

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AD HOC COMMUNITY POWER COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Friday, April 2, 2021

8:00 AM

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Members Present:

Peter Hansel, Chair
Councilor Mike Giacomo
Ann Shedd
Paul Roth
Dan Belluscio

Staff Present:

Mari Brunner, Planner
Rhett Lamb, Community Development
Director

Members Not Present:

Chair Hansel 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

Chair Hansel called the meeting to order at 8:01 AM. Roll Call was taken.

2) Approval of Minutes – March 5, 2021

Ann Shedd made a motion to approve the minutes of March 5, 2021 as presented. Paul Roth seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

3) Draft City of Keene Community Power Plan
a. Discussion and Additional Comments

Mari Brunner stated they received written comments following the public hearings and mentioned that she sent them to the committee for review. Chair Hansel suggested they share feedback on the comments and asked if the committee felt the comments were sufficiently addressed at the public hearings.

Ann Shedd stated that she felt the comments were adequately addressed. The one question that stood out to her was about why they are offering the default product since it won't significantly impact budgets; however, she understands the principal of keeping people in the program by offering that level of participation. Chair Hansel agreed about keeping as many participants in the group as possible to broaden their base and hopefully get them to participate in a higher level over time. He added that Mr. Roche did a great job explaining that concept in the public hearings.

In the comments, Bob King brought up using locally sourced hydro power and Chair Hansel asked Bob Hayden to speak to that topic. Mr. Hayden reported that he, Bob King and Elizabeth

Dragon have had meetings to discuss the contract between Standard Power and Bob King's hydro facility known as Minnewawa. The contract specifies that the net metering benefits from Minnewawa would be directed to the Community Power program, if the City agrees. Mr. Hayden went on to state that the approximate benefit per year would be in the range of \$20,000. He further explained that, since the contract between Standard Power and Mr. King exists but there is not a plan in place yet, they wanted to start a fund for the Community Power plan using those Minnewawa revenues. He stated they are working on developing that opportunity and the first of the funds would likely be available around the 20th of July. Additionally, Bob King has a variety of renewable energy certificates (RECs) that are produced by his facilities, specifically a re-energized facility in Claremont, NH called Lower Valley Hydro. That facility is new production to the grid and is therefore qualified as a Class 1 REC, and Bob King has mentioned that he would like to make the RECs available at market price to the aggregation. Lastly, Mr. Hayden added that in the future they could think about adding an opportunity for direct donations to the fund through the Community Power website.

Ms. Brunner read a statement in the plan that currently says "all RECs above those required by the RPS are initially expected to be NH Class 1 eligible RECs. The city may seek RECs from a variety of renewable energy sources, and will choose the best combination of environmental benefits and price." She mentioned that the statement is in the plan to indicate their interest in Class 1 renewable energy and she felt there may be some room to add in Class 4. Ms. Brunner informed the committee that they could add language that states eligible RECs could include those generated by facilities within the Monadnock region, to make it abundantly clear that they are not limiting themselves to Class 1.

Dan Belluscio stated he was in support of adding that extra language. Chair Hansel agreed as well and asked Mr. Roche if there would be any issue modifying the plan with that language. Mr. Roche replied that it shouldn't be a problem. He added that there are a few other places in the plan that show Keene's intent to support the growth of renewable energy and local renewable energy, which gives them flexibility; however, it wouldn't hurt to make the language clearer with regards to supporting those local projects.

Mr. Hayden added that members in areas without a Community Power program may have a renewable source they'd like to donate to support Keene, reiterating that flexibility would help in those instances. Mr. Roche replied that they could think about changing the language to New Hampshire instead of Monadnock region. Mr. Hayden stated that, when talking about the Community Power plan, their load and demand for RECs will be much greater than their Greater Monadnock region can initially support. The opportunity to direct those REC purchases to future projects is great in comparison to the available RECs specifically in the Monadnock region.

