

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ENERGY AND CLIMATE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, May 27, 2026

4:30 PM

2nd Floor Conference Room,
City Hall

Members Present:

Gordon Leverage, Chair
Maureen Nebenzahl, Vice Chair
Councilor Bryan Lake
Paul Roth
Timothy Murphy
Lisa Maxfield
Jake Pipp, Alternate (Voting)
Charles Redfern, Alternate (Voting)
Catherine Koning, Alternate (Voting)
Matthew Boulton, Alternate (Voting)
Rowland Russell, Alternate (Voting)

Staff Present:

Megan Fortson, Planner
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner (left early)

Members Not Present:

Annu Joshi Bargale
Steve Larmon
Clair Oursler

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Leverage called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM.

City Councilor Ed Haas and Keene resident, Diana Duffy, introduced themselves as guests.

2. Approval of Minutes – March 25, 2026 & April 21, 2026

A motion by Dr. Koning to adopt the March 25, 2026 meeting minutes was duly seconded by Mr. Roth and the motion carried unanimously. A motion by Mr. Murphy to adopt the April 21, 2026 meeting minutes was duly seconded by Mr. Redfern and the motion carried unanimously.

3. Bicycle Pedestrian Plan Update – Focus Group Activity

Ms. Brunner arrived at 4:35 PM, provided handouts, and displayed maps on boards in the room. Members of the City's Bicycle/Pedestrian Path Advisory Committee (BPPAC), Councilor Haas and Ms. Duffy, were also present as guests. Ms. Brunner explained that at this time, the City was in the process of updating its Bicycle/Pedestrian Master Plan. The City was one of the early adopters of a

Bicycle/Pedestrian Master Plan in 1999; Dr. Russell noted there was actually a 1994 document that Jim Gruber laid the groundwork for and Dr. Russell would send it to Ms. Brunner. The City's Bicycle/Pedestrian Master Plan had not been updated since 1999. Ms. Brunner thought the 1999 Plan had been used very effectively by both the BPPAC and partner organizations. However, she said things had changed and so the City was undertaking a process of updating the Plan. As a part of that, there would be a series of input sessions and the BPPAC was looking for interested organizations and groups for a series of focus groups. Also, starting in late June and early July would be a series of bike and walk audits funded through an AARP grant; a commitment of three to five of each. Ms. Brunner was looking for ideal places and willing groups to help carry out those audits. Some will be advertised to the general public so specific groups could be related to them.

Councilor Haas asked what a bike/walk audit comprises. Ms. Brunner replied that they are based on predetermined routes that are walked or biked. You can walk as a group with a map and follow a checklist of items that you score on that route, or you can bike and follow predetermined stops along the route and make notes. The idea is to have a diversity of people participating in the group. This grant would allow for purchasing a foldable wheelchair, so even if there is not somebody participating in the group who uses a mobility device, the group can be sure to consider those needs. Feedback from the audits can help identify specific things that could be improved along those routes. They can also be used to identify observed driver behavior of note that can help inform strategies in the plan as well.

Chair Leverage asked if the audits are about access to things/places in the City, because he did not see recreation represented; is that a separate conversation? Ms. Brunner thinks they include all of the above: biking and walkability of Keene, and bike routes as a method of transportation, but also a draw for tourism and a recreational asset. It has a big impact on our economy. The City worked with a team of students from University of New Hampshire (UNH) a few years prior, who looked at the economic impact of Keene's rail trails on the downtown and recommended ways to improve that through wayfinding and more. Dr. Russell said there were two separate studies actually, one with Keene's downtown trails in 2022 and then in 2023/2024, a separate study again with UNH on mountain biking and economic benefits. Ms. Brunner was unaware of the mountain bike one and Dr. Russell would send it to her; Drummer Hill and some other locations around Keene with mountain bike trails draw people into the community and they often stop at a local store or stay for a weekend, etc. Dr. Russell said the 2022 study produced a great locator map of trails in New Hampshire with sponsoring businesses along the trails. Vice Chair Nebenzahl is a part of a Thursday walking group, the Cheshire Walkers of approximately 20 people, who she said would definitely use a map with businesses listed like that.

