

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ENERGY & CLIMATE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, February 16, 2021

3:00 PM

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Members Present:

Peter Hansel, Chair
Cary Gaunt, Vice Chair
Ken Dooley
Jude Nuru
Paul Roth
Zach Luse
Andrew Dey
Clair Oursler, Alternate

Staff Present:

Mari Brunner, Planner

Members Not Present:

Jake Pipp

Chair Hansel called the meeting to order at 3:00 PM.

1. Roll Call

Chair Hansel read a prepared statement explaining how Emergency Order #12, issued by the Governor of the State of New Hampshire, pursuant to Executive Order #2020-04, gives authority for public meetings to be held remotely and shared information about how members of the public can listen and share comments. He then read the Zoom platform rules aloud and roll call was conducted.

2. Introductions

Dr. Jim Gruber introduced himself as retreat facilitator and asked members to introduce themselves and provide a bit of background of how and why they have come to participate in the committee. All members introduced themselves and described their various backgrounds.

Ms. Brunner announced that Dr. Ann Shedd, former Chair of ECC is in the attendee list, along with three prospective members of the committee, Mr. Chuck Weed, Ms. Denise Thomas and Ms. Suzanne Butcher.

3. Review of ECC Purpose and Functions

Chair Hansel provided an overview of the purpose of the Energy and Climate Committee (ECC). He said the wording was devised when they changed their title from the Cities for Climate Protection Committee to the Energy and Climate Committee. He read the purpose statement: “In order to protect Keene’s public health, safety and welfare, as well as the economic vitality of the community the ECC exists to monitor and advocate for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, promote energy conservation, as well as the use and production of renewable energy and increase awareness and resilience to the expected impacts of a changing climate.”

Ms. Brunner provided an overview of how ECC functions as a committee. She included a list of functions on page three of the agenda packet. She listed some examples of activities the ECC has done in the past, for example the ECC has sponsored NH Saves Button Up workshops in the community, both as the lead organizer and more recently as a co-sponsor with the Clean Energy Team, which falls under the increased awareness of the committee’s purpose. She stated that ECC has also requested the City Council to take a formal position of opposition on HB315. She said ECC can make recommendations to City Council which will be referred to one of three City Council committees based on the nature of the topic. She said that the public then has an opportunity to weigh in and it is referred back to City Council for a vote and the process takes a minimum of four weeks which has been a challenge in the past as legislation can be passed before the committee hearing takes place. Ms. Brunner said that ECC has also made recommendations for City Council to participate in a specific program, such as the SolSmart program, or recommend that the City participate in a specific policy. She stated that ECC can also apply for grant funding to help cover costs of programs and events which has not been done much in the recent past.

Mr. Weed noted that he has been in correspondence with the head of the Science and Technology committee of the New Hampshire House, and his concern is that people who are less able to bear the burden of the costs of such projects will not benefit. Chair Hansel emphasized that the ECC recognizes impacts on all strata of the community and that they are cognizant of how programs will impact all community members. Ms. Brunner stated that she put a link into the chat for members to enter information into a Google sheet. Dr. Gruber stated that the Google sheet is intended for members to enter their ideas on “how” to accomplish the functions of ECC. He said the sheet is set up to show “what” ECC wants to do and provides a space for members to offer their feedback on how those functions may be actually carried out.

Dr. Gruber reviewed the broad areas in which the ECC functions, and stated that the plan for today is for members to type in their thoughts into the space provided on the Google sheet for how to accomplish each function listed. Mr. Dey asked if the local action plan and the climate action plan are synonymous and Ms. Brunner said that they are. Members entered their feedback into the Google sheet. Ms. Brunner read aloud some of the examples provided by members on the “how” of each function listed.

