

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AD HOC COMMUNITY POWER COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Friday, January 15, 2021

8:00 AM

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Members Present:

Councilor Mike Giacomo
Dr. Ann Shedd
Paul Roth
Dan Belluscio

Staff Present:

Rhett Lamb, Community Development
Director
Mari Brunner, Planner

Members Not Present:

Peter Hansel, Chair

Mari Brunner read a prepared statement explaining how the Emergency Order #12, pursuant to Executive Order #2020-04 issued by the Governor of New Hampshire, waives certain provisions of RSA 91-A (which regulates the operation of public body meetings) during the declared COVID-19 State of Emergency.

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Mari Brunner, Planner, called the meeting to order at 8:03 AM. Roll call was conducted.

Mr. Roth motioned to have Dr. Shedd act as temporary Chair in the absence of Chair Peter Hansel. Councilor Giacomo seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

2) Approval of December 4, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Mr. Roth moved to approve the December 4, 2020 minutes as presented. Councilor Giacomo seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

3) Preliminary Survey Results

Daria Mark, a representative from Good Energy, reviewed the results that had come in over the past month from the Community Power survey. These results helped inform what should be included in the draft Community Power Plan. The survey began on December 8, 2020 and was disseminated online as well as in print in the Monadnock Shopper newspaper. It ran for approximately one month, ending on January 7, 2021, and rendered 126 total responses, mostly from the online version.

Ms. Mark paused and asked the committee if they had heard any conversation or mentions of the survey out in the community. Mr. Belluscio replied that he hadn't but reasoned that

everyone is fairly isolated during the pandemic, so not a lot of external conversations are taking place. Councilor Giacomo stated that he shared the survey with the neighborhood groups in his north central region, reaching about 100 people.

Ms. Mark continued with the review and stated they saw a predominantly residential response, with 82% of survey takers owning their home, and 6% already generating electricity with solar panels.

To help the public understand what the survey asked about, they created two videos. The first explaining Community Power, and the second answering how it impacts the City of Keene. Ms. Mark encouraged the committee to take a look at those videos, which are located at www.KeeneEnergyPlan.com/CommunityPower. She mentioned these would be great resources to share if people are wondering what the program is all about.

The following data from the survey results was presented by Ms. Mark.

Demographics: The survey asked two demographics questions to measure diversity of responses. Results showed a good spread on age and income.

Electricity Supply: A majority of the survey respondents use Eversource but 13% have taken action to find a different supplier. The next question explored what people are looking for when they seek a different supplier. Results showed that 69% of respondents were looking for a better rate. The other respondents wanted more renewable content.

Community Power Goals: This multiple choice question explored what the community wanted to see from the Community Power program. The highest response was a desire to see an increase in local renewable energy. Other popular answers were lower energy bills, better rates, and creating local jobs.

Renewables and Price: This question was aimed to tease out community sentiments with regards to adding renewable energy versus the cost. 8% of respondents did not want more renewable electricity but 92% said they did. Breaking down that 92% further revealed that 50% of respondents are willing to pay more for renewable electricity and 42 percent want more renewable electricity if they can pay about the same amount they currently pay.

Mr. Roth asked if the last two bars on the Renewables and Price chart were additive (the 19% and 31%). Ms. Mark replied that if a respondent chose the option of wanting more renewable energy, they then had to choose from three options: wanting to pay the same, willing to pay a small amount more, or willing to pay more in general. Those responses are seen in the last three bars (42%, 19%, and 31%) and represent how much more the participants want renewable energy. Councilor Giacomo stated with regards to price sensitivity that these responses seem to be cut down the middle, 50% are able or willing to pay more, versus 50% of respondents not able or willing to pay more. Maria Dark agreed and added that the 31% of respondents that are willing to pay more is the demographic they would try to target in an opt-up campaign.

Income information was asked on the survey to reveal any trends in responses based on respondent income level. The next chart showed that respondents with higher income levels are not the only ones who are interested in more renewable energy. The lightest blue category represents income under \$50,000, the next blue is \$50,000-100,000, and the dark blue is greater than \$100,000. This is important because it shows representation from all different income levels in favor of more renewable energy.

Councilor Giacomo commented that the chart shows there's about a 65-35 split within the under \$50,000 cohort between the 'willing to pay extra' category and the 'want to pay the same amount' category, which tells them there's willingness and actual price sensitivity to be able to afford the higher rate, which is great. There's also no question that this cohort is in favor of more renewable energy, but about 50% are saying they probably can't afford a higher rate, and he wants to make sure they are paying attention to all representations in the community and going about things in a cost-effective way. Ms. Mark wondered if the people who said they don't want more renewable energy, in the under \$50,000 cohort, were saying it out of concern for increased prices. She and Councilor Giacomo agreed that this could be possible because it has been a narrative they've seen in the past.