Ms. Brunner began explaining that she wanted the ECC and members of the public present to participate as a focus group in an activity. She provided a handout with instructions. She asked everyone to interact with the maps around the room using dot stickers to identify dangerous areas in red, areas for improvement in yellow, and good areas in green. Participants could also use markers to draw on routes they walk/bike. They could use sticky notes to make comments, such as, "drivers run lights here." She commented on how sticky notes were used well by the High School focus group. This portion of the activity would be 10 minutes, and the group would reconvene to discuss the areas that could use the most improvement. Then, everyone would get one sticker and be asked to vote for their top location to narrow down the higher priorities.

Councilor Haas saw dots on one of the maps and asked if this exercise was expanding out of the Roadway Safety Action Plan and places identified therein that are hazardous to walk and ride; would this task be overlaying on that? Ms. Brunner said no, those were just landmark markers that the Councilor was seeing on the map. At this time, there was a public survey running for this project and they very intentionally tried not to make the questions duplicative of the Roadway Safety Action Plan survey but rather to build upon them. She said the real value of these activities is narrowing in on where the priorities are. She thought this effort could help develop strategies for the ideas from the Roadway Safety Action Plan and strategies for what to work on next (e.g., programming, policies that the City could implement, education campaigns).

Mr. Redfern asked permission to take photos of the activity for the Pathways for Keene website about planning. Ms. Maxfield asked not to be in photos.

Mr. Boulton said this way of thinking seemed focused on things to improve, which is excellent. Another way of thinking about it could be about the assets or things to enhance to draw people toward the resources as another way of thinking that surfaces opportunities.

Keene Citizen Tom Duston asked if cemeteries would be appropriate for walking and cycling and Vice Chair Nebenzahl said yes, her walking group uses them.

The focus group breakout lasted approximately 10 minutes from 4:50 PM–5:00 PM and members of the public participated.

The group reconvened and Ms. Brunner asked the group what areas seemed to need the biggest improvements and what are the greatest assets:

- Improvements:
 - West Street:
 - Keeps you from getting east–west besides some back ways that are not marked.
 - Particularly, the bottleneck at the east–west / north–south bottleneck at Island and West Streets.
 - Dr. Russell mentioned BPPAC bike/pedestrian counts that showed 50 plus cars running red lights at that intersection in a two-hour period.
 - Even walking along West Street and this intersection with the light feels dangerous.
 - Major patches of difficulty west of the Library, where the connectivity goes in and out and creates hazards. There is no connectivity between the nice downtown and the Jonathan Daniels Trail.
 - Transitions on and off bridges: they are not always well plowed in the winter, and they have dangerous bumps due to the height difference between the bridge deck and the finished grade of the path.
 - Most of Court Street is challenging for bicycles, particularly Upper Court Street, where there is no sidewalk or it is quite damaged.
 - A hole in the network from Gilbo Avenue to Emerald Street to transition across that corner of trail, where there is no signage. There is only an implication about

sidewalks. It is unclear that the trail begins down at the end of Emerald Street all the way down to Island Street.

- South Main Street at Wyman Way: dangerous left turn. Ms. Duffy is curious to see the bike/pedestrian audits at that intersection. She said sidewalks should be safe places to walk in the wintertime but also safe places for kids to hang out.
- More traffic calming into the urban zone: the flashing lights have helped but it is a mindset. People coming off of RT-101 do not slow until the roundabout. The City had made some progress with traffic calming, but having more safety measures in place would be nice.
- East Keene is darker and more residential, while west Keene is more illuminated and urban.
- The need to “teach people to walk” more than a few blocks instead of driving.
- Lower Winchester Street: there is no sidewalk from Market Basket to Krif Road, no real shoulder, and speeding drivers. The bridge there is narrow and people try to cross with motorized scooters and carts trying to get to the store and it is very dangerous and/or backs up traffic. It would be nice for nearby residents to be able to walk to Market Basket safely or bike into town from that part of Winchester Street. That quarter mile keeps people from accessing a lot because it feels so unsafe. Ms. Brunner confirmed that the Winchester St bridge reconstruction project was pushed out another two years by the state.
- The intersection of Optical Avenue, Eastern Avenue, and Marlboro Street: everyone treats it as a yield not a stop and it is dangerous.
- Visibility at pedestrian crossings: better lighting around them so they are more luminous at night or during the rain. For example, the new roundabout south of Walmart.
- Assets:
 - It is a fairly compact City and not as widespread as other communities.
 - The City has a plan and culture of access when doing big projects (e.g., bike paths during the Route 9 project).
 - Finding transitions and pathways that are not obvious to identify with more signage. Mr. Redfern had set a meeting with Deputy City Manager, Andy Bohannon, about appropriate signage.
 - General walkability: this is a walking City, which may be its greatest asset. Vice Chair Nebenzahl was drawn to that coming from New York City. She cited everywhere she could walk without a car.
 - There are more cemeteries in the residential neighborhoods of east Keene.
 - Variability: flat and hills.
 - Sidewalks are getting wider.
 - Gems for walkability: Drummer Hill, Greater Goose Pond, and Stearns Hill. The problem is safe access to them on foot or bike. Particularly, Goose Pond is compounded by Upper Court Street and East Surry Road. They also have limited parking.
 - A lot of nice trails on the west side that people are unfamiliar with, such as near the YMCA; a lot of technical mountain biking but easy biking as well. It is not just the rail trail but side trails too.

