

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ENERGY AND CLIMATE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, July 18, 2019

8:00 AM

Recreation Center, Room 14

Members Present:

Ann Shedd, Chair
Peter Hansel
Chris Brehme
Jake Pipp
Councilor Terry Clark
Kenneth Dooley
Rod Bouchard, Member-Elect

Staff Present:

Mari Brunner, Planner
Shaylin Salas, Intern

Members Not Present:

Jessica Baum
Cary Gaunt

1) Call to Order

Chair Shedd called the meeting to order at 8:03 AM and Ms. Brunner conducted roll call. Chair Shedd introduced Mr. Bouchard, who is the Assistant County Administrator and will be nominated to Council for membership following this meeting. The Committee exchanged brief introductions.

2) US Department of Energy SolSmart Program

Ms. Brunner reported that staff learned about this US Department of Energy (DOE) program from the City's current energy consultant, the Cadmus Group LLC (Cadmus). The program is a ranking system, where cities are awarded a "grade" based on how solar-friendly they are (bronze, silver, or gold). The DOE is working with the Cadmus consulting group to provide free technical assistance to cities that participate in the program. If a community decides to participate, they would get assistance from Cadmus to help them complete the application (baseline data, policies in place, permitting process, zoning allowance, etc.) and identify ways to be more solar-friendly. The Cadmus consultants working on the DOE program are the same consultants Keene is negotiating with for the Energy Plan. The consultants offered to reduce the original budget estimate of \$45,000 for assistance with the Energy Plan significantly if Keene participates in the SolSmart program; it is free to participate. Ms. Brunner and The Community Development Director had a meeting with the consultants and the only item needed to participate is a letter from the City Manager saying the City is committed to reducing the "soft" costs of solar. Ms. Brunner brought this information to the Committee keep members informed and gauge whether there is support for the City's participation in the program.

Peter Hansel asked about the staff time required to fill out the application and participate in the program, noting that it takes a considerable amount of staff time to fill out the application for the Bicycle Friendly Community program, which uses a similar ranking system. Ms. Brunner said that Cadmus will “pre-fill” the application by reviewing Keene’s website and regulations as well as resources shared by staff (e.g. the baseline solar data this Committee has generated). This will minimize the staff time necessary to complete the application. Ms. Brunner said Cadmus worked with Lebanon, NH (silver rating), as well as many other communities in bordering states. There was concern expressed that no matter how well the City fills out the application, it is unlikely Keene would be rewarded because of the lack of incentives for solar available in NH. However, it is encouraging that Lebanon achieved a silver designation. Chair Shedd said through looking at the SolSmart material, it appears as though the SolSmart criteria are not based on installed solar; rather they look at municipal policies and programs that affect solar development and determine if they need to be improved as a part of the ranking process. She thinks Keene has room to progress up their ranking scale since there are few solar policies currently.

Ms. Brunner said the consultants think Keene has room for improvement, but they seemed positive about the incentives and policies that are already in place, such as the property tax exemption. Ms. Brunner noted there are more than 250 cities, counties, and regional organizations participating nationwide. Cadmus would provide Keene with an energy baseline for the Energy Plan through the SolSmart program; they would also identify local and state policies and incentives that could affect Keene’s goals. Because a significant part of Cadmus’ work now falls under the SolSmart program, they submitted a revised option for the Energy Plan, which is substantially less (\$25,000). However, in configuring the new price, Cadmus took some things out of the scope of work that staff need to follow-up on. It is likely that the final scope of work and budget will be somewhere between this number and the original budget quote of \$45,000.

Mr. Bouchard asked if this ranking is just a designation cities can tout or if it includes policy advocacy. Ms. Brunner said it is less about advocacy and more about local policies, incentives, and programs. For example, consultants would review Keene’s Zoning Ordinance and provide a list of options to make that Ordinance more solar-friendly. Staff felt they already had a list of options and alternatively asked Cadmus to help write a draft Ordinance, to which they agreed. Ms. Brunner noted the City is a part of Clean Energy NH, which works more on advocacy at the state level. She thought the SolSmart program focused more on ensuring there is local support for renewable energy systems.

