

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ENERGY AND CLIMATE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, April 3, 2024

8:00 AM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Zach Luse, Chair
Paul Roth, Vice Chair
Councilor Bryan Lake
Jude Nuru
Lisa Maxfield
Jake Pipp (arrived late)
Charles Redfern, Alternate
Rowland Russell, Alternate

Staff Present:

Megan Fortson, Planning Technician

Members Not Present:

Diana Duffy
Clair Oursler
Michael Winograd
Kenneth Swymer

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Zach Luse called the meeting to order at 8:00 AM. Mr. Pipp arrived shortly after roll call.

2) Approval of Minutes

Councilor Bryan Lake moved to approve the minutes from the prior meeting. Mr. Jude Nuru seconded the motion and with all in favor, the minutes from March 6, 2024, were approved and accepted.

3) ECC Work Group Reports Outs

A) Community Solar

Mr. Nuru shared that the community solar work group met on the 13th of March. As previously discussed, they were assessing the Parks and Recreation Building and the Transfer Station as potential sites for solar. They were finally able to get in touch with City staff and learned that neither site has the capacity to hold solar. They hinted of another location where they are trying to evaluate potential capacity. Other potential locations were rooftops that require significant

upgrades in order to support the solar array. Mr. Nuru did not think that kind of upgrade is something they will want to pursue.

Mr. Nuru shared they learned there is a businessman in Keene who is hoping to develop several community solar farms in the Monadnock region with Keene likely to be a first choice. They have sent an invitation to the gentleman to join the next meeting so they can learn more about this program rollout.

Lastly, they discussed and decided to increase publicity around the solar coaching program and to promote the solar garden concept. They plan to reach out to the Keene Sentinel to request a professional story. Mr. Nuru shared that the first one has started in Jaffrey and there are several other developers looking to take advantage of House Bill 281, which removed the restrictions among municipalities. Chair Luse thanked Mr. Nuru for his update.

Mr. Charles Redfern wanted to comment on the businessman who is wanting to add solar farms. He shared that there is another local gentleman wanting to energize his own business, but also tie it in so the community can use the excess power. He shared that this person recently came before the Zoning Board, who shot down his idea. His plan had included a solar farm as well as EV charging station, primarily for the use of his employees. Mr. Redfern understood that upon being denied, the gentleman turned to the ECC committee, who also declined support.

Chair Luse explained that it was not a matter of declining support. Their reason to not get involved was based on the fact that there was a zoning issue and it was not the ECC's place to speak up on zoning issues. He went on to explain that the zoning prevented a public charging station in that particular location.

Mr. Redfern responded that it seemed to him that if the ECC is going to encourage the use of solar energy in the city, barriers such as zoning need to be considerate of community goals. He believed that the committee ought to at least encourage City Staff to modify the zoning ordinance to account modern technologies that lead to a cleaner environment.

Chair Luse explained that the city has been working on removing barriers and have also been looking at permitting issues, like the cost permitting related to the installation of EV rechargers as well as how does a public charging station get zoned. He was not sure the last piece was even a city issue and thought that may fall under the state's purview.

Ms. Megan Fortson shared that she knows the project never made it to the Planning Board because before one can go before the Planning Board, the project must first be in compliance with zoning. She confirmed Mr. Luse's statement saying that the city has been looking at building permit fees and evaluating the way in which permit fees are currently calculated, which is based on the value of the proposed work. Installing a higher level-charger that costs more money would be more expensive for an applicant because of the higher cost of the EV charger. She explained that the

city has been doing an assessment of the way that they calculate the building permit fees in an effort to at least remove that as a barrier.

Mr. Redfern shared that it was his understanding that the gentleman was planning to revise his plan and resubmit. Mr. Redfern was hopeful that the rezoning regulations would take effect prior to his resubmission.

Ms. Fortson explained that she was not sure what the status of the rezoning was, but if it were to be a change on the part of the city, it would likely be an ordinance change that would have to go before the Joint Planning Board & Planning, Licenses, & Development Committee and the City Council.

Chair Luse stated if the zoning is something the city needs advice on or this particular businessperson needs support on, so long as it is not related to a specific zoning issue, the committee can provide a recommendation. Mr. Redfern thanked Chair Luse.

Councilor Ed Haas asked if the committee could send a generic letter of support for future changes in zoning to the City Council to accommodate these things rather than waiting on a submission. Ms. Fortson said she would have to follow up with staff to see what the process is, but she believed the time to do that would be if an ordinance was going through the approval process. Mr. Paul Roth added that it is hard to make a general statement without knowing the specifics of the issue at hand.

