

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ENERGY AND CLIMATE COMMITTEE – RETREAT
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, March 15, 2022

12:00 PM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Peter Hansel, Chair
Zach Luse, Vice Chair
Councilor Raleigh Ormerod
Councilor Bryan Lake
Jake Pipp
Jude Nuru
Diana Duffy (via Zoom)
Beth Campbell
Linsey Edmunds
Clair Oursler, Alternate

Staff Present:

Mari Brunner, Senior Planner
Chris Cusack, Contract Planner

Members Not Present:

Paul Roth

1) Welcome and Introductions

Chair Hansel called the meeting to order at 12:04 PM. He introduced the Energy and Climate Committee's history, mission, and work. Members introduced themselves.

2) State of the Committee

A) Review of Energy Plan

Mari Brunner, Senior Planner, stated that an overview of the Energy Plan is in the agenda packet. She continued that it includes the Energy Plan's vision, which restates the goals the City Council adopted: to transition the whole Keene community to renewable electricity by 2030, and renewable energy for thermal (cooling and heating) and energy use for transportation by 2050. In January of 2019, the City Council adopted these goals asked the ECC to work with staff to come up with a plan to achieve those goals. That two-year process resulted in the Keene Energy Plan. The full plan is about 100 pages, but can be summarized by looking at the pathways. It is split into three sections: Electricity, Thermal Energy, and Transportation Energy. The framework they used was to first focus on reducing the overall energy use, through energy conservation and efficiency. The second piece of the framework was to switch as much as possible to generating renewable energy from local sources. The third piece was to meet the remaining demand that

cannot be met with local energy by purchasing it elsewhere. An example in the electricity grid is that if they cannot produce all of the energy locally, which is the case, then they would purchase renewable electricity from the grid, generated outside of the Monadnock region. The last piece was to focus on outreach, education, and “advocacy and communications,” which means taking a role in the State’s legislative process when there are policies that affect Keene’s ability to switch to renewable energy and pursue efficiency. It means paying attention to what is happening at the State level so they can weigh in regarding policies or programs that would affect Keene.

Ms. Brunner stated that the last two pages of the agenda packet include Table 5.1 from the plan, which identifies priority implementation strategies. They organized the 17 identified strategies by category. The strategies that relate to Energy Efficiency include a benchmarking program, home energy and weatherization programs, promoting Complete Streets and the City Express Bus and multimodal transportation, and making sure they pay attention to what is happening at the State level with respect to policies around promoting multimodal and alternative forms of transportation.

She continued that under Renewable Energy is the Community Power Program, which allows the City to go out to bid for the electricity supply for all of its residents, so Keene residents can benefit from the City’s collective buying power. It is a little more complicated than that, but that is a brief explanation. The City could also choose to incorporate more renewable energy into that supply. The City’s goal is to go above and beyond the renewable energy content in the default electricity supply, while also remaining cost competitive. The Community Power Program has big potential to impact the renewable electricity goal in particular. This also includes the option to do a virtual power purchase agreement as part of the Community Power Program. Other renewable energy strategies include a pilot battery storage program, renewable energy loans, and solar- and EV-ready guidelines, documents for the community at large to have, to help them if they want to install solar or EV charging stations or purchase electric vehicles.

Ms. Brunner continued that the final category of strategies is “fuel switching.” One strategy is the Heat Smart Campaign, similar to the Solarize Campaign, a community effort to promote solar during a specific period of time. The Heat Smart Campaign would promote the installation of renewable thermal technologies, and specifically mini-splits or air source heat pumps. Other strategies in this category are to have public charging stations for electric vehicles; and to promote electric busses, which is the purview of the Keene School District and Home Healthcare Hospice and Community Services, which runs the City Express program. That strategy focuses on working with those organizations to see if they are able and willing to pilot an electric bus or switch their fleet of busses to electric. Other strategies are advocacy for electric vehicles and alternative fuel vehicles, and commissioning a study to assess the potential for a renewable district heating system in Keene.