Staff and Chair Shedd confirmed other aspects of the SolSmart program and Cadmus consultancy based on Committee discussion:

- The SolSmart program is specifically about solar; therefore, Cadmus would get their funding for the solar part of Keene’s energy study from the DOE SolSmart program. However, Cadmus would still look holistically at Keene’s existing energy baseline for the electricity sector.
- Cadmus would do a comprehensive overview of Keene’s energy options for the energy plan.
- The DOE and Cadmus would benefit from another community in NH participating in the SolSmart program, as it will hopefully spur participation from other NH communities.

- The SolSmart program and results of Keene’s energy study will be helpful to both the City and county; Cheshire County is working with Eversource to install a battery micro grid in Westmoreland, NH, as well as a solar project on other county property. Keene’s support will be helpful for other projects throughout the county.
- The county can also participate in the SolSmart program for free. Staff would need to inquire about a mechanism to include the county in the City’s contract with Cadmus. Other towns throughout the county might want to participate at a lower cost.
- Other participating cities and organizations have spoken highly of the SolSmart program.
- The energy project manager from Cadmus will also be the contact for SolSmart.
- The City will remain a SolSmart participant after the contract with Cadmus ends. Staff will inquire about whether the City would need to re-apply to maintain its designation, and whether technical assistance could be available through the program if the City does need to re-apply.

Ms. Brunner will communicate with the City Manager to draft a letter to confirm the City’s commitment to the program. Members asked about the status of the contract with the energy consultant. Ms. Brunner reported that staff are in the process of negotiating a scope of work with Cadmus, and said she anticipates one more revision to the scope of work to address remaining questions before developing a contract. Ms. Brunner will share the final scope of work with the Committee. Staff anticipate that the chosen consultant will begin work as soon as possible after the contract is finalized and signed.

3) Energy Plan

a. Focus Group 1: Landlords & Real Estate

Chair Shedd noted that Ms. Salas has been preparing this focus group. Ms. Salas referred to page three of the meeting packet, which pertains to the focus group. The goals of the focus groups include getting direction on community priorities, getting a better understanding of the needs and considerations of different stakeholder groups, to understand their vision, concerns, ideas, and to obtain buy-in from the groups on the Energy Plan. Staff hope to leave the focus groups with ideas for different strategies moving forward. The goal is to build relationships with these stakeholders and their networks. So far, nine stakeholders have agreed to attend the focus group, which the Committee agreed is a good turnout. Ms. Salas referred the proposed focus group agenda in the meeting packet.

Ms. Brunner referred to the proposed focus group agenda item for a “meeting-in-a-box” training. She recalled that the Committee was in support of doing a “meeting-in-a-box” activity with the focus group attendees. Ms. Brunner and Ms. Salas spoke to the person who organized a similar activity in 2008 for the Master Plan visioning process, Juliet Walker, to understand how that outreach tool was used. Ms. Brunner thinks it is a great tool and more effective with the general public. Ms. Walker noted an important component is to have a lot of staff organization in addition to community volunteers who are trained to act as meeting facilitators. The way the activity was organized in 2008, community members would contact the City to sign-up for a meeting, and someone at the City would manage people’s schedules and assign people to different groups. Then, volunteer facilitators would do a meeting in a box, called such because all materials needed are in a

box given to facilitators, who lead the meetings and collect feedback for the City; staff would then summarize that information digitally.

Ms. Brunner said the Monadnock Progressive Alliance Clean Energy Team (CET) have offered their dedicated support in this process. She and Ms. Salas have a meeting scheduled with a couple CET representatives to see if they are interested in volunteering to be facilitators for this activity. The CET has already done similar work in the community and might be interested in this effort. These meetings would be to engage the general public versus specific stakeholder groups. Chair Shedd said one of the CET members arranged for her and Ms. Salas to meet with the board of Monadnock Interfaith Project, which ties together diverse faith communities in the area. There is potential to have their congregations do meeting in a box style groups within their membership as well, which would broaden the reach of the project.