Energy Efficiency: They included three questions to tease out how much and what has been done in the community with regards to energy efficiency. The first question asked if they had done an energy audit. Around 73% of respondents answered yes, which showed there's still a lot of potential when thinking about saving energy. The next two questions attempted to discover if there was a reason they hadn't done an energy audit. The first asked if they keep their thermostat lower than they would like to save money, and 71% of respondents answered yes. The next question asked if their home is drafty or are their energy costs high, and about half of respondents said yes. Overall, the results showed potential on improvement for reducing energy use.

The next chart used the income levels to answer if getting an energy audit had to do with finances. The results showed that it was not a matter of income, it was more about other factors like time.

Outreach Channel Effectiveness: The survey asked people how they heard about the survey with options of the newspaper (Shopper news, Keene Sentinel), online (City website, social media), e-mail, or other. Most respondents heard about the survey through a newspaper and the next highest response was one of the online options.

Conclusions – The survey results demonstrated that there is very strong support for a default product with extra renewables, an option that offers additional renewable content, and desire for the most cost-effective option.

4) Overview of Draft Community Power Plan

Patrick Roche from Good Energy stated that the draft Community Power Plan starts with Keene's vision of electricity to be 100% renewable by 2030, and the 2050 goal of thermal and transportation to be 100% renewable energy. He stated the plan is meant to be a

framework that spells out how they will approach their goals and noted that it leaves room for innovation so the program can evolve. The following was Mr. Roche's review of the plan.

Program Vision: The first piece of the plan is successful launch. They focused on economic value that also increases renewable energy for the community and supports the growth of new renewable energy in the region. The economic value will be critical for both short and long-term goals of the program. This had already been demonstrated in the survey results showing about half of the respondents willing to pay more for renewable energy, and half who are looking to pay about the same. The idea is to maximize environmental goals while having economic impact.

The second piece of the vision emphasizes using a variety of tools and innovations over time, such as optional products that help achieve higher renewable percentages for those that can afford it, and strong incentives to support more local renewable energy in Keene.

The next component is harnessing the community and making sure there's space to regularly revisit goals and planning. To help get to 100% renewable energy they want to include community input, creativity and ideas with regards to steps in the plan and distribution of benefits.

Next is removing barriers to program goals which means operating the program within the regulations that exist, but also working to change rules and expand and create new opportunities.

Lastly, is leading by example and collaborating. This is the idea of allowing the program to have a greater impact by helping other communities start and launch their own programs and collaborating with other communities to expand buying power.

Mr. Roche then touched on renewable energy and NH Class 1. He stated that renewable energy means we are focused on extra renewable energy, above and beyond what the state minimums are. This is NH Class 1, "new renewable energy," and the sources have to be located in New England, NY or Eastern Canada to be on their regional electricity grid. Wind, solar, small hydro, methane, and biomass are the primary sources.

Renewable Portfolio Graph: the light green box is the NH Class 1 section which has increased every year and is part of what drives the growth of renewable energy in our region. Keene would accelerate this growth if they purchase extra renewable energy. For the year of 2021 we are at about 10% Class 1 and the NH Renewable Portfolio Standard plateaus at about 20%.

Electricity Products: In the plan there are 3 different electricity products included. The first is the default product that people would be automatically enrolled in, unless they take action. This first product is designed to have some savings or cost parity with Eversource and some extra renewable energy. They estimated starting at 5-10% extra renewable energy

with this default product, so there's flexibility to be able to remain economically competitive.

Councilor Giacomo asked if the 5-10% is added to the 30% from the prior slide. Mr. Roche replied yes and stated he would show this in a graph shortly.

The other two products are optional. One would be 100% focus on extra renewable energy, so they'd match 100% of extra renewable energy on top of what the state is offering. The other would be the basic product at 0%, for people who want as much savings as possible and would meet the state's minimum portfolio standards. Mr. Roche mentioned that they will need to do a considerable amount of promotion and education to get people in the 100% option, as past programs have demonstrated that most people stay in the standard product.

A NH Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) and Keene Community Power graph was then shown, with the dark green representing the voluntary Class 1 in Keene, using 5% extra renewable energy on top of the NH RPS percentage. It illustrated that, if starting in 2021, they'd already be higher than the state's RPS. In other words, that 5% would be increasing the Class 1 requirement by half. They felt these product options aligned with the survey and would be a good place to start, allowing for room to add more renewable energy and keep economic value.

Community Development Director, Rhett Lamb, asked when talking about the percentage increase over the RPS, if somebody is opting up to that 100% product, are they getting 100% renewable energy or 100% over the RPS? Mr. Roche answered that 100% NH Class 1 renewable energy would be purchased on their behalf. The percentage for the RPS and 100% of additional NH Class 1 energy would be put onto the grid. In other words, they'd be helping the rest of the grid/their neighbor because one can only physically use 100% renewable energy. Mr. Lamb suggested that they keep the message as simple as possible moving forward and Mr. Roche agreed.