Chair Luse said he believed that if the gentleman was not doing the public fueling station and had kept it private, he did not believe there would have been an issue.

Mr. Rowland Russel said Mr. Redfern's suggestion was well taken and suggested that maybe a broader level of input would be to inform the next Comprehensive Master Plan and look at where and how that is being discussed in the Master Plan, which then is the umbrella over policy.

B) Grants, Fundraising, and Partnerships

Mr. Redfern apologized to the group explaining that due to a number of personal issues that came up, he did not get the report together. He offered to have it ready for next month.

C) Education and Outreach

Chair Luse shared that the education and outreach group has been focused on Earth Day. He believed he still owed a QR code for the newsletter, but he said everything else is all set with materials. Ms. Lisa Maxfield said Carolyn will also be picking some materials up today. She asked Ms. Fortson about the logistics of getting the table for the event stating that she could pick it up on the Friday before, but was not sure how to get it back to Ms. Fortson given the weekend and that Ms. Maxfield works on Mondays. Ms. Maxfield stated she has a table at home and offered to use her own table, which Ms. Fortson saw no issue with. Ms. Fortson added that she has handouts

for the Earth Day as well as tabletop easels, none of which are time sensitive for pickup or return. Ms. Maxfield offered to bring a tent. Ms. Fortson offered to follow up with Community Development Staff to see if the department's tent had a City seal on it or not.

Chair Luse shared that they still needed people to volunteer and sign up. Ms. Maxfield offered to be there the whole time due to the numerous conflicts and uncertainties other members have with the date of the Earth Fest. Members who have tentative conflicts stated that should their plans change or things work out such that they are free, they will sign up for slots to help. Councilor Haas shared that he had not yet signed up for any slots, but would be there. Ms. Maxfield shared that Mr. Bob Hayden will also be coming.

D) Legislative Tracking

Councilor Bryan Lake shared that Mr. Mike Kowalczyk, MSK Consulting, had done a good job of laying groundwork for getting the workgroup pros and cons for different ways they could go about doing home energy labeling. He added that they had chatted briefly about trying to get a couple more people involved to have a better conversation next month. He is hopeful there will be more to come on that, but there is definitely some different paths the workgroup could take.

Councilor Lake shared that their workgroup has also had some scheduling and technical issues, which is why they were not able to get anything on the work group report-out form. He is hoping that will start to go a little smoother. He is still learning teams and Mr. Jake Pipp was not even able to join the meeting, resulting in separate conversations. One of the things he and Mr. Pipp discussed was seeing if there was a way to try and give some updates throughout the month, given the number of bills they are tracking and how quickly things have been moving.

He shared that it was hard to give a good update for where things are now because a couple of the bills were in one committee as of the last meeting and since then, have received a passing vote, moved on to the next step and already had hearings. He added that he did not have any time to write letters of support or even let the group know that a letter of support might be something they want to do. He is not sure what they can do from a communication standpoint given NH RSA 91-A, but plans to reach out to the City Attorney to see if an update message would be acceptable.

Chair Luse explained that in the past, when he has sent Ms. Mari Brunner updates, she typically would send an email out to the whole group. He believed it was fine so long as they did not get a conversation going, but suggested blind copying everyone so they cannot reply all as a protection. He said it was a tough situation because the timing of it prevented them from being able to get City Council to write letters of support because of how long the process takes.

Councilor Lake stated that the update would be more informative so that if individuals wanted to then reach out to their representatives or state senators, they could.

Mr. Redfern asked Councilor Lake if he was aware that Mr. Phil Jones was in the legislature and sits on some key committees that would be pertinent to the ECC, transportation being one of them.

He shared that Mr. Jones has some friendships built within the Department of Transportation and has been very effective with the Department of Transportation. If the ECC had an initiative, he might be someone that would be willing to help and is a great resource.

Councilor Lake shared that Legiscan has been a great resource in tracking bills and updates for every action that is taken out of the House and Senate. He explained that it posts when the hearing will be and informs users of where the bill is in the process and whether a hearing has been scheduled. He believed it was nationwide resource and was not sure who owned it, but said that it seems to be very accurate.

Chair Luse asked Councilor Lake if Clean Energy's legislative tracking has been helpful. Councilor Lake responded that it has and they have pointed him to a couple of the updates. One of them being HB 1623, which he explained that he missed the first time. He explained that on face value, the bill essentially recommends trying to provide cheap and reliable energy to the population of the state, trying to remove barriers for innovation, not subsidizing one energy source over another, which all sounds good. Clean Energy came out and pointed out that it meant there would be no subsidization or support of new technologies and that the goal would be cheap energy versus going after the clean energy goals they should be going after. He shared that HB 1623 narrowly passed the house with a vote of 184 to 168. It is now on its way to the Senate.