Dr. Shedd stated there were several comments related to how the Community Power plan will support energy efficiency, noting that those answers are vague since they are still about a year away from program launch. She suggested it may be helpful in reassuring the public to share, in public presentations and discussions, how Community Power programs in other areas have supported energy efficiency. Chair Hansel agreed, stating the more they can emphasize energy efficiency, the better.

Ms. Brunner referred to her notes from the community comments and stated the only other thing she would mention is that there were a few comments on the importance of education and outreach. She stated it's a reminder to make sure they use the program as an opportunity to provide good information surrounding energy efficiency and to look towards building a fund to more directly support those programs in the future.

Chair Hansel mentioned an article in the Keene Sentinel which summarized public comments from the Community Power hearings, and noted that he wished the headline would have been different. He wondered if a letter to the editor might address that concern. Mr. Hayden stated a letter to the editor was a good idea, adding that it's a big subject and would be tough for him personally to answer in only one page. Mr. Roche reported that the consultants worked on a sample response addressing two major points, one being the headline, and the other being the lack of differentiation between local and national and the related costs. He suggested a concise response that emphasizes that the default is going to be cost-competitive and a little greener. Dr. Shedd added that the Sentinel has a 400 word limit on letters to the editor.

Councilor Mike Giacomo stated he felt people really latched onto the extra \$23 per month number with regards to the Keene 100% Local Green option, and asked for verification that those were sample numbers, not established rates. Mr. Roche replied that those were sample numbers based on the general Class 1 market today, which could very well change. Paul Roth added that the article highlighted the lowest cost and then the highest cost and agreed that they should address it to provide some clarification. He mentioned that there was also a good point brought up about 100% not being 100% renewable energy but rather 100% above what the current PUC level is, which they also latched onto. Chair Hansel asked that Ms. Brunner and Mr. Roche send their thoughts regarding all this to him and he will try to craft a concise response.

Chair Hansel asked what percentage the \$23 equates to on the electricity bill. Mr. Roche stated he will calculate that and get back to him. Chair Hansel added that in retrospect percentages might have been better to use than dollars. Mr. Hayden stated the PUC usually uses an average bill of 750 kilowatt hours per month.

Chair Hansel then invited members of the public to comment.

Bob King thanked everyone for the opportunity to comment and asked if it was too late to submit written comments, and inquired how he could go about doing so. Ms. Brunner replied that he can send questions and comments to the email communitydevelopment@ci.keene.nh.us, or through the Keene Community Power website, and the comments will be passed on to the committee. She added that comments can still be submitted after the committee's vote because the plan still needs to go to City Council for review and another public hearing.

Mr. King mentioned that in the upcoming week Executive Councilor Cinde Warmington and the Sentinel will be touring the Minnewawa Hydro facility. He suggested the Community Power team could send a representative to the tour to speak to the Sentinel and maybe re-explain some things. Lastly, he added that the plan language supports local renewable energy but it sounds like the accepted solution is to purchase RECs. Mr. King understood that the idea of renewable energy was to buy renewable kilowatt hours, not just RECs, and wondered if the plan could better reflect that priority. Mr. Roche replied that for the community to make any claims about using renewable energy they have to purchase and retire a REC, because all electrons go on the grid and they can't pick and choose which they want. As a result, they have to buy the electrons and the certificates, which allow them to make the claims that they used green electrons. He added that it's important to note that, at least starting off, they are going to be working with suppliers who will mostly be doing unbundled RECs. The electrons from those facilities are on their electricity grid, which is very different than unbundled RECs from places like Texas, where the electrons can't even get to their grid. Mr. Roche stated that contracting for both the power and the RECs from a facility can definitely be a goal in the future.

Chair Hansel asked if the alternative would be a power purchase agreement with a specific site as opposed to buying RECs. Mr. Roche answered yes, the supplier would put together a contract and they would need an agreement. Mr. Hayden stated that for a power purchase agreement that included both power and the associated RECs, they would be inclined to contract a power purchase agreement that would become part of the power stack, along with a supplier that they would use for the balance of power. He gave the example of 40 megawatts of solar which would take hundreds of acres and would only produce about one-third of the power needed for Keene residents, businesses and municipal buildings. He added it would be a great impact in multiple ways, both load, space and power.