B) Progress Over the Past Year

Ms. Brunner stated that the City has made some headway with some of those strategies, in part due to the ECC's work. At the time of last year's ECC retreat via Zoom, with the passage of the Energy Plan just a couple months prior, the ECC decided to form work groups to start implementing some strategies. The ECC initially decided to focus the work groups on weatherization (which now also includes energy efficiency), electric vehicles, and home energy labeling (working with Northeast Energy Efficiency Partnership, NEEP), and later added a fourth work group for community solar. The work groups have made good progress. In addition, the City had a Keene State College (KSC) intern work on the first draft of the solar- and EV-ready guidelines. Councilor Lake is updating those. The City also worked with a UNH Sustainability Institute fellow last summer to start a benchmarking program. That fellow did a lot of the groundwork for the City but the City is not yet at the point of actually benchmarking the City facilities. The fellow's final report gave the City some good next steps.

Ms. Brunner continued that the City had an Ad Hoc Community Power Committee, for about a year, which created a Community Power Plan. The City Council adopted that plan but cannot launch a program until the State PUC approves the plan and develops rules for that program.

Chair Hansel asked for questions. Ms. Duffy stated that that is a wonderful and ambitious laundry list. She asked if it has been prioritized yet or if there is a plan of attack, or if that is what they are here today to figure out. Chair Hansel replied that the ECC needs to reassess what they are doing and figure out the priorities for going forward.

Ms. Brunner stated that the table she was reading from includes a timeframe, saying whether a strategy is near, mid, or long term. She continued that it also gives an idea of the lead/who would be responsible for each strategy. Last year they narrowed the list down by taking strategies off the list if someone else was the lead, so the committee was looking at a shorter list of 6 to 8 strategies and narrowed it down from there.

3) SWOT Analysis – Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats

Chair Hansel stated that Chris Cusack volunteered to lead the SWOT analysis.

Chris Cusack stated that he is a Contract Planner, working here temporarily. He continued that Mari Brunner moved up to Senior Planner and the City just hired a new Planner and are in the process of hiring a new Community Development Director.

Mr. Cusack began by asking what the ECC's strengths are. What would they boast about? He continued that he will write down the ideas that people toss out. ECC members gave the following answers:

- Early adopters with ICLEI

- Involved local citizenry who push the ECC and help the ECC, and respond when the ECC asks for support
- Strong support from City staff and City Council
- Leadership from the City, and passion
- Keene is a leader across the state, first city to sign to Community Power
- Deep, varied expertise on this team, regarding the environment and energy
- ECC members who are committed and doing the work in work groups. Some have said the ECC is a model of what a City committee can do.
- ECC members “walk the talk.” They are not just “interested” in energy and climate issues; they take action.
- Local media willing to cover these kinds of issues, such as Community Power Program getting front page articles

Mr. Cusack asked what the ECC’s weaknesses are. What can be improved? ECC members gave the following answers:

- The limitations of being a public body and having to operate within the rules and limitations that come with that. It slows things down when you cannot have meetings on the fly or make decisions over email, or when they cannot meet due to lack of quorum.
- Some people want/need to participate remotely, and the meetings are in person again
- The global pandemic has affected participation
- Limited resources, limited staff time, limited money
- ECC has been blessed to have the amount of staff time they have had. If that changed, what would happen?
- Advocacy for the City to add a full-time or part-time Sustainability Officer has not worked
- ECC is all-volunteer; volunteers have limited time

Ms. Campbell asked about data and research. How much are they prioritizing those, based on what has proven effective in other municipalities? How does the ECC come to decisions about priorities? Do they address the low-hanging fruit because it is economically viable, or if it is proven to have a big energy impact? Those are questions not to answer now, but to think about. Chair Hansel replied that those questions are next on the agenda, after the break.

Bruce Norlund replied to Ms. Campbell’s questions, stating that each ECC members has other connections and contacts that contributes to the overall effectiveness of the ECC. He gave examples.

The list of the ECC’s weaknesses continued:

- Sometimes what happens in Concord works against the ECC’s efforts. It requires the ECC to stay on its toes, to stay aware of what is happening and support energy policy

- Keene is no longer on the leading edge. E.g. the work groups are looking to case studies from other cities, to see how to implement strategies.
- Landscape constraints in Keene, regarding Community Power. Land is not very available for many sources of renewable energy. Not a lot of wind or undeveloped land.