Ms. Brunner said the Committee should be deliberate and thoughtful about what type of information they want to acquire from all outreach activities, including the meeting in a box activity. During Ms. Walker's effort, each group had a facilitator who was trained on basic guidelines (e.g., handling someone talking a lot, how to set up the space, etc.) as well as guiding questions to ask. She thought the guiding questions from this past activity are not a good template for this Committee's efforts because a consultant designed it specifically for the visioning portion of the Comprehensive Master Plan, which is a much broader topic. Ms. Brunner stressed that this is just an idea right now but she envisioned less of a general discussion because the Committee wants information specific to the energy plan. With clarity on the type information that would be useful, she thinks developing questions will be possible. Chair Shedd requested that staff add this item to the agenda in August, when Committee members can share their ideas for community meeting questions.

Chair Shedd noted there was supposed to be a community survey in the fall, for which the committee would determine content and distribute. She questioned overlap between surveys and meetings in a box. Ms. Brunner suggested taking a step back, and said perhaps the Committee should discuss the type of information they are seeking and how that information will be used. It would be helpful to hone in on the goal of both the surveys and meetings, then the Committee can more easily develop questions. Chair Shedd asked members to reflect on this in advance of the August meeting, when some brainstorming can begin. Upon request, staff will provide some information to support the Committee's reflection, based on the Committee's clear goal for the survey.

Chair Shedd noted Concord, NH is wrapping up their one-year process toward an energy plan and she knows they had stakeholder and community engagement meetings, though she could not recall a survey. Staff will reach out to Concord on what they asked their community in a survey or public meetings. Chair Shedd noted that Hanover also did neighborhood meetings less formally than Keene might intend; staff will inquire if they used specific questions as well.

The Committee shared ideas and discussed the opportunities, benefits, and potential challenges to develop a community survey and community meetings:

- Community Survey
 - A good time to collect a contact list for potential participants in the community meetings that would follow.

- An opportunity to offer a sign-up list to be notified for upcoming events.
- A survey could go out now, in the early phases of the Energy Plan development and generate public participation as the Energy Plan is closer to fruition.
- It might be appropriate and helpful to have more than one survey over the course of this Committee's planning.
 - Early survey – questions residents have about energy use, renewable energy, and impacts for them. This information can help guide Committee actions.
- Might be most appropriate for more closed-ended questions.
- Community Meetings (or focus groups)
 - It might be more appropriate and helpful to have the community share their early questions (like the early survey suggestion) in a community meeting setting, where there could be more active dialogue.
 - Might be most useful for open-ended questions.
 - It might not be possible to successfully ask stakeholders these questions without knowing the scope of the project.
 - Meetings could be less complicated than anticipated if the Committee has broadly defined strategies to take to the meeting.
 - Guiding questions such as: where do you purchase energy? How can you use energy efficiently? How can you generate renewables? How can your building be more efficient? Do you know options for subsidies?
 - Stakeholder meetings, like this first one proposed for landlords and real estate, can help stakeholders think about efficiency that they might not know. Landlords sometimes are most focused on their property and perhaps less about efficiency and utilities, especially if tenants pay utilities. They can also learn about other organizations and online resources. Specific questions for each group can help them think outside their normal concerns and priorities.
 - The Committee should arrive at focus groups anticipating barriers and incentives for stakeholders, and prepared to answer those questions. The Committee should be prepared with synthesized research the Committee has been generating.
 - The Committee should foster individualized answers.

The Committee agreed that dynamics are changing in town for these stakeholders with new residential buildings opening. Ms. Salas referred to a list in the Committee's Google drive with potential questions to ask each stakeholder group (landlords/real estate, residents/renters, businesses, institutions) and other materials like a general introduction common across all stakeholder groups. The Committee discussed the meaning of the SWOT (strength, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis proposed in the meeting packet. The main benefit staff see of the SWOT process is to build relationships with stakeholders. For example, Ms. Salas spent several months building relationships that led to nine stakeholders who agreed to participate in this first group. Chair Shedd thinks staff began with the most challenging group, because it has the least bottom line investment in the energy of their properties. The Committee agreed the list of nine is impressive. The Committee brainstormed SWOT answers they identify to build context, anticipate answers, and provide clearer examples for community meetings:

