

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AD-HOC COMMUNITY POWER COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Friday, October 2, 2020

8:00 AM

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Members Present:

Peter Hansel, Chair
Councilor Mike Giacomo
Dr. Ann Shedd
Paul Roth
Dan Belluscio
Jeffrey Titus

Staff Present:

Rhett Lamb, ACM/Community Development
Director
Mari Brunner, Planner

Members Not Present:

Chair Hansel called the meeting to order at 8:00 AM.

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Hansel read a statement regarding the authority of the committee to hold a remote meeting, pursuant to Executive Order #2020-04. He called the meeting to order and conducted roll call. All members reported their location and whether anyone else was in the room with them.

2) Approval of September 4, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Ann Shedd made a motion to adopt the minutes of September 4, 2020 as submitted. Paul Roth seconded the motion, which carried unanimously by a roll call vote.

3) Public Outreach

a. Defining near-term and long-term goals

Chair Hansel asked for a staff update on this item. Mari Brunner said that she would like to review what she has heard so far from this committee as well as the Energy and Climate Committee (ECC) as goals for a Community Power Program in Keene. For near-term program goals, she has heard the following:

- Increase the percentage of renewable energy in the electricity mix.

- Provide greater choice for ratepayers, not only by offering this program, but also by offering options within the program to “opt-up” to 100% renewable energy and “opt-down” to a cheaper rate.
- Provide a default option that is competitive in terms of pricing with the default option offered through the utility.
- Encourage participation from commercial customers and large energy users who are currently on competitive energy supply, to the extent possible.

Ms. Brunner continued, listing long-term goals that she has heard articulated so far:

- Over time, use this program as a tool to reduce the overall energy use in the community through energy efficiency. She added that the Energy and Climate Committee (ECC) has talked about this goal from the perspective of reducing the energy burden for low-income and elderly residents. These groups tend to spend more as a percentage of their income on energy bills.
- This program should help drive the development of new renewable energy projects locally and in the region.
- By 2030, this program should offer a default option that is both 100% renewable and cost-competitive with the default utility rate.
- Increase customer awareness and understanding of their energy use, both in terms of how much they use as well as where their energy comes from, and what options they have for sourcing their energy.
- Finally, the last category can be described as “driving innovation.” Ms. Brunner said that this category includes time-of-use services, distributive technologies such as solar plus storage and EV charging during off-peak times, which Henry Herndon from Clean Energy NH talked about a couple months ago. She added that these types of services and technologies can be used to help shape the community’s load and shave peaks to reduce overall costs. She said she didn’t explain this very well, but she tried to capture the general goal of offering more innovative services and technologies in the long term to reduce costs.

Ms. Brunner said that she tried to capture what she has heard so far, and asked whether the committee members felt she accurately described these goals. Is anything missing from this list?

Chair Hansel thanked staff and said the list is comprehensive. He said that the definition for renewable energy needs to be clarified; however, this will be done by the ECC through the energy plan process. Ann Shedd said that the group will need to figure out to what degree renewable energy will be included in the default option in comparison to the amount of renewable energy in the utility’s default rate. Rhett Lamb added that, in thinking about the City’s broader energy goals which include using 100% renewable energy for transportation, heating, and cooling by 2050, the group may want to think about how a Community Power program can tie in and support these goals, for example through electric heating, cooling, and transportation. Chair Hansel thanked Mr. Lamb for his comments, and said that it will be

important to keep these goals in mind because switching to electric heating, cooling, and transportation will increase electricity demand.

Dan Belluscio said that he agrees with all of the goals that were stated; however, he would like to see these goals prioritized so the group knows what to focus on first. There are some lofty goals, and the program will not be able to do everything at first. What are the highest priority goals to achieve with this first phase of the program?

Jeffrey Titus said he agrees with Mr. Lamb that the Community Power program goals should be tied into other City goals, and added that this committee should keep its ears and eyes open throughout this process and keep learning. Ms. Brunner thanked everyone for their comments, and said to Jeff's point, one of the next steps should be to seek input from the public on the program goals.

b. Outreach methods & timeline

Ms. Brunner said that she wanted to check in with this committee about public outreach and timing for public meetings. Staff looked at the outreach ideas included in the consultant proposal, and they would like to propose that the committee hold two public meetings. The first meeting would be focused on providing information about Community Power and answering questions from the public. It would also be an opportunity for the committee to listen to the public about their concerns, hopes, and ideas. Then, about a month or a month and a half later, they could hold a second meeting. The purpose of the second public meeting would be to recap the input received, present on the draft plan, and then ask for further input and feedback. They could keep the plan posted for a few more weeks to get input. Supporting outreach could include a series of short videos, direct outreach to groups and organizations, social media posts, press releases, etc. The KeeneEnergyPan.com website could be used as a repository for information and resources.