Mr. Cusack asked what the opportunities are. What are favorable situations now, or that they foresee in the future? What are they most hopeful about? ECC members gave the following answers:

- Prices of fossil fuels are going up and supply is going down. A lot of market forces are driving that. It creates more opportunity for solar and other alternative energies.
- A recent bill passed that makes EV infrastructure funds available to NH. Keene should ask for a seat at the table as these plans develop.
- In the past couple weeks, inquiries about EVs have about doubled. Rising fossil fuel costs drive the interest in EVs.
- The concept of having control over your own energy generation is gaining ground in academia and industry.
- The current global political situation is currently causing an interest in local energy generation and not relying on imports. This interest might not last. Need to take advantage of it.
- There are federal, state, and local opportunities
- Grants are available for the ECC to apply for
- ECC has a big opportunity to increase awareness of its work and accomplishments. Need to do this more.
- People are talking about renewable energy more than ever, due to global politics, the COVID-19 pandemic and funding, and other factors. For example, school boards are talking about improving HVAC systems, which they might not have done 10 years ago. There are more opportunities for conversations, as people think and talk about energy more.
- The City offering tax exemptions (abatements?) to entities trying to switch to solar or other renewable energy. They need to raise awareness of this opportunity.
- Chamber of Commerce is doing a promoting the region initiative, and have hired a consultant to help brand the Monadnock region. Needs more focus on energy, sustainability, etc. That should be a highlight of the region.

Mr. Cusack asked what the threats are. What are the unfavorable situations that are potentially damaging to the ECC's mission? What obstacles do they face? The ECC gave the following answers:

- Keene should look beyond just being #1 in NH. Keene should strive to be a leader in the region/this part of New England, as people are moving here from out of state. Need to look more regionally for benchmarking.

- State funding. NH has less funding than surrounding states and it seems to be always under attack, especially for energy programs.
- Project costs. Electric vehicles, solar panels, etc., are expensive up front. Difficult for people to afford, especially since federal incentives have tapered or disappeared
- Inflation
- Supply issues with selenium. Need more research into what it takes to make a battery or solar panel.
- NH's complex legislation regarding how these programs should be deployed
- NH's lack of incentives, compared to nearby states'
- Lack of understanding and misinformation, among the public, of the ECC's work and the issues. This includes some pushback due the lack of understanding – Eversource raised its rates and some people think the ECC had something to do with it.
- Lack of stability and affordable housing, and rising costs of living, cause people to fear the costs of switching to renewable energy.

Mr. Cusack stated that he will put all of this together and look for themes and threads, as a draft, and people can comment on it and edit it. Then they can discuss, where do they go from here?

Chair Hansel called for a five-minute break.

4) Priorities for 2022-2022

A) What are our goals for the upcoming year? How should they be prioritized?

When the meeting resumed, Chair Hansel stated that Mr. Luse will lead them through what he views as some priorities for the ECC.

Mr. Luse stated that the question is what the ECC wants to accomplish over the next year or two. He continued that they can figure out the “how” in the next step. What are the big things they want to focus on? On the list of strategies that Ms. Brunner was referring to earlier, the priorities that the ECC had previously identified say “ECC” next to them. They do not necessarily need to stick to these. The Heat Smart Campaign was something they had wanted to look at in the one-to-two-year timeframe, as well as advocacy for EVs and alternative fuel vehicles, advocacy for public transportation and active transportation, and weatherization. The ECC's current work groups reflect these. Weatherization was stalled due to the lack of incentives and funding over the last couple years.

Chair Hansel stated that the ECC took over another one, which was slated for the City – home energy labeling.

Mr. Luse stated that the goal is to figure out which items to focus on in the next one to two years. The Heatsmart Campaign is one they did not focus on at all, which was a one- to two-year goal last time, so he would add that as a priority for the next couple years. Chair Hansel agreed.

