-making" event between energy services contractors and institutional clients, including municipalities, on January 5 at the Rocky Hill Marriott (<http://www.reeba.org/id4.html>)
- Clean Water Action has a staff person available to provide 1-on-1 technical assistance to towns
- CT Energy Efficiency Fund launching a community program in which town earns points for getting residents to sign up for HES, appliance rebates, business program, etc.
- Incorporate clean energy, energy efficiency for municipal buildings, energy efficiency for residents and businesses programs into a singular community incentive program
- CT Energy Efficiency Fund working on providing model documents, contracts, and technical assistance to towns pursuing performance contracting. Need to push for regional approaches to this so can realistically attract vendors to work with small towns.
- DCS Energy residential program is still available for individual homeowners
- Energy efficiency & renewable energy office of U.S. Department of Energy has many webinars, programs, etc. <http://www.eere.energy.gov/>
- U.S. Department of Energy put together a model set of standards for Towns to use LED street lighting
- Increasing communication skills, e.g. how to access webinars
- Neighbor to Neighbor Energy Challenge – any chance to expand to more communities?
- Match towns with other towns who already have done something, create an “experts” board, etc. to help one another

State policy and statewide actions

- Governor wants the state to be #1 on energy efficiency, with energy at a department level. On the other hand the Department of Energy & Environmental Protection's reorganization may impact helpful staff like Lynn Stoddard and muddle regulatory functions (i.e. DPUC now inside DEEP).
- PACE financing in upcoming legislative session needs support to pass. Home loans for renewable energy projects can be repayed through property taxes, if viewed favorably by lenders like FannieMae. See <http://www.dsireusa.org/solar/solarpolicyguide/?id=26>.
- State Legislature Energy Committee Chair not sharing our priorities, so stay involved with legislators
- Town task forces can band together to impact and influence state legislation
- Overhauling state laws, e.g. use EPA's guidelines for siting schools
- Tap into state resources like UCONN to provide help
- CL&P = threat

Public engagement

- Economic climate and high electric rates provide opportunity to sell people on the financial savings of energy improvements rather than sustainability or climate change benefits
- Context of national energy security issues creates interest in renewable and locally generated energy
- High oil costs disproportionately impact transportation and less than half of most communities' working populations live in town, so get big "bang for our buck" by focusing on public transportation
- Trying to get information out competes with others trying to get out opposing information, even misinformation (e.g. climate change, recycling)
- Political environment, e.g. some issues like global warming have become politicized
- International climate change panel talking about climate change and changed weather, more storms, need to focus on reducing carbon footprints, and "climate change" works better than "global warming"
- "Transitions" movement (focused on whether we'll be prepared when we reach peak oil) can help engage residents in personal and community investments in renewable energy, food security, etc.
- When someone says something in the press, we have an opportunity to respond and defend our priorities and our partners (letter to the editor, op-ed, post online to share with others)
- Patch small town blogs are easy to publish articles on
- Most houses of worship have social justice committees: try to network them and partner (with or without IREJN)
- Real estate industry needs to become knowledgeable about and communicate about energy usage of houses (starting to use rating system)
- Celebrate our successes more often

"New" strategies and technologies

- Ability to create energy improvement districts
- Potential for regionalization
- Bulk fuel purchases
- Load shedding
- Community choice aggregation type programs, put out an RFP to get lower rates for residents/businesses
- Virtual net metering to earn credits (as long as you own the solar array)
- Co-generation technologies becoming affordable and sizeable for municipal applications
- Low cost energy loans available with payback through the utility?
- Cap & trade and carbon tax systems
- Resisting natural gas expansion (based a lot on fracking)
- Embrace algae-based bio-fuels
- Embrace local food growing movement

4. Hot topics selected from the discussions above for continued discussion and/or action in the near future as prioritized by distributive voting:

- 33 - Regionalization, e.g. joint energy procurement, performance contracting, and/or planning
- 29 - How can task forces help one another (e.g. speakers, write letters)
- 27 - Ordinances to enable solar and wind permitting
- 26 - Performance contracting
- 23 - Benchmarking, improving data collection & analysis
- 22 - “Sustainability” not just clean or efficient energy, can be politically charged conversation
- 20 - Public engagement/publicity
- 18 - Municipal creating utilities and/or owning street lights
- 12 - Concerns about how state programs work
- 12 - Energy improvement districts
- 10 - Changing rules so that projects must come before energy committee for review
- 10 - New state law still needs tweaking
- 9 - How to identify best practices (share, LEEDS-like criteria)
- 6 - Aggregation and affinity programs for helping residents and businesses purchase energy
- 4 - How/whether to talk about climate change
- 3 - How to create a plan & get it approved
- 0 - Plan visit to Mansfield hydro (and other places?)
- 0 - Public Act 11-80 how to respond/prepare

5. Possible next steps for continuing this dialogue:

- Meet again with open space technology format
- Meet biannually, annually, or quarterly with focus on a few hot topics with experts, panels, and/or town success stories
- Create and meet as working groups on hot topics, e.g. towns doing performance contracting next year
- Focus on general and/or topic-specific listservs and/or web forums
- Offer topic-specific webinars
- Create a subcommittees for each hot topic identified today and figure out next steps
- Develop comprehensive statements for hot topics and identify best practices, packaged for easy promotion to leaders
- Recommend colleagues to our contact list
- Each of us meet with neighbor town, keep up this strategy at your local level.
- Create energy & sustainability association, e.g. modeled after the CT Association of Conservation & Inland Wetlands Commissions
- Get more information about each task force (e.g. chair, meeting schedule, sustainability efforts), possibly use greentowns.com to share that info with one another
- Figure out how to use “Angie’s List” or create something similar for us to comment on and share with one another energy services vendors and consultants with whom towns work
- Focus on how to integrate energy saving techniques into budget