Ms. Brunner said that this proposal would extend the project timeline by a month or maybe two. She recalled that, at last month's meeting, concerns were raised by a committee member about the timeline being too aggressive. This would slow it down and provide more time for the public to learn about the program and provide input during the planning phase. She asked the committee members for feedback on this idea.

Chair Hansel said that he is in support of holding two meetings as described. Ann Shedd said that she is supportive, but would like clarification about who is doing the outreach. She understood that the Community Power Consultant would do a lot of outreach; is this approach going to put a large burden on staff? Ms. Brunner responded that, once the consultant is on board, they would do most of the heavy lifting, for example by creating videos. Staff would still play a supporting role; however, and the committee members would also need to be actively involved.

Chair Hansel called on Bob Hayden, an attendee, to speak. Mr. Hayden said that Standard Power is a local company and they are planning to be fully involved in public meetings and outreach efforts, along with Good Energy. Mr. Lamb said that Mr. Hayden is the president of Standard Power, for committee members who haven't met him yet. He said that Standard Power and Good Energy are not yet under contract with the City, however, they are participating in this meeting as attendees to hear what the committee is working on.

Chair Hansel said he thinks the City should reach out to the same focus groups that were used for the energy plan, in particular the commercial and the institutional groups. Ms. Brunner said she will write that idea down and agreed it would make sense to reconvene those groups, possibly between the two public meetings.

c. Public meeting(s)

Chair Hansel asked if this agenda item has already been covered. Ms. Brunner said that the only thing to add is a discussion about the impact the public meetings will have on the project timeline. She said that the group doesn't need to decide when the public meetings will be held today, but once the consultant is under contract, they can start deciding on dates. The project timeline will likely be pushed out a month or two. Chair Hansel said that adding a couple months to the timeline is not a big deal, especially if they can still get a program going in 2021. He noted that the public is already primed to talk about Community Power since there have already been several articles in the paper about it.

Ann Shedd noted that, in a typical year, it can be difficult to capture the public's attention during the holiday season. She is not sure how COVID will affect that. Ms. Brunner agreed and said that, assuming the consultant is on board sometime this month, they could have the first meeting possibly in early November, which would put the second meeting in mid-December. Otherwise, they might be pushing the second meeting out into early 2021.

4) Draft Outline for Community Power Plan

Chair Hansel asked staff to comment on this item. Ms. Brunner said that a draft outline for a Community Power Plan is included on the last page of their packet, page 17. This outline was prepared by Good Energy and Standard Power after a discussion with staff about their local goals for this program. She said she can go through it, or take questions. Chair Hansel said it would be helpful for Ms. Brunner to go through the outline.

Ms. Brunner said the first section – Introduction and Key Features – would include the purpose of the program, the program goals, and the long-term vision. It would also include the process to develop and approve the plan. The second section – Class of consumers that may participate – will include information about applicable classes, universal access and equitable treatment, and reliability. Ms. Brunner noted again that this outline was shared by Standard Power and Good Energy, and she assumes this section is required by the Community Power Law. The third

section – Organizational Structure – would include an overview of how the program would be structured. The fourth section is “Product Options.” She thinks this would include the different options, such as the opt-up or opt-down options that they could offer.

Section five is “Operation,” including the process for issuing an RFP, public outreach and education, how customers will be enrolled, quarterly notifications, annual reporting, and ongoing outreach and education. The sixth section is Funding. Ms. Brunner said she is not sure what this section would include. She said that a representative from Standard Power or Good Energy may wish to comment on this section. Patrick Roche, an attendee, introduced himself and said he works for Good Energy. He said that this section of the plan would include the fee that is paid to the consultant for the services they provide.

Ms. Brunner continued, saying that the next section is called “Rate setting and costs to participants.” Section eight is called “Net metering compensation according to Chapter PUC 900 rules” – this is for small customer generators and large customer generators. She said she assumes this section is required as part of any aggregation plan. The next section is “Electric Assistance Program and other discounts.” She asked if committee members are familiar with the Electric Assistance Program (EAP). She said it is a program offered through the utility for customers who cannot pay a large electricity bill all at once – they can get a payment plan through this program, and pay off their bill in smaller installments over a period of time. This program exists to help residents who have difficulty paying electricity bills. Mr. Roche said that this is an accurate description of the program, and added that it will be important to be clear how customers on EAP will be affected by the Community Power Program.