Ms. Duffy asked how priorities are determined, generally. She asked if there are data behind how these decisions are made. Mr. Luse replied that this list came out of the process where they talked about the impact [of the strategies] and about what the ECC could actually accomplish. They did that process and are now reassessing where they are at and whether they want to move priorities around on the list, considering impact versus feasibility.

Ms. Brunner offered to write more ideas on the flip chart. ECC members gave the following answers.

- Public EV charging stations, which would have momentum now
- Community Solar
- Home Energy Labeling needs a discussion at some point.
- Do they want to keep the four work groups as priorities over the next couple years? If they add in the Heatsmart Campaign, they basically have the current four work groups.
- Is there anything in the Energy Plan that is not currently in the list of priorities but should be?
 - Education/Outreach/Advocacy category, which last year they glazed over because it is so general.
 - Benchmarking, which was assigned to the City, not the ECC.

Ms. Brunner stated that benchmarking has stalled a bit. She continued that the UNH fellow did an excellent job with the report, setting the City up to take the next steps, but the City is not quite ready yet, on the staff side, to take on benchmarking. The City needs to do benchmarking internally before they start asking others to do it, so the City will be able to answer others' questions about benchmarking and help others to do it. Discussion continued, and ECC members spoke to the importance of benchmarking still being up on the list, and ideas for how to tackle this, such as having an entity other than the City take the lead on a benchmarking program and then share what they learn with others. There is also an IT component to figure out and some IT barriers that might take a couple years. Ms. Brunner replied yes, a problem they ran into was not being able to get the needed data. It is both a strength and weakness of the City that each individual department manages its own budget, although there is a centralized budgeting process. A big challenge of the benchmarking program was getting the data they needed to input into the Energy Star tool. The limitations of the Energy Star tool itself was another weakness and staff has not had time to research the other options. She continued that a non-profit could take on a benchmarking program.

ECC gave more ideas about priorities:

- Renewable energy loans and/or conservation loans. With the recent success of the City-initiated "21 in 21" program, there is awareness of this, and maybe opportunities to get something going. The ECC could help the City do some research on what that type of program could look like or how other communities are doing it and bring a recommendation forward to staff or the City Council.

- Potentially expanding the promotion of EVs and EV charging stations to include the City's fleet and/or school busses (First Student)

Ms. Brunner stated that a barrier with First Student is staff does not know who to contact at the company at the local level. She continued that however, this would be a great opportunity, as First Student has done electric school busses in other states. The reason they have not done it in NH may be tied to the lack of incentives and lack of programs in NH. The ECC's goal has been to reach out to First Student. If anyone has a contact there, that would be great.

Chair Hansel stated that the ECC should maintain an awareness of what other groups are doing similar work, and decide whether the ECC should take the work on itself, or assist or monitor the other group. For example, John Kondos has been doing a lot with bus electrification programs. The ECC could perhaps publicize, monitor, or offer to help other groups like this.

Mr. Nuru stated that the Keene School District is independent from the City, but in other places where the school district and municipality are meshed, they budget for busses. The ECC could look at how it is working elsewhere. There is a company that has piloted electric school busses in other states, including Maine.

Councilor Lake stated that it was great to have Public Works Director Kürt Blomquist here to talk with the ECC, and he thinks they should invite him back. He continued that he is a great resource, and considers everything involved with getting EVs in the city. Others agreed. Discussion continued about electric busses, the KSD and its budget, First Student, the ECC's role, incentives, and so on and so forth.

ECC members' other thoughts about priorities included the following:

- Expand the promotion of EVs to include electric equipment as well, such as lawn mowers, leaf blowers, and more.
- What about the fleet at KSC, Cheshire Medical Center, and other entities? Is the ECC only interested in encouraging private citizens to purchase EVs for their personal use? Why or why not?
- There are plans across the country to increase EV infrastructure. Rt. 101 is an identified corridor of importance. What will the State do for EV infrastructure? How can Keene utilize that to expand fleets in other ways?
- Recent bills have been introduced about compost. Landfills are sources of emissions. Can the ECC track what is happening at the State level about compost?