Mr. Roche went on to highlight other keys for Keene's goals:

- Net metering – They don't have the price or term for paying for electricity yet, this will be figured out when they go to bid and they'll lock in rates and terms based on what they know about the market. Net metering is similar to this, they can define how they provide net metering benefits. The options are somewhat limited based on the billing system that Eversource has but there is some flexibility that they can look at in the competitive bidding process. The goal will be to see if they can offer as good or better incentives than default service. This will include education and outreach to communicate any differences between default service and what the Community Power program offers.
- Energy efficiency – The plan highlights that, to start, the main focus will be cross promoting the NH Saves program. Overtime, they are hoping to more directly support energy efficiency.
- Buying groups – Being a regional leader they state that the City of Keene is interested and open to their program and that they make their own choices about their products; however, everyone goes up to bid on the same day at the same time

so they are benefiting from collective buying power, while keeping autonomy with the program.

- Opt up campaigns – Education, outreach and opt-up campaigns are run to support general program awareness and recruit participation into the 100% product.
- Planning and evaluation – There is a big emphasis on this as a part of reaching goals. They need to get the program up and running and then look at evaluation and innovations.

Universal Access and Equitable Treatment: Mr. Roche highlighted that this is a key statutory requirement. Universal access means anyone can join the program and equitable treatment means they have to treat similarly situated customers the same. The plan makes a few different distinctions on treating customers the same based on their circumstance:

- Product option – This includes the opt-up options or the basic/default option.
- Rate class - large commercial versus residential versus small business
- Joining via the opt-out process or actively opting in. The distinction here is mostly for large commercial entities. If opting in as residential or small business you are guaranteed the program rate; however, they reserve the right to charge market price for large commercial entities. The reasoning behind this is that it is a way to protect the rest of the participants due to risk premium.
- Switch options any time without penalty

Mr. Belluscio asked if the larger commercial entities are negotiating a lower rate outside the system anyway, which is normally better than residential rates. Mr. Roche answered that most large commercial entities will be doing a more complex rate and probably won't be enrolling in the program. Mr. Belluscio stated that everything looked amazing and wondered why people wouldn't do this and what could go wrong? Mr. Roche answered that on the economic side they can't guarantee savings. When they are recommending the default 5% or 10% they are giving themselves some buffer to account for variability because they only know the utility rate six months out. The track record for programs that they've run is that they do deliver savings, so that is a plus. Mr. Roche states this is why the education and outreach plan is essential. A lot of people are not familiar with electricity and don't think about it all that much. They do not want people to feel confused or feel the city is doing something without their knowledge or buy-in, so the process typically goes better with community preparation.

Ms. Mark announced that everyone could contact communitydevelopment@ci.keene.nh.us for questions, and they will answer them in the meeting on January 26, 2021. The survey outreach identified that people wanted to hear about this program via email and she showed how the public can sign up on the City of Keene website. Community outreach will include email, flyers, social media, radio, etc. The meeting on January 26, 2021 will consist of presenting the survey results and explaining the draft Community Power plan.

5) January 26, 2021 Public Hearings – 12:00 PM and 6:30 PM

Dr. Shedd requested that the committee hear about proposed HB315 and how it could impact the Community Power plan if passed. Guest Robert Hayden stated that the bill is

restrictive and they do not want restrictions. They want to be able to use more renewables anywhere they can. He stated that he has had many conversations with other concerned entities in regards to planning strategies. At worst case, they would create a strategy to water down HB315 so they don't lose as much flexibility. The preferred strategy would be to completely eliminate HB315 with a large effort of business and community folks commenting against it. They are in the developmental stage of what their strategies will be and are very aware of the situation and looking to maintain the flexibility they now have.

Ms. Brunner stated they have a meeting scheduled for Friday, January 22 and asked if the committee would like to hear more about this bill then. Dr. Shedd replied yes and stated maybe the committee members could read a little bit about the bill beforehand. She inquired on whether or not there's a more formal version of the Community Power plan available to circulate to committee members. Ms. Brunner responded that there will be and the goal is to send it out next week before the meeting to give committee members time to review it. Mr. Lamb added that they have a meeting set up with city managers and the city attorney as soon as their time allows, and will do their best to get the plan out to the committee as soon as possible.

Councilor Giacomo stated he submitted a question for Ms. Mark in the chat about how many people they would need to opt-up in order for them to reach 100% goal, and requested that they obtain that estimation at some point in the near future.

6) New Business

There was no new business. Dr. Shedd requested that everyone contact the Community Development Department if they have questions from today.

7) Upcoming Meetings

- a. **Friday, January 22, 2021 at 8:00 AM (tentative)** – Dr. Shedd stated this meeting is scheduled to take place.
- b. **Tuesday, January 26, 2021 at 12:00 and 6:30 PM** – Dr. Shedd stated they will need a quorum for these meetings and Ms. Brunner replied that she had heard back and they will have quorum at both meetings. Dr. Shedd inquired about the format and Ms. Brunner stated it would be similar to the meeting today, including at least 20 minutes for questions from the public.
- c. **Friday, February 5, 2021 at 8:00 AM**

8) Adjourn

Dr. Shedd adjourned the meeting at 9:02 AM

Respectfully submitted by,
Nicole Cullinane, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by Mari Brunner, Planner
Additional edits by Katie Kibler, Clerk's Office