Chair Hansel asked whether it is possible to add an option for a customer to choose to pay extra to “Opt-up” for someone else who is on EAP. He asked Mr. Hayden and Mr. Roche whether this is something they have seen before in community power programs. Mr. Roche said that he hasn’t seen that happen elsewhere as part of a community power program, but they can look into it as an option to see if it is possible. Councilor Giacomo said that he recently got a bill from Liberty Utilities, and there is an option to pay extra to help others in need with their bills. He isn’t sure how much of that money actually goes toward helping others, and how much is used by the utility for overhead costs.

Ms. Brunner said the next section is called “Aggregating Municipalities & Buying Group.” She imagines this section would deal with how Keene could join with other communities on a program. She said this could be done informally, or it could be done more formally with contracts and agreements in place between communities. This group will need to think about this section more, with support from the consultant. Ann Shedd said that it will be important to follow along with the Community Power New Hampshire group and not reinvent the wheel.

Section eleven is called “Promoting Energy Efficiency” – this section would deal with how the program could be used to increase energy efficiency. Next is “Method of Entering and Terminating Agreements with Other Entities,” followed by “Rights and Responsibilities of

Program Participants,” “Extension or Termination of Program,” “Planned Schedule,” and finally the “Conclusion” section. She said that this outline is not final, but rather a draft to help get the committee thinking about the structure of the plan and what could and should be included.

5) New Business

Chair Hansel asked if there is any new business. Ann Shedd said that Clean Energy New Hampshire sent out a letter regarding the current PUC rulemaking process and the detrimental impact it could have on Community Power in New Hampshire if it goes through as currently proposed. For example, the proposed rules around net metering are not advantageous. She said she believes Ms. Dragon signed the letter on behalf of the City. Ms. Brunner said that Dr. Shedd is correct; the City Manager signed this letter to show the City’s support for rules that will help enable Community Power programs to be successful. She said that one of the big issues, as she understands it from talking to Henry Herndon, is the timing for when Community Power programs can go out to market. The current proposed rules have a small window of time within which programs can go out to bid, which could impact the pricing they receive. She said it is her understanding this would not stop a program from moving forward, but it could affect pricing.

Chair Hansel said that another issue he has heard about with the PUC rules is data sharing, and asked if that is one of the issues currently being discussed. Mr. Hayden said that the committee has captured the three main items – group net metering and individual net metering, timing (there is a very narrow window right now), and data privacy issues. He said that he expects that the rule making process will come up with rules that treat everyone fairly and that would enable Community Power programs to operate as described in the enabling legislation. He said that the data sharing issue has been known for quite some time, and he expects many of these issues to get worked out. The next meeting is October 28. Hopefully, many of these issues will be clarified and rectified at this meeting. Mr. Roche added that they may reach out to the City to have someone attend this meeting and speak on behalf of Keene’s interests, in addition to signing this letter.

Mr. Lamb said that this committee may want to consider taking a vote to authorize a committee member to speak on behalf of the City at the October 28 meeting. Chair Hansel agreed this would be helpful, and said they ran into this issue when the request came from Clean Energy NH to sign the letter, and they did not have anyone from the committee who was authorized to represent the committee as a whole.

Ann Shedd made a motion to authorize Chair Hansel and Jeffrey Titus to represent the Community Power Committee at the PUC meeting. The motion was seconded by Dan Belluscio, and passed by a unanimous roll call vote.

6) Upcoming Dates of Interest

- a. **Tuesday, October 20, 6-8 PM – Virtual Keene Energy Plan Forum**

Chair Hansel said that the ECC is working on organizing a community forum for the energy plan on October 20 at 6:00 pm. He asked Ms. Brunner if there is anything else to add. Ms. Brunner encouraged members of the committee to attend the forum, which will have a break-out session on Community Power. They are hoping to have good participation from the community, and it may be helpful for members of this committee to be present. People can register for the event at KeeneEnergyPlan.com.

b. October 29-30, 2020 – NH Local Energy Solutions Conference

Chair Hansel asked if there is anything more to say about this item. Ms. Brunner said that this is an annual conference hosted by Clean Energy NH and the Local Energy Solutions Work Group. She said that, because the City is a municipal member of Clean Energy NH, they get two complimentary registrations. If any committee members are interested in attending, please let her know and she can sign them up.

7) Next Meeting: Friday, November 6, 2020 at 8:00 AM

There being no further business, Chair Hansel adjourned the meeting at 8:57 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Mari Brunner, Planner

Reviewed and edited by Rhett Lamb, Community Development Director