- A lot of loops in town that are the perfect length, such as Optical Avenue–Marlboro Street being exactly one mile. There is another three-mile trail.
- Appel Way: provides the east–west connection and connects to Wheelock Park, which is a fantastic asset to connect the City. Vice Chair Nebenzahl agreed with Councilor Lake that it is a great walking asset, which her walking group loves to use when accessing Wheelock Park.

The Committee members spent five minutes voting on their top asset and top concern each, from 5:25 PM to 5:30 PM. Ms. Brunner did not provide the results as a surprise.

Ms. Brunner, Councilor Haas, and Ms. Duffy left the meeting at 5:30 PM. Chair Leverage thanked Ms. Brunner for facilitating.

4. Local Solar Success Stories

a. Cedarcrest Ground-Mounted Solar Array, 91 Maple Ave

No comments.

b. Keene Housing Authority

No comments.

5. Community Power Mailer – Content Ideas

No comments.

6. Work Groups – Organization, Leaders, & Membership

a. Policy (Meets as needed)

The Work Group will meet as needed and Chair Leverage said there was nothing pressing at this time.

b. Resilience

Dr. Russell reported that the Work Group had a list of questions to forward to the appropriate parties within the City that he would send to Ms. Fortson. The Work Group would also be meeting on June 9, 2026 at 2:00 PM via MS Teams.

c. Outreach

Dr. Koning said the Outreach Work Group organized a meeting for June 6, 2026 at 4:00 PM.

7. Task Groups

a. Communication Plan

b. Benchmarking Dashboard

Chair Leversee said the Committee would organize these Task Groups at the next meeting. They would be drawn from the Committee as a whole, thinking about what has to be done, and who wants to participate. Mr. Roth thought that aligned with Dr. Russell's point about matching resources with benchmarking

Ms. Maxfield asked if the Task Groups have to follow quorum rules. Ms. Fortson said yes, they cannot have more than five people, otherwise these groups would exceed quorum per RSA 91-A. Dr. Russell suggested involving community members who are connected to the groups.

8. Staff Updates

Ms. Fortson reported that Emily Duseau departed as Planning Technician, so all communications should be addressed her moving forward. She would be missed. Mr. Murphy asked Ms. Fortson to send Ms. Duseau a thank you note on behalf of the Committee and there was consensus; Ms. Fortson agreed.

Ms. Fortson also reported that the City Council would be holding its first Public Hearing on the Budget on June 4, 2026 at 7:00 PM before voting on the Budget on June 18th. ECC members could attend on June 4th to share their support for the Assistant Sustainability Planner position again. Ms. Fortson thanked everyone who attended the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee meeting in support. Mr. Boulton asked if there was a prospect on where the position was headed. Ms. Fortson said City staff were cautiously optimistic but ultimately it would be a decision of the City Council. Staff hoped it would be approved so they could move forward posting a job description and everything online. Attending the June 4th meeting would reiterate how important this position is to the ECC.

9. New Business

Mr. Redfern asked if anyone had seen an enlarged postcard from Eversource Energy that seemed misleading, indicating that if you sign up for the Eversource saver program, you get \$100. It is misleading because you have to switch to Eversource but that is not clear. He wondered if anyone was concerned about it. Chair Leversee looked at it and looked it up online and he believed it was clear that you must convert. Mr. Redfern thought it might have been the small print. Discussion ensued about how that would mean switching from Community Power. Those on Community Power still get an Eversource bill because of supply and distribution components.

10. Next Meeting: June 24, 2026 at 4:30 PM

11. Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Leversee adjourned the meeting at 5:36 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Megan A. Fortson, AICP - Planner