- Strengths

- A demand from tenants for efficiency and renewable energy to save cost. Landlords seek long-term tenants, who will take care of apartments, which energy efficiency could facilitate.
- Energy efficient properties near the rail trail system have been proven to increase property value.
- Weaknesses
 - It will cost the landlord money up-front.
 - Age of housing might make it more expensive to renovate with efficient or renewable options.
 - Many landlords do not see energy costs because tenants pay, or vice versa. People directly responsible for using the energy might not have incentive to improve.
- Opportunities
 - Competition to get good tenants with more reasonable rent.
 - Possible incentives, subsidies, or grants. The Committee discussed current opportunities in the City.
 - The City's goals and prospective City programs and policies to support energy efficiency.
 - As some landlords invest to improve the energy profile of their homes, demand for efficient rentals could increase and ultimately save money for landlords and/or tenants.
- Threats
 - An external threat is enrollment in rural universities and colleges declining, so landlords who rely on students could be threatened.

Sharing these ideas with community meeting facilitators could help prompt conversation among the focus groups. Participants are diverse and will provide an interesting collective perspective of their realities. Chair Shedd noted that there is a hotel manager on the list, which she thinks is an interesting perspective to represent, even if they do not clearly fit in this focus group; though they might have things in common with landlords of larger properties. Ms. Brunner agreed the original intent was to include lodging in this focus group and staff will reconsider the best group to include them in. She thinks the approach will be more nuanced than just asking the group what their strengths are; guiding questions to help reveal their strengths will be more effective. This Committee exercise will help develop more questions. Regarding output of the focus groups, Ms. Salas questioned if the information generated will be given to the consultants; Ms. Brunner plans to share that information. Ms. Brunner noted the consultants provided two options with and without community outreach: \$95,000 versus \$45,000 because community outreach is time consuming. Still, a summary of the focus group outputs will interest the consultants.

Councilor Clark asked if there is a timeline for the consultants. Ms. Brunner said they will start as soon as a contract is negotiated and executed by the City Manager, which she hoped would be within a few weeks after this meeting. Council already approved use of personnel funds for a non-personnel use and gave the City Manager authority to negotiate and execute a contract. All approvals are in place according to the Purchasing Department, which will expedite this process. Ultimately, Ms. Brunner anticipates a spring 2020 completion, which is generous but will likely benefit the project overall.

Chair Shedd asked when this focus group will be ready to begin. Ms. Salas will share a poll on the topic, but anticipated the first three weeks of August as a goal. Chair Shedd asked whether it is prudent to conduct two focus groups before the first community forum on the timeline for early fall; she asked if it is possible. Ms. Salas said that is the plan. If this focus group is in early August, there is still time in September for another, so she thinks it is possible. Chair Shedd said it seems to be taking a while to hone the content and format of even the first group, and it will be different for each group; she questioned if this timeline will be possible. There will be more discussion at the August meeting.

Chair Shedd noted that because October is National Energy Awareness Month, having a series of events on energy could help participants in the planning process to come with a greater base of knowledge. If each of several groups in the community took charge of one presentation, the burden would be less, and then culminate with the community workshop. Ms. Brunner said October is the target timeframe for the first community meeting, which might be a good time to solicit community questions on energy; there are many options for that workshop to incorporate many stakeholders and share knowledge on opportunities to address energy planning.

Before the August meeting, Ms. Salas will work to provide more extensive introductory content on the current energy status in Keene and different benefits of energy efficiency options; the goal is to meet the stakeholders where they are and develop more SWOT details. There is a draft of questions she, Ms. Brunner, and Chair Shedd have been working on that this meeting's discussion will help inform. Chair Shedd thought there was a spectrum from more open questions to more detailed questions. Ms. Brunner clarified that meeting in a box questions could be targeted to anyone in the public, from any sector; these focus groups, however, will center on specific roles in the community, though the two efforts will be similar. Staff hopes the nine focus group participants will act as champions of the project. There is currently no specific strategy (absent the meetings in a box). Ms. Brunner hopes to have a survey prepared in advance for the nine participants to email to peers; responses would go directly to staff and eliminate the need to type and compile responses by hand. The Committee noted the proposed focus group agenda in the meeting packet needed revisions, which Ms. Salas will work on. This is an opportunity to hear participants' ideas and center the focus group on a few key topics. Councilor Clark said stakeholders will want to know how the Energy Plan will impact their businesses and what they need to start doing to prepare.