Mr. King asked if the Community Power plan, as currently written, would allow for Bob Hayden's aforementioned scenario. Mr. Hayden replied that the plan doesn't preclude it, and he suggested that over the next 5 years he may have projects similar to this but they may not all be in Keene. Chair Hansel stated he thinks there's enough flexibility in the plan to allow that kind of addition in the future.

b. Board Deliberation

Ms. Brunner stated that if the committee feels like the plan is ready to send to City Council and that all comments have been addressed and incorporated, then they can move forward with that. They can also choose to have more time and schedule another meeting for continued discussion.

Mr. Belluscio stated given the language change they discussed and that they know there are more comments that will be coming in, it would be good to allow for more time and a second meeting to make sure they cover everything.

Dr. Shedd agreed that they have time given the legislative process around this program, and felt they should take that time to incorporate and review comments and modifications as needed, and then vote at a future meeting.

Councilor Mike Giacomo stated he is quite happy with the plan now, but if they have time to make it better, then he agrees with doing that. Paul Roth agreed and stated they need to be aware of the public comment and take as much of that in as they can, and emphasize it in their changes.

Ms. Brunner suggested that they don't push the meeting out too far because staff would like to send the plan to the PUC for their review sooner rather than later to get that process started. Mr. Roth asked about the public notice period and Ms. Brunner responded that they have 24 hours to post the meeting. Short discussion ensued and the committee decided to meet again on Thursday, April 8, 2021 at 8:00AM.

c. Next Steps for Plan Adoption and Program Launch

Ms. Brunner stated once they approve the plan they will introduce it to the City Council as well as send the draft to the PUC to start review. At the same time, the PUC rulemaking process will need to happen. Ms. Brunner stated the timeline for the program launch will be near the end of 2021 or beginning of 2022.

Chair Hansel asked if they can send the plan to the PUC before the City Council adopts it. Mr. Hayden replied that there are no rules on that yet and from what he's heard the idea is to move as promptly as possible. Mr. Roche added that putting the plan in front of legislators and the PUC to show that they are ready can only help move the process along.

4) Update on status of HB 315, “Relative to the aggregation of electric customers”

Mr. Hayden stated that HB 315 will be an extremely unique bill, in that it will be the only bill that comes out of the house ST&E committee that had any work done on it, and it will be the only bill that has bipartisan support when it goes to the Senate. Based on those factors they are hoping the bill gets fast tracked, which would mean the Senate could sign on it in late May or early June, and then get it to the Governor. Mr. Hayden mentioned that the Governor seems to be supportive of helping community power proliferate. He added that the state budget is likely to pass with a change to the PUC becoming the energy department, which could be an interesting element to the timeline.

Chair Hansel asked how the timeline would be impacted if the bill doesn't fast track. Mr. Hayden stated the worst case timeline would be the bill not being signed by the Governor and being sent back to rulemaking based on the original law. If the Governor does sign the bill but takes time doing so, they would likely see it in mid to late August, and then the PUC rulemaking could commence. Mr. Hayden stated he was unsure whether or not the PUC will start that process immediately, but if completed by the end of 2021 they could end up launching the program in spring of 2022.

Mr. Roche added that there has already been a letter from the governor urging expediency on the amendment, so he is hopeful the best case timeline will occur.

5) New Business

There was no new business. Mr. Hayden added that if they want to talk about future big projects like those mentioned by Bob King, he's happy to do so at the next meeting.

6) Next Meeting – Date to be Determined

Chair Hansel reminded everyone that the next meeting will be on April 8, 2021 at 8:00 AM.

7) Adjourn

Chair Hansel adjourned the meeting at 8:54 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Nicole Cullinane, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Mari Brunner, Planner

Additional edits by,
Katie Kibler, Clerk's Office