5) **Culminating Questions**

- A) **What should the ECC start doing?**
- B) **What should the ECC stop doing?**
- C) **What should the ECC keep doing?**

Mr. Luse stated that they need to think about where the ECC can have the biggest impact and what they can actually achieve. He continued that it sounds like the EV work group should be broadening its focus a bit, to look at how they can impact bussing, charging infrastructure, electrical equipment like lawnmowers and snow blowers, and so on and so forth.

Chair Hansel stated that there are many conversations around the country about EVs right now. He continued that in that sense, the ECC does not necessarily need to promote it, but there are other ways they can contribute to the whole discussion. They could do public education about these other forms of energy use that could be electrified, or about what other groups are doing and what is being discovered about fleets and school busses. The work group could get the information together and out to the public.

Mr. Norlund stated that electric dump trucks are coming, and electric school busses are available. He continued that they should take advantage of this and promote it.

Ms. Brunner stated that compost is not in the Energy Plan, so she did not include it, because the ECC's focus is on advancing the strategies for the goals of the Energy Plan. She asked if that is a correct assumption, and stated that she sees a lot of nodding heads. She continued that there are four work groups that have been meeting, and one of the things they wanted to get out of the retreat today was a decision about whether the work groups would continue with those four topics, or if they should drop one of those work groups and add a new one, and so on and so forth. She put a check mark next to EV, because it sounds like that work group has lots to discuss and lots of passion, excitement, and ideas for the future.

Ms. Brunner stated that the weatherization/energy efficiency work group has been quite active this year. She asked how the ECC feels about continuing that group. The work group has done, for example, Keene Energy Week, and has talked about doing a program with window dressers. Chair Hansel replied that he thinks it is one of the most important work groups. Not wasting energy is a key goal.

Ms. Brunner stated that something new that they have not had, but that she has heard a lot of people say is important, is education and outreach. She asked if people think that should be its own work group. Several ECC members replied yes, and spoke about how education about EVs, and Keene Energy Week, could fall under this. A task of this work group could be to talk with the other work groups, regarding what they want the public to know about.

Ms. Brunner stated that the home energy labeling work group lost steam because all of its members resigned, but there are some volunteers still in that work group. Should the ECC continue this work group? They were working on creating a pilot home energy labeling program. It is a heavy lift for a small group of volunteers, is the feedback she received from them. Do any ECC members want to take the lead on this?

Ms. Campbell replied that the building industry, which she is a part of, frequently relies on third party certification, such as Energy Star for homes or the HERS Index. She continued that it would be a concern to her to have a small group reinventing the home label, when there are nationally recognized labels available, but perhaps she is misunderstanding the point.

Ms. Brunner replied that that is one of the challenges with this one; they found that it is very difficult to explain. She continued that in a nutshell, it would take information from all those third parties and put it on a label that would be posted when a house or apartment goes up for sale or rent. The work group was looking at using an online model that would either pull in data from the HERS Index or Home Energy Score or elsewhere, or, if a person had not participated in any of those they could fill out a questionnaire online and it models what your energy use might be. It would not be as accurate as doing a Home Energy Score or HERS rating, but it would give something. The idea would be that once you finish you get a label that compares apples to apples. It would not be based on how you use your home, but the actual way the home is set up.

Ms. Campbell replied that her experience in the home building industry is that self-reporting does not carry much weight, in terms of how much one might actually be able to sell their home for, compared to third party certification.

Ms. Brunner stated that she is sensing that the ECC might not want to continue the home energy labeling work group. Chair Hansel asked if they should fold it into the weatherization work group. Others agreed. Brief discussion continued about the topic. The leader of the weatherization work group expressed that the group might not have the time to discuss/work on home energy labeling, given all their other work. Mr. Nuru suggested they move the topic to the education and outreach work group. Others spoke against including home energy labeling as a priority, citing lack of community support. Chair Hansel suggested they drop this from the priority list for now and revisit it in the future, and that they reach out to volunteers from the home energy labeling work group to acknowledge their efforts and ask if they would like to join a different work group.

Ms. Brunner stated that the community solar work group has also been active. She asked if the ECC wants it to continue, or if they feel like it is losing steam. Mr. Nuru spoke in favor of continuing it. Chair Hansel agreed.