The Committee discussed opportunities to contact interested parties through the school system. Including institutions like the school district in this process can help educate the public about their energy efficiency work. The school system can also be a messenger of what needs to and can happen in the community. The best way to introduce this project to the school system is with a presentation to the Facilities Committee, which can guide the process from there. There could be opportunities to educate staff, teachers, and students. The decision-making entity, though, is the school board and administration. Ultimately, the school district might not be interested in participating. The Committee agreed the institutional focus group should include a participant from the school board, specifically from the Facilities Committee, which will make energy decisions.

The Committee discussed and agreed upon the following timeline, spaced three to four weeks apart:

1. Landlord/real estate focus group
2. Commercial/business focus group

3. Community forum
4. Residential focus group
5. Institutional focus group

Ms. Brunner recalled there was press when Council adopted the renewable energy resolution and approved the energy consultant. Staff will offer the Sentinel the opportunity to follow-up on progress since the Council decision and current goals/efforts. The Sentinel tends to like stories in a series because it builds readership interest; there could be a series on what each stakeholder group is doing (i.e., county, college, school district). Communication helps make these programs successful.

b. Sustainable Energy Success Stories

Ms. Brunner referred to the last page of the meeting packet where there was a template developed by Ms. Salas. For this agenda item, Ms. Brunner hoped to understand what organizations the Committee wants to highlight through a success story, then ask members to sign-up to interview a representation of each organization. Committee members could use this template to create the success stories. She also asked where the Committee wants to post these stories; they can be on the City website, but the question is how to share and use them. Chair Shedd looked at the NH Saves site (Resources page) where there is a section profiling success stories, including one about Keene Ice. The profiles include schools, businesses, homes, multi-unit residential facilities, and others. She said the NH Saves format could help guide this Committee. She noted that CleanEnergyKeene.com has a few profiles as well. Ms. Brunner asked if the CleanEnergyKeene.com is an example of where the stories could be housed to reach a broader audience than the City website; there are pros and cons to both. Chair Shedd suggested the home page of the City website could display one success story at a time and link to the others; Ms. Brunner will inquire with IT. Mr. Bouchard controls the county website and can post stories there as well that represent the whole region, not just Keene. Chair Shedd also suggested rotating the type of profiles.

Committee members discussed benefits and challenges associated with using the CET website. Councilor Clark said the CET is non-partisan, but there is a left-leaning perception because of the issues they gravitate toward; their mission statement states non-partisanship. The City must consider this potential conflict in their role as a City body. Ms. Brunner thought it was fine to post stories on the CET website, but this may affect who sees the success stories since some people may not go to the CET website. Ms. Brunner said an option is to post stories in multiple places, such as the county website. Chair Shedd said simple profiles repeated in several contexts is part of what it will take to bring the community along with this effort. Chair Shedd also recalled the Keene Chamber of Commerce might be willing to post stories.

Ms. Salas created a list of community contacts who have indicated they are willing to be interviewed, participate in focus groups, and be featured in a success story. Several people have already agreed and she will continue inquiring based on Committee feedback, which has been helpful. The last meeting led her to several more organizations and people who have agreed or who she presumes will say yes if contacted again. At the last meeting, Ms. Salas recalled someone from the Cheshire County Jail, who wants to offer a success story about the jail; the Committee questioned if it was a success or a learning opportunity. The Committee discussed other success stories of organizations overcoming energy challenges with important lessons learned to share.

Staff hoped members would sign-up for different success stories to complete in the next few months using the template in the meeting packet.