4. Sustainable Energy Plan Implementation

a. Overview of Plan Vision and Implementation Pathways

Vice Chair Gaunt thanked Dr. Shedd for her leadership on the ECC, as well as Chair Hansel, Ms. Brunner and City staff. She stated that in January of 2019, the City Council adopted the

Sustainable Energy Resolution which states “one hundred percent of the electricity consumed in the City of Keene will come from renewable sources by 2030 and one hundred percent of the energy used for transportation will come from renewable sources in 2050.” She noted that the Sustainable Energy Plan is a roadmap on how to achieve these goals. She stated that the vision for the Energy Plan that is that by 2050, Keene will be a “thriving and resilient community powered by affordable, clean and renewable energy. All electricity and energy used for heating, cooling and transportation will come from renewable energy sources.” She said there was much discussion in previous retreats about the wording and language of the vision. They talked at great length to make sure that the wording is inclusive of all community members and that resiliency is built in and has staying power. She asked what that means in practice and noted that there are four pathways: (1) reduce energy use, (2) all City sectors will collaborate to generate and store renewable energy locally, (3) if they cannot fully cover energy generation locally, the idea is to switch remaining energy demand to renewable sources that come from beyond the community, and (4) conduct ongoing advocacy and information-sharing to both educate people and encourage their involvement. She said that ideally as this moves forward there will be more advocates for the plan to push it forward. And finally, how do we show that progress is being made through information-sharing.

b. Near-term Implementation Priorities

Dr. Gruber stated that for the coming year, there are five near-term implementation strategies in the Sustainable Energy Plan that ECC has identified. Ms. Brunner noted that those five strategies are included in the agenda packet. Dr. Gruber said these include Home energy labeling and weatherization programs, advocacy for public transportation, Heart Smart campaign and the advocacy for EV infrastructure. Chair Hansel noted that they added the home energy labeling under the ECC’s purview, which is now listed as voluntary. Dr. Gruber stated that there are high level steps on how to proceed on these steps and to put together a working plan on how this can be achieved this year.

Dr. Gruber introduced the *Voluntary Home Energy labeling* program slide and asked members to enter their ideas on “how” this can be achieved and what partners should be involved. Chair Hansel proposed that they engage entities from other locations to discuss how they achieved their program, so as not ‘reinvent the wheel’ and receive guidance. Dr. Gruber agreed with that idea. Mr. Dey proposed that they do not limit their guidance to just NH and to invite expertise from other states as well. Vice Chair Gaunt suggested that they begin to develop what ECC thinks are the best options and based on that review discuss how to achieve the goal. Chair Hansel stated that there will be pushback on this goal, so they should encourage property owners to participate in the process. Mr. Nuru agreed and said they should also aim to include the utilities as they are likely to be a source of pushback on this program. Chair Hansel agreed. Mr. Luse added that some cities have done rebates as incentives and that may be appropriate here. Vice Chair Gaunt agreed that highlighting the benefits and rebates is key. Vice Chair Hansel said that multiple listings already have some information gathering they are already doing and perhaps they should find a way to incorporate that information into what they are doing as well. Vice Chair Gaunt added that at Keene State College (KSC), they want to develop a green rating system so that students can pick and choose where they may want to live off campus based on how much money would be spent on energy use. She said the idea was to have different tiers, for example,

sustainable energy and well-being; they were developing a metric on how landlords can meet certain criteria, for example, free recycling, renewable gas or natural gas. She said this is different than home energy labeling but can provide a pilot test. Mr. Roth added that they can look at KSC as a benchmark, as there is no way to evaluate best practices now as Energy Star is more business based and not residential.

Ms. Brunner added that benchmarking is a separate item that the City is going to pursue in the near-term for City buildings which will use a software like Energy Star. However, the home energy labeling is a label that compares the energy efficiency of homes to other homes to provide information to buyers or renters on how much it will cost to operate that home. Ms. Gaunt said it boils down to some people will want an energy labeling based on a soundbite. Chuck Weed stated that when he switched to solar through his provider, people informed him that he was subsidizing corporations from Texas, therefore it would be good to rate local renewables that would not be sending subsidies to Texas. Chair Hansel said that may be applicable to a separate part of the program and not home energy labeling, as the latter is mainly concerned with heating and air conditioning, and could also involve energy sources. Dr. Gruber said that in the interest of time, are there key partners that should be involved. Mr. Dey proposed that they tie this into the weatherization program and energy audit. This might make people more amenable if it is attached to that specific process. Chair Hansel said that metrics are also going to be a key part and how the City is going to gather that information is an important part of the goal. Dr. Gruber encouraged Chair Hansel to state that ECC should add a metric system into the program. Mr. Roth proposed that they should partner with the suppliers because more efficiency means less sale of their product, therefore it may be wise to include them in the process.

