**MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 25, 2025 MEETING**

**OF THE BETHLEHEM SUSTAINABILITY WORKING GROUP**

The meeting commenced at 5:31 pm at the Town Library. Present were Bruce Caplain, Barry Zitser, and Rachelle Lyons.

Bruce read the Sustainability Working Group’s (Group’s) Mission Statement:

The purpose of the Sustainability Working Group (“Group”) is to facilitate, educate and enable residents, businesses and municipal entities on economic, environmental, and socially sustainable practices so humans and nature can exist in productive harmony for present and future generations, while collaborating with others when appropriate.

There was no public input.

**Updates**:

Bruce noted that the Group’s letter, to encourage grant funders to contribute money to allow the Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust (ACT) to purchase approximately 750 acres in Bethlehem for conservation, had been forwarded to ACT for distribution. Barry noted he received acknowledgment of his individual contribution on behalf of the Group from ACT. Bruce mentioned that the Group had also successfully encouraged a number of others to make similar contributions. Rachelle mentioned that the Bethlehem Conservation Commission, on which she serves, had volunteered to offer some equivalent hours for the maintenance of the tract, if purchased. Rachelle further noted that without ACT’s purchase the site would be at risk for private development, such as by businesses promoting artificial intelligence (AI) projects. These projects require large parcels of land, and since AI also consumes large amounts of electricity, the upgrade of the transmission lines near the parcel might also attract development. Rachelle finally noted that the Bethlehem parcel contains valuable water resources which need to be conserved, and such conservation might be hindered by some proposed legislation before the New Hampshire legislature that seeks to restrict municipalities from opposing the siting of certain projects.

There was a brief discussion on the Group’s support of the adoption of the proposed lighting and sign ordinance warrants that are being submitted for voter approval on March 11th. The Group’s letters to the editors, in support of these warrants, were printed in both the Littleton Courier and the Record Journal. There was also a townwide mailing of support by the Conservation Commission.

Bruce brought up the subject of how we bring attention to the little things that affect our lives, but which can greatly affect sustainability. He noted that he subscribes to the One5c email, which often has great product reviews for sustainable goods.

Bruce also recommended partnering with other sustainability organizations. He stated that he had received a communication from Blake Ramsey on NH Climate who would like to get our support for certain bills pending before the New Hampshire legislature.

In planning for Group activities for the remainder of the year, Bruce mentioned that he had a good discussion with Bruce Etter, who is enthusiastic about partnering with the Littleton Co-op to encourage the purchase of sustainable products. Barry noted that some of these sustainable products are more expensive than less sustainable alternatives. He suggested that if the Group were to endorse a sustainable product, such as laundry detergent, perhaps we could lower the price through a coupon, with the coupon discount cost shared between the Co-op and the Group. The Group could use a portion of its grant for this purpose.

There was a discussion on enhancing voluntary business and apartment recycling. Lloyd’s Hill, Lahout’s, and Hillview apartments do not have recycling bins, but their renters could be encouraged to bring their recyclables to the NCES transfer station without charge. Bruce has already received permission from Lloyd’s Hill to put up an informational sign for this purpose, and the Manager of Lahout’s would be willing to put this information in a newsletter or flyer distributed to renters. The Group has not yet gotten in touch with the manager of the Hillview apartments, which are small in number. Bruce noted that the Senior Center might also benefit from such information.

Barry had previously distributed to Bruce and Rachelle some information that should be included in a sign or flyer. It would notify renters how they could obtain permission to use the NCES transfer station, the types of recyclables and other items that could be brought to the transfer station, and how they could benefit by having access to the swap shop. Rachelle had previously suggested that some additional information benefitting renters could be provided. Barry suggested putting in how renters could subscribe to Our Town News, and also become members of the virtual swap shop on Facebook for Bethlehem residents. Bruce stated that he would bring Barry’s draft information to Jess Donnelly who is very creative in making such notices to see if she would be interested.

Barry has prepared a shortened resolution for submission to the Conservation Commission after the March election to encourage the voluntary reduced use of single-use and unnecessary plastics. The resolution would not impose any new responsibilities on the Conservation Commission, other than for the Commission to recommend that the Town Select Board formally go on record to encourage the Transfer Station Committee and the Group to pursue voluntary actions to further reduced plastic use.

On the issue of creating a Town orchard near the solar array behind the Bethlehem Elementary School, Barry mentioned that the local nursery, Yonder Mountain, is closed until May. However, he will email Yonder Mountain to see if we could get information and a discount on some trees for planting. Rachelle stated that she runs a student tree advisory committee at Plymouth State University, her place of employment. She indicated that perhaps some of the students could start nurturing some trees, without cost, by snipping some grafts from existing trees. Bruce will reach out to Mary Lou Krambeer and Chris Jensen who might be helpful in donating some grafts. Perhaps the orchard could also have some berries.

Bruce brought up the subject of whether the Group wants to sponsor a movie at The Colonial in the coming year. The consensus was that we should, but that we should think about a sustainability movie that is hopeful instead of depressing.

On the issue of increasing the Group’s active membership, Rachelle stated that she has two students who live in Bethlehem who might be interested in joining, but she would have to wait until classes are over before approaching them to see if they are interested.

Rachelle brought up the subject of whether the Group could encourage a repair workshop to further reduce landfilling. There was a discussion on how we can identify and bring people together for this purpose. Bruce mentioned a few people, such as bike repairers, who might be interested in appearing at an event which attracts persons. Barry also mentioned that the Transfer Station Committee has an interest in this subject and that in one of its grant applications suggested that a repair shop might be located at a future Town transfer station.

There was approval of the January 28, 2025 minutes, and Barry stated he would forward them to Nicole.

The next meeting date was established for March 25th at 5:30pm.

The meeting adjourned three minutes prior to the 6:30pm Transfer Station meeting that was also scheduled at the Library following the Group’s meeting.