Councilor Lake continued and explained that SB 543, which establishes a state environmental adaptation, resilience and innovation council passed 5-0. HB 1332, which prohibits electric vehicles from parking and parking garages, failed the house on a decent margin. There is another bill relative to prohibiting parking of non-electric vehicles in spaces designated for electric vehicles and it has narrowly failed the house. He explained that there is another bill relative to studies of nuclear energy technologies. Right now, there are a number of organizations within the state government that are supposed to be researching nuclear technologies. This bill would require that these organizations submit a report of what their research is and what they have been doing. Councilor Lake explained that it passed the house committee and should be going to the full house vote soon. He also mentioned that the bill suspending the issuance of new landfill permits passed the House yesterday during the Senate Hearing. The bill establishing a forced carbon commission, passed on a voice vote according to Councilor Lake. Chair Luse thanked Councilor Lake for the update.

E) Food Security

Mr. Russel shared that they are in research mode right now, particularly focused on climate resilience and conservation measures for food security and food systems, especially farms. He explained that it entails significant asset mapping of what is currently there in terms of resources, organizations, grants, funding, but also where. He requested that if members are aware of any innovations or articles particularly focused on farms as they adapt to climate change, to please forward them to his attention. Once all that has been gathered, they will decide whether to move forward with another focus group with farms. He believes a more productive meeting might be with organizations like the Monadnock Conservancy and possibly some of the science people from

Keene State and Antioch who are working on climate adaptation to have them elaborate and add to the document that they would then turn over to the farmers as a resource guide.

Mr. Russel shared that there is about ten thousand dollars of funding available through the State Conservation District via the local conservation district of the community garden in west Keene. The plan is to put in hedgerow to block the wind and to help with the cooler temperature in that location. He shared that they will be increasing the edibles, which will add to what gets donated to the Community Kitchen. Currently, there are only two spigots out there and three sections of garden, so they plan to add five spigots allowing for gardeners to get water more easily.

A key part of the grant is a matching component where gardeners could choose from a shopping list they are putting together of soil conservation, water management, water conservation, pest management, and season extension materials. The idea is that gardeners would pay twenty-five percent of the cost and this would allow them to add things like soaker hoses, protective measures to protect gardens from cold temperatures, and deer fence netting to protect their plants. Much of that work is happening currently. He shared that they have a contractor who will be putting the spigots in within the next week or two. This will be the first year of no-till with three quarters of the garden being no till. Last year, people started planting things like garlic for during the winter months. The city will be spending much less time and resources on the garden and Mr. Russel expects more of the garden will become no till as the years go by.

The other piece the workgroup is acting on is they have just started promoting an app/website program called Shared Earth, which matches people who have space for gardens with people who are looking for space for gardens. They have started posting to pertinent Facebook groups and Mr. Russel plans to email stakeholders that have been involved with food security work to share in their circles. They have not been able to find additional community garden spaces as they had hoped as barriers keep arising. As such, Mr. Russel plans to ask the funder whether they can roll over the grant or repurpose the grant to purchase materials for qualifying, underserved people to do container gardens in their homes.

Chair Luse thanked Mr. Russel and said he has been seeing more and more on hydroponics and vertical gardens and wondered if that is something their group had looked into. Mr. Russel responded that it had come up in the focus group they did on converting lawns into gardens. He thought there was a certainly a business aspect they want to encourage like at the medical center or workplace gardens. He shared that he had worked out a presentation for the New England Organic Farmers Association that included a whole set of alternative gardening practices, including hydroponics and something called spin farming noting that there are a lot of interesting models out there.

Mr. Russel added one last thing they plan to do is a focus group on food waste, composting and commercial composting.

- 4) **Final Earth Fest/Earth Day Preparations- Saturday April 20, 2024 from 12:00 PM-4:00 PM**
- 5) **Meeting Schedule Updates**

Ms. Fortson shared that she did get some responses. She wondered given Ms. Brunner's absence and expected return in the next month or two if they should table this matter until Ms. Brunner returns so that she can offer some input. Chair Luse did not believe there was any rush on it and agreed to table it.

- 6) **Reminder: NH Businesses for Social Responsibility Networking Event- Wednesday, April 3rd from 3:00- 5:00 pm in Gilsum, NH**
- 7) **New Business**
- 8) **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Luse adjourned the meeting at 8:41 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Amanda Trask, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Megan Fortson, Planning Technician