Dr. Gruber moved to the next slide on the *Weatherization program*. He asked how they should proceed with these high-level actions. Vice Chair Gaunt stated that reviving a team of KSC student volunteer energy auditors might be helpful. Chair Hansel stated that Eversource and Southwest Community Services (SCS) already have programs, and asked if there a way to find out how comprehensive they are and how many homes have they have already done. Mr. Luse agreed that he had to do a ton of his own research to acquire that information. Chair Hansel stated that they will also need a number of volunteers like the Clean Energy Team and others will have their own ideas and will want to support the effort. Mr. Nuru said that apart from the Clean Energy group, other mission-aligned organizations are likely to support these kinds of actions. Mr. Dey said that the Button Up Programs are also aligned with this work. Chair Hansel agreed and said that they were tied in with NH Saves and performed workshops for residents in Keene. Ms. Brunner stated that part of the strategy was to continue Button Up workshops, and other examples like Vital Communities in the Upper Valley, partnered with NH Saves and on a local level raised funds to hire a local person to serve as a resource for businesses and residents who wanted to use the NH Saves program to provide information and resources. She said that one idea is to have a person like this housed in Keene to support existing programs where they are at and help amplify their impact. Mr. Dey said that perhaps the way to have the biggest impact is to help people take advantage of existing programs, for example, Efficiency Vermont for a number of years had people that were called Energy Guides to help people navigate the programs. Mr. Luse noted that CDFR and BFA have similar energy programs. Chair Hansel proposed that if they do another Button Up type workshop, they could have some actual people come in to talk about their experience and challenges. He said he has done four NH Saves

buildings and his question is how they are going to measure success and is unsure of how NH Saves or any of the other groups will share that information. Mr. Roth and Mr. Dey suggested that they have testimonials and case studies on their websites.

Ms. Gaunt shared that she just had a big insulation project done on her house in Vermont, and the firm that did the work had their own expert that was connected with Efficiency Vermont but also an employee of the contracting firm, so perhaps having a program that trains staff on what is available and how to achieve this could be very beneficial. Chair Hansel added that Dr. Shedd has some ideas on this subject as well. Dr. Shedd stated that she recently verified with one of the efficiency folks at Eversource that there is a lot more money available for residential NH Saves work, up to 75% of the project cost up to \$8,000, so pushing that information out is very important in getting more people to look into the program. She said that it is also up to \$8,000 per unit in multiunit rental properties and that is good leverage for landlords to do weatherization work. The entry point is a site tool on the NH Saves website where you enter square footage and some data on energy usage for qualification purposes and there are some other programs if people do not qualify for that audit. She encouraged members to incorporate that into their weatherization program.

In terms of metrics tracking, Ms. Gaunt proposed that it would be helpful to establish more specific Simple, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound (SMART) goals, for example, to state they would like “X” number of buildings per sector and then track those metrics. Dr. Gruber stated that it would be good to get Antioch University New England involved as well as they started Vital Communities years ago. Mr. Nuru stated that the City of Keene is one of the towns that has a tax exemption for renewable energy but many people are unaware of that so it is important to create awareness in the community that they can leverage tax exemption up to the full cost of the program. Chair Hansel agreed. Dr. Gruber suggested they move onto Advocacy.

