Virginia Solar Energy Development and Energy Storage Authority Meeting

**Minutes**

**October 4, 2023**

**Virtual -- Microsoft Teams**

**Members Present**

Paul Duncan, Michael Walsh, Skyler Zunk, Gregory Habeeb, Colleen Lueken, Jo Anne Webb, Katharine Bond, Robert Birdsey

**Members Absent:** Michael Herbert, Rumy Mohta, Harry Godfrey

**Virginia Energy Staff Present:**

Ken Jurman, Aaron Berryhill

**Call to Order**

Authority Chair Skyler Zunk called the meeting to order at 10:00. He began by welcoming the Authority’s newest member, Robert Birdsey, Managing Director and co-founder of GreenFront Energy Partners. Mr. Birdsey then gave an overview of GreenFront Energy Partners stating they are an investment banking and advisory company focused on the new energy economy.

**Approval of Minutes**

The minutes from the Authority’s September 13, 2023 meeting were circulated in advance of the October 4 meeting. After a final brief review and correction of several minor errors, Mr. Zunk called for a motion to approve the minutes. Mr. Habeeb made a motion, which was seconded by Ms. Webb. The motion was unanimously approved.

**Authority Website**

Mr. Jurman gave an update and preview of the Authority’s new website which is still under development, reminding members that because the Authority is essentially a government body, they are not allowed to have the website hosted on a commercial platform. It instead must be on the Commonwealth’s *Virginia.Gov* domain.

Mr. Ducan asked whether it would be appropriate or useful to include major solar and energy storage initiatives in Virginia. He recognized that continually updating a website can take up a lot of time, but that compared to static websites, an evolving website could help draw in viewers.

Members discussed whether introduced and approved legislation relevant to the Authority’s mission should be included. After some discussion, it was decided to just include legislation that was approved and provide a link to the Legislative Information System so viewers can track all introduced legislation.

**Annual Report**

The members had a lengthy discussion on the Annual Report, with much of the focus on word-smithing the recommendations so that members present could come to a consensus.

Ms. Bond asked whether the version they were reviewing included any changes since the version discussed at the previous meeting. Mr. Zunk confirmed that there were significant changes since the September 13 meeting, including changes recommended by Ms. Bond and a colleague at Dominion Energy, clarification, and corrections by Mr. Zunk on the section regarding local permitting, and other updates to provide more depth and context.

Ms. Bond questioned recommendations that began with “We recommend”, and whether the members of the Authority could or should request the Governor and/or the General Assembly take certain actions, and whether that could be seen as lobbying.

Mr. Habeeb responded that since the members were not being paid it didn’t constitute lobbying and pointed out that at the previous meeting, there was consensus that the Authority had the authority to and should make specific recommendations to the Governor and the legislature for legislative action supportive of solar and energy storage.

It was decided to change the introductory statement for the recommendations from “We recommend” to “The Authority recommends” as the Authority can make recommendations even if a member does not vote to support a recommendation or abstains from voting.

Mr. Birdsey, as a new member, asked what the background for the recommendations was and whether there was robust discussion and debate.

Mr. Zunk responded that the Authority historically had not made recommendations that advance solar and energy storage. He pointed out that the enabling legislation for the Authority states that the Annual Report includes a summary of the Authority’s activities and recommendations to the Governor and specific House and Senate committee Chairmen. As such, at the Authority’s September meeting, members brainstormed and discussed recommendations, and then through an iterative process over the next several weeks staff circulated report drafts with the members for their feedback and recommendations, which were then compiled into a final draft.

Ms. Bond expressed her concern that some of the recommendations were incredibly specific such as requiring utilities to consider so-called Grid Enhancing Technologies while not accounting for other factors utilities are responsible for such as reliability, safety, and other factors.

Ms. Lueken pointed out that the recommendation cited only required utilities to consider implementing these technologies.

Ms. Bond added that while there were good points raised, the recommendations, as currently worded, didn’t consider other factors that need to be considered if the recommendations were made to decision-makers.

Mr. Habeeb asked whether there were recommendations that were not appropriate for the Authority to make, or whether they were simply recommendations that some members could agree with while others could not, and if the latter, whether wordsmithing the recommendations could lead the members closer to consensus.

Ms. Bond indicated that she would not feel comfortable with the recommendations until she saw them in their final forms and fully understood the meaning of them. She indicated she was not in a position to vote on a document that had been circulated with multiple revisions being made up until 12 hours before the meeting.

Mr. Zunk pointed out that the specific recommendations being discussed were put together by Ms. Lueken more than two weeks prior to the meeting and so were in each version being circulated. He thanked those who did review and wordsmith the report and recommendations and indicated they were pressed for time and had to complete the report in time for staff to circulate it through the Administration’s approval process before submitting it to the Governor, House, and Senate.