- Mr. Brehme will profile Keene State College
- Mr. Brehme will profile the biomass project at the school; he also offered his drone services for other success stories.
 - Aerial photography will enhance stories like 350 Marlboro Street and the Filtrine project, which Mr. Hansel will profile when complete. They will be the largest solar installation in the City.
 - Commissioner Steve Hooper also has a drone and might offer services.
- Chair Shedd will profile the solar installation at the Keene Unitarian Church, Bensonwood, and Michelle Chalice.
- Councilor Clark will speak with Toby Tousley.
- Ms. Salas will follow Councilor Greenwald's solar installation process and document it over several months.

Ms. Brunner asked Committee members to follow the template on the last page of the meeting packet when drafting the success stories, which the Committee agreed should be less than 1,000 words or one page. Members should send any success story materials to Ms. Salas and Ms. Brunner, who will ensure their placement online.

The state vetoed HB 365. There was no context for the veto, so it is unclear if a portion or the whole bill was shut-down. Chair Shedd said the comments in the veto were confusing, stating it would cost the rate payers, which is likely not true. The City is a member of Clean Energy NH and Committee members should get policy updates from them. Chair Shedd said some municipal entities have submitted comments supporting the statewide veto override, though she did not think there would be time in the Council schedule to officially request they comment again; however, the Committee can ask the City Clerk to re-send the support letter for this bill. Ms. Brunner said the Assistant Public Works Director is following this closely because it will significantly affect the City's future projects, such as the proposed renewable energy project at the Wastewater Treatment Plant. The plant is right next to the airport where there is good land for a solar farm. Ms. Brunner anticipates engaging more with Eversource because they are trying a pilot program that the Committee also commented on about net metering for low and moderate income community solar projects. Eversource is now creating programs to take advantage of that and are seeking interested communities. This topic can be agendaized at a future meeting. Mr. Bouchard recalled a program (2004-2007) where the county sponsored energy programs for low and moderate income loans for anything from fixing roofs, insulation, and furnaces, etc. He explained further details about that program and its incentives.

Ms. Brunner clarified that members who volunteered for success stories agreed to interview participants and write the stories with full permission for staff editing and consistency across the stories. Staff will share the final drafts with the authors and person/organization featured, who will need to sign-off and might offer feedback. Brief stories, including two quotes, with many pictures are the goal. Videos are welcome, though staff will not be able to edit them.

c. Online Survey

Ms. Brunner asked the Committee what information they want from a survey of the public (i.e., feedback on a vision statement, community values, data on energy people are using, etc.). The Committee provided the following information they want to learn:

- The participants' demographics (though much will be available through census data)
 - Are they a visitor, resident, or work here?
 - Do they own or rent?
- Residents' energy costs and how it burdens their standard of living
- Where they purchase their energy: supplier or independent broker
- What energy options people are considering right now

Even if survey information is not usable for Committee goals, it could give participants ideas. Committee members agreed to frame everything within a timeframe of then next 5-10 years to project the demand for electricity; which business owners might be interested in knowing, since NH has one of highest electrical rates in country. Ms. Brunner said a lot of questions the Committee posed seemed specific to residents and asked if this survey should be specific to residents. The Committee discussed pros and cons of including visitors and those who work in Keene. Ideally the survey will be no more than 10 questions. It could include a question about the zip code, if they are a renter or home owner, their energy costs, relative house size/number of bedrooms, their energy supplier, etc. Many people do not know they can choose a different energy provider. This survey is not only about electricity and should include heating questions as well. The survey should include references and links to more resources. For brevity, it could include a matrix of potential heating and electric options and question the likelihood the respondent would implement those options.

4) Other Business

The purpose of this agenda item is to allow members to introduce business not listed on the agenda, for further discussion at a future meeting. No new business was raised at this time.

5) Next Meeting – Wednesday, August 7, 2019 from 8:00 AM-9:15 AM

6) Adjourn

Hearing no further business, Chair Shedd adjourned the meeting at 10:03 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker
July 25, 2019

Reviewed and edited by Mari Brunner, Planner