Ms. Brunner stated that she started brainstorming a list of potential partners within the *Advocacy for Public Transportation and Active Transportation*. She said these are mostly housed within Southwest Region Planning Commission (SWRPC) which coordinates two different groups, one that is in alliance around active transportation called the Monadnock Alliance for Sustainable Transportation (MAST) and one around public transportation called the Monadnock Region Coordinating Council for Community Transportation (MRCC). There is also another group called the Granite State Clean Cities Coalition which is active around biodiesel and electronic vehicles (EVs). She stated that these are strong potential partners. Chair Hansel said he is active with MAST and they are a good partner to help with Advocacy. Dr. Gruber suggested that Pathways for Keene (PFK) is another potential partner.

Chair Hansel said they would need SWRPC to advise on what opportunities are available. Ms. Brunner said they are not an advocacy organization, but if something is happening on a bigger scale, they would inform the City. She said MAST is probably more of the advocacy group. Chair Hansel proposed that they create liaisons with any of these partners to collaborate on any action that might need to be taken. Ms. Brunner said that the ECC can make recommendations to City Council. Vice Chair Gaunt said that KSC is concerned with creating a public transportation

link between Brattleboro and Keene which has been researched extensively and she supports making a recommendation on that.

Mr. Nuru suggested that making transportation accessible to Concord or Manchester is also important and stated that he is speaking from personal experience. Chair Hansel added that has been a focus of MAST for years and it has been challenging but ECC should add their voices to others who have been advocating for that. Ms. Brunner added that these ideas have already been very well studied and the biggest roadblock is that there is such little funding in NH for public transportation although there is a lot of desire for it. Chair Hansel stated that he sees this item as a strategy they will not be able to measure very well and they may not have much impact, however, any opportunity they have to advocate for it they should take it. Dr. Gruber added that the plan for a bipartisan transportation bill will be on the table in the next year or two, and particularly with the energy and climate change, that is when they can seek grant funding. He emphasized that ECC needs to be connected with federal representatives so they can inform the committee on what is coming down the pike. Mr. Dey said there are probably metrics, such as vehicle miles traveled, that are relevant but ECC may not be responsible for tracking them. He said it would be helpful to bring experts and professionals into the City to discuss their successful transportation programs to explain what has worked well and what has not. Mr. Nuru stated that in terms of looking for funding, in other cities where public transportation is working, the City can explore how those cities funded those systems and maybe they can replicate that. Ms. Brunner said that it is mainly funded by tax dollars from the State and NH does not have any. Chair Hansel said Dartmouth University helps fund the systems in the Upper Valley.

Ms. Brunner stated that the *HeatSmart campaign* is aimed at encouraging the installation of renewable thermal technologies for space heating and cooling and for hot water heating through targeted local outreach efforts and bulk discount prices. She said this is a similar concept as the Solarize campaign but for renewable thermal technologies and they have some good local examples they can draw from like Northampton, MA. Vice Chair Gaunt said it would be beneficial to reach out to vendors that are selling renewable fuels for thermal, for example, at KSC they are using 100% refined used vegetable oil to replace their number 6 heating oil and the firm is called Life Cycle Renewables. She asked the firm if they would consider the residential sector, and they said they would if there was a critical mass, so bringing the entrepreneurs together with the need might be a good avenue to pursue. Chair Hansel agreed and added that there is a thermal energy manufacturer here in Keene and they are geared towards bigger buildings but they may be a good ally, as well as other organizations that sell heat pumps and mini splits. Ms. Brunner said when she spoke to Mr. Mason in Northampton, they had a lead volunteer who put in a lot of time and they had a grant to provide a stipend for that position. Any ideas on how they can create a team lead in Keene would be good. She said from start to finish, it is about a year for the campaign. Members suggested AmeriCorps Volunteers or AUNE team Master's projects. Dr. Gruber said they decide one those projects in September and they do the CSIs in the spring and planning in the fall. Ms. Brunner said the timing of the CSI program might not work out with the timing of the HeatSmart campaign, which typically gears up throughout the summer and then runs in the fall. Dr. Gruber agreed and said this area is early in development. Chair Hansel agreed that there is more time to discuss steps on the thermal component. Vice Chair Gaunt suggested bringing stakeholders together to work on this solution.