Ms. Bond offered to wordsmith the recommendations she had concerns with and submit them to staff, but Mr. Zunk indicated the members would be voting on the report during the meeting in order to meet the mandated reporting deadline.

Members spent approximately the next 45 minutes discussing and wordsmithing each recommendation until eventually coming to a consensus.

Mr. Zunk explained other changes from previous reports including removing the History of the Authority section which appeared at the beginning previous reports, eliminating multiple appendices that no longer reflected the Youngkin Administration’s new reporting guidelines, and the addition of a member meeting attendance report.

Ms. Bond asked whether other Boards and Authorities included attendance reports and was told by Mr. Jurman that Virginia Energy does report this information to the Administration each year. It should be noted that this information is reported at the request of the Administration.

Finally, Mr. Zunk called for a motion to approve the 2023 Annual Report. A motion was made by Ms. Webb and seconded by Mr. Habeeb.

The motion to approve the Annual Report was unanimously approved.

**Future Meeting Topics**

Mr. Habeeb pointed out that the presentations members heard during the year, which influenced some of the recommendations, could be seen as one side of a conversation. He proposed for future meetings that if a presentation is given that addresses certain views on a topic, an opportunity should be given to hear from opposing viewpoints on that topic.

Mr. Zunk agreed and said he still wants to hear from VACO regarding solar and storage zoning and permitting issues addressed by solar and storage developers at a previous to hear the locality’s side of the issue. He would also like to hear from the Data Center Coalition and hopes to make this happen at the Authority’s next meeting on January 9, 2024.

Mr. Duncan said that building electrification is a growing issue that has implications for cities, municipal utilities, electric cooperatives, etc. He said that Blacksburg and other localities are undergoing a large electrification effort such as energy storage, electric vehicle infrastructure, etc., and said all of this is putting pressure on local utilities. He volunteered to reach out to Virginia Tech for possible presenters on this issue. He believes electrification is more challenging in southwest Virginia than in central and northern Virginia and that it would be good to hear from someone in that part of the state on the issues they face.

He would also like to hear from localities in the southwest part of the Commonwealth on any issues they may be facing related to grid upgrades that may be taking place under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Finally, he said he had an open item that he committed to at the previous meeting to reach out to the engineering group at the SCC and ask them to attend a future meeting and give their perspective on the interconnection of solar, storage, and electric vehicle service equipment.

Mr. Habeeb offered that it might be good for someone at Dominion to give their perspectives on these issues and Ms. Bond suggested the Authority might like to hear about Dominion’s new energy storage pilot where they’re deploying a few new battery technologies of longer duration. Ms. Lueken concurred and added it would be good to also hear about the broader grid-scale solar and storage deployment happening in Dominion’s service territory.

Mr. Habeeb also suggested inviting someone to give an update on solar and energy storage deployment in Virginia electric cooperative territories, as well as possibly Appalachian Power and the municipal utilities, and Ms. Lueken suggested having an extended workshop and inviting as many coops and municipal utilities as are willing to participate to talk about solar and storage and exchange ideas.

Mr. Duncan added that such a workshop with the utilities should include a discussion on electric vehicles as this is “the snowball coming down the mountain”, and that his discussions with utilities seem to indicate that EVs are a big unknown for them.

Finally, Mr. Birdsey asked whether demand response technologies such as electric vehicle-to-grid or residential storage fell under the Authority’s purview.

Mr. Duncan responded that energy storage, including vehicle-to-grid, are dispatchable resources that, when coupled with a load, can act as a generator located behind the meter that could put energy back onto the grid, and that whether in front of or behind the meter was indistinguishable, and that **in the aggregate** could help support the local distribution utility and the transmission utility. He believes the Authority should include these in its mission.

Mr. Birdsey said that some of his clients at GreenFront Energy Partners work in this storage space and would likely be willing to speak to the Authority.

**Public Comments**

Mr. Zunk called for comments from members of the public present online. None were offered.

**Next Meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 9 at 10:00 a.m. in a location to be determined.

**Final Annual Report**

Before adjourning, Mr. Jurman said he would send out the clean final draft of the report to the members for final review and comments. He indicated he would give them until the close of business the following day and after incorporating any corrections, he would forward the report on for internal review and then external review by the Younkin administration.

**Adjournment**

Mr. Zunk called for a motion to adjourn until January 9th, 2024. A motion was made by Mr. Habeeb and seconded by Ms. Lueken and unanimously approved. The meeting was adjourned at 11:45.