Ms. Brunner stated that the two new topics are home energy loans and the HeatSmart Campaign. Those would be new work groups. She asked if anyone feels strongly about those and wants to take the lead on them. Ms. Campbell replied that she is interested, and spoke of how getting one company to sign on to solar might be the equivalent of 10 single-family households. Chair Hansel agreed that that would be a worthwhile work group, and he is interested in participating. Others who are not ECC members may be interested in participating as well.

Ms. Brunner asked if she can cross off the HeatSmart Campaign, or if anyone is excited to lead it. Chair Hansel replied that he would recommend putting it off for a year in order for the ECC

to make a good decision on it, but they could schedule a meeting with someone who could tell them more about HeatSmart Campaigns that have been successful elsewhere. Ms. Brunner replied that maybe someone from Northampton, MA, could share their experiences.

Mr. Luse stated that he thinks benchmarking is an important one, for measuring progress. He continued that he does not know if a work group could move that forward or not, or if there are other things the ECC could do to help. Ms. Duffy replied that she did a lot of benchmarking for KSC. She continued that she wonders if she would be allowed, and if it would be helpful, for her to educate the committee about where they are, what they want to learn, and how what they want to learn can inform how they want to help the community or the City Council. Since many ECC members are new, they need to get oriented. She would be happy to help. Chair Hansel replied that would be great. He continued that the ECC needs to educate themselves more, over the next year, before they decide whether to have a separate work group. If Ms. Duffy or someone from another community wants to come talk to the ECC, that would be great. Ms. Duffy asked if she can connect with Ms. Brunner to get the benchmarking background. Chair Hansel replied yes.

Mr. Luse stated that lastly, they need to look at work group membership, and who wants to be in which groups. Discussion ensued and ECC members decided which work groups to participate in. Chair Hansel stated that each work group can only have up to five ECC members so they do not form a quorum of the ECC. Ms. Brunner reminded everyone that the work groups are actually “research groups” and not able to act on their own, due to the fact that the ECC is a public body. Everything they do and decide has to take place in the full committee setting at a regular ECC meeting that is publically noticed. She continued that they cannot have a quorum of ECC members at a work group meeting, unless it is publically noticed, with the public invited to attend, with a minute-taker and an agenda posted at least 24 hours in advance, and so on and so forth. Chair Hansel asked if work group members who are not members of the ECC are counted as part of the quorum. Ms. Brunner replied no.

Chair Hansel stated that they did great work at this retreat, and focused their attention where he thinks they can. He looks forward to the education and outreach part of it, and getting more information out to the public. That is a way the ECC can really make an impact.

6) Monadnock Earth Festival

Ms. Brunner stated that right after the March meeting, staff learned that the Monadnock Earth Festival is happening in person this year. She continued that in past years, the ECC has tabled at this event. They need to know, before the April ECC meeting, whether the ECC wants to table this year, so they can reserve a spot and prepare. It is April 23 from 12 to 4 PM. Volunteers would be needed for set-up from 11 AM to 12 PM, during the actual event from 12 to 4 PM, and for break down from 4 to 5 PM. She asked if anyone is willing and able to volunteer for that. Discussion ensued about what the ECC could do. Mr. Norlund stated that he will volunteer for the whole day. Mr. Oursler stated that he will volunteer, too. Chair Hansel stated that those who

are able to volunteer should get together to plan what to have at the table and figure out the details. Ms. Brunner stated that she will send the committee a volunteer sign-up sheet.

7) **Wrap-up and Next Steps**

Mr. Nuru stated that he has found Ms. Brunner's support of the work groups very helpful. He asked if the new Planner will be helping with that. Ms. Brunner replied that Mr. Cusack is here through the end of April, at least, and will be able to help out through then. She continued that after that, there will not be staff support for the work groups.

Chair Hansel thanked everyone for their work today. He continued that he will be away for the regularly scheduled April meeting, and hopes that Mr. Luse can chair it.

8) **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Hansel adjourned the meeting at 2:17 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Christopher Cusack, Contract Planner