Chair Hansel stated that there are some organizations working on Advocacy for EVs and Alternative Fuel Vehicles, for example, the Monadnock Sustainability Hub (MSH) that is planning another EV program. Ms. Brunner stated that MSH launched a “Fast Charge Monadnock” campaign that is trying to raise matching funds for grants to bring EV chargers to the region. They have run some events to increase consumer comfort levels for EVs in the community. She stated that they would be a great partner. Chair Hansel said the market is moving this way very rapidly, and General Motors (GM) has made the decision to go all EV by 2035, so fortunately other entities are doing a lot of good work, however, the ECC can create more awareness of this in the community. Mr. Luse pointed out that there is a lack of EV charging infrastructure in the region. Ms. Brunner added that the region is very behind, however, there may be some funding coming in from the Volkswagen settlement for EV charging infrastructure. Mr. Nuru said the federal tax credit for EV infrastructure has been reinstated and is at 30% and some of the local car dealers are interested in having charging stations available for customers. Chair Hansel asked if gas station franchises have bought into EV charging stations at their locations. Mr. Roth said it would make sense to have them with the minimart model gas stations. Mr. Nuru said it is happening in other states, for example, Maine has highway EV charging stations.

Ms. Brunner stated that it sounds like there is more interest in promoting EVs rather than advocacy and this item is more geared towards advocacy at the state and federal policy level; however, they can also aim to do work at the local level to promote EVs more directly as well. Chair Hansel said it could be added as a subcategory. Mr. Roth asked if there is anyone in the Technology and Science committee that would endorse legislation, because perhaps they should talk to local representatives and see if they will sponsor it. Chair Hansel stated that is a good point and Eversource should be invested in this and perhaps they can speak with them about sponsoring this. Mr. Roth added that electric bikes should be added to this as there is a lot of enthusiasm around them in the community.

c. Next steps

Dr. Gruber asked each member to identify their top two focus areas for this year. He proposed that each member should identify their number one and two and then Ms. Brunner can record their choices. Chair Hansel suggested that members raise their hands instead for a number one, or two. Ms. Gaunt suggested a roll call instead.

Chair Hansel ranked EV program as number one, and home energy as number two.

Mr. Roth ranked EV program as number one, and home energy labeling as number two.

Mr. Dey ranked home energy labeling as number one, and weatherization as number two.

Ms. Gaunt ranked home energy labeling as number one, and HeatSmart for number two.

Mr. Luse ranked home energy labeling as number one, and weatherization for number two.

Mr. Nuru ranked EV program as number one, and HeatSmart as number two.

Mr. Oursler ranked advocacy for public transportation as number one, and home energy labeling as number two.

Ms. Brunner stated that home energy labeling, weatherization and advocacy for EVs are the top three. Dr. Gruber stated that those are the areas that ECC should focus on.

5. Request: Letter of Support for KSC Sustainability Initiatives

Ms. Gaunt stated that KSC has very ambitious sustainability goals and have been making great progress, however, they are receiving some pushback from the University System of New Hampshire. She stated that she is asking for a letter of support from ECC that simply states that ECC supports KSC's commitment and that the ECC hopes that KSC will maintain its intended actions to achieve 100% renewable energy by 2030 and a fossil fuel free campus no later than 2050. She said that they are getting pushback from the system to purchase the cheapest type of power and not necessarily the type of power that they have laid out in their sustainable energy plan.

Ms. Brunner said that ECC can make a motion for the committee but not on behalf of the City.

Mr. Roth moved that Chair Hansel and members craft a letter to Keene State College (KSC) stating that the ECC is in support of KSC's commitment and that the ECC hopes that KSC will maintain its intended actions to achieve 100% renewable energy by 2030 and a fossil fuel free campus by 2050, Mr. Luse seconded and the motion was passed unanimously.

Mr. Gruber thanked the committee and Chair Hansel thanked Mr. Gruber for his facilitation.

6. Next Meeting: Wednesday, March 3, 2021

7. Adjourn

Chair Hansel adjourned the meeting at 5:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Ayshah Kassamali-Fox, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by Mari Brunner, Planner