

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ENERGY AND CLIMATE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, June 5, 2024

8:00 AM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Zach Luse, Chair
Councilor Bryan Lake
Diana Duffy
Clair Oursler
Kenneth Swymer
Annu Joshi Bargale
Gordon Leverage
Jake Pipp, Alternate
Charles Redfern, Alternate
Rowland Russell, Alternate
Michael Winograd, Alternate

Staff Present:

Mari Brunner, Senior Planner

Members Not Present:

Paul Roth, Vice Chair
Jude Nuru
Lisa Maxfield

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Luse called the meeting to order at 8:05 AM. Upon completing the roll call, he invited all four alternate members to participate as voting members.

2) Approval of Minutes

Chair Luse welcomed any comments or discussion on the minutes. With no comments or discussion, Councilor Bryan Lake moved to approve the minutes of the prior meeting. Dr. Rowland Russell seconded the motion. Ms. Diana Duffy commented on the quality of the minutes, stating that it was captured well despite being a discussion-heavy meeting. With unanimous approval, the minutes from May 1st, 2024, were adopted.

3) Introduction for New Members

Chair Luse welcomed a new member, Dr. Gordon Leverage, who was unable to attend last month's introductions. Each member shared a brief recap of who they are and how long they

have been involved with the Energy and Climate Committee (ECC). Guest attendee, Mr. Frank Richter of Clean Energy NH, introduced himself as having taken over the role previously held by John Kondos. He shared that he started in the role a few months ago and is working with 32 towns in the region doing everything from grants to policy to technical implementation. Councilor Ed Haas stated he was also attending as a guest and is on the Bicycle Path and Pedestrian Advisory Committee and Planning, Licenses, and Development committees.

Dr. Leverage shared that he retired as Dean of Social Sciences at Keene State College. Before that, he did environmental research on organic fuels and metals from fossil fuel use and development. Former Members, Peter Hansel and Ann Shedd, both active members of the Monadnock Sustainability Hub were also in attendance and introduced themselves. Catherine Owen Koning, also of Monadnock Sustainability Hub provided a quick introduction. Ms. Shedd introduced the new sustainability hub program manager, Jack Lamonte. He shared that he just started last month and is in the process of outreach and introductions. He welcomed ideas and suggestions and offered support wherever he could. Workgroup members, Mike Metell (legislature) and Carolyn Jones (education and outreach) also introduced themselves.

4) **Budget Discussion**

A) Clean Energy NH Membership Dues

Chair Luse introduced Ms. Mari Brunner for the budget discussion regarding the Clean Energy NH Membership dues. Ms. Brunner explained that in the past, the ECC has paid for the city's membership out of the ECC budget. There is an annual budget of \$850. Historically, that was because they paid \$600 to be members of ICLEI and \$250 to be members of Clean Energy NH. ICLEI has more than doubled its membership costs. They graciously let the ECC maintain their membership at the pre-increase cost for several years. ECC decided to drop the membership.

Clean Energy NH has also increased its membership. There is a \$300 level of membership, which has benefits like what they had previously (two registrations to the local Energy Solutions Conference). With the \$500 level membership, it would provide four additional registrations for a total of six to attend the local Energy Solutions Conference. The decision in front of the committee is whether to stay at the current level of membership at the increased price of \$300 or upgrade membership to the \$500 level. Chair Luse shared that he has never been able to attend and questioned whether those additional tickets would get used. Mr. Redfern, Mr. Pipp, and Mr. Swymer all said they had used them and would again. Chair Luse stated he would be in support of paying extra to further the work. There was a lack of clarity as to whether the \$500 level offered a total of four registrations or a total of six. Mr. Richter offered to get clarification on that for the committee.

Ms. Duffy suggested staying at the current level and challenging themselves to utilize the expertise and offerings by pushing the limits of the membership before increasing. Mr. Pipp asked if it was known what the registration was. No one provided a price, but Ms. Jones

commented that the conference is always well-attended, informative, and generally geared toward municipal players. She urged people to attend.

Councilor Lake urged caution as sending six committee members might be considered a quorum. He suggested staying at the current level and seeing how it plays out for the following year. Ms. Brunner reminded the committee that should they stay at the \$300 level, there is always the option to use the remaining budget to purchase additional tickets for interested members who decide they do want to attend.

Chair Luse asked for a motion. Mr. Pipp moved to join Clean Energy NH as a municipal member at the \$300 level and received a second from Councilor Lake. With no opposition and all in favor, the motion was approved.

5) Community Power Update

Ms. Brunner explained this agenda item was initially intended to be used to review the community participation report received from Good Energy. It was included on page ten of the committee's packet along with the original launch report for comparison. She explained that participation levels have dropped since the original launch, which she believed to be because Eversource currently has cheaper rates and because several people left the program after having installed solar. She added that the State of New Hampshire requires that any energy supplier provide information to their customers about the energy mix that they provide. Recently, Direct Energy sent out a letter to everyone on community power. She noted that the letter created quite a bit of confusion and she warned that committee members may receive questions from community members. She added that the letter is simply to report on the energy mix for the Keene Community Power Program. Mr. Peter Hansel said looking at the enrollment, he thought the numbers were encouraging.

6) Discussion about Potential AmeriCorps Volunteer Opportunity

Ms. Brunner explained that she had included a link to the report that Mr. Redfern had completed. It was linked to the agenda and was also e-mailed out. Mr. Redfern completed extensive research on the AmeriCorps program, current programs in other communities, and how they are using AmeriCorps volunteers to build up capacity to complete this type of energy and climate work. With the City Council's approval, the ECC could recommend the city apply for an AmeriCorps volunteer. It would be a full-time, year-long appointment. Chair Luse added that this volunteer could be used to implement and complete many of the things the committee has been trying to do but did not have the capacity or volunteers to be able to.

Mr. Winograd asked who would administer or manage this person and what the objectives of the position were. Mr. Redfern explained that the report outlined suggestions for a reporting structure and included potential job descriptions, gathered from an already-established, working program. Ms. Brunner shared that Community Development and the City Manager's office were

two potential reporting structure options available for this position. She said there are also a couple of deputy city managers that this person could potentially report to. Chair Luse pointed out that there is still research and conversations that would need to happen before this could be taken to the City Council. The conversation currently in front of the committee is whether this is something they want to move forward with.

Mr. Winograd spoke up and wondered whether working with the county had been investigated since they have grant writers. Chair Luse responded that this position would be more for finding and monitoring grants. The county does more of the “back office” work of the grant with applying, tracking, sponsoring, and administering the grants. Mr. Pipp asked when the application was due and when the position would start. Mr. Redfern responded that there is a cycle every year and all that information is included in the packet. Chair Luse shared that he found that the application was due October 13th and the service term was January to October. Ms. Brunner clarified Mr. Luse’s comment stating that the application in the packet that Mr. Redfern sent out was specific to Portland and their program is structured differently. A direct reach-out to AmeriCorps would likely be necessary to get more information on how the average timeline works.

Mr. Winograd suggested the committee wait to decide until the stakeholders are identified and brought into the conversation. Discussion around whether to move forward ensued. There was a miscommunication on whether that included applying. Mr. Luse clarified that the decision at hand was whether to move forward with more in-depth research on and for the application process. Chair Luse stated he believed the next steps would be to research the timeframe, deadlines, and associated costs. Ms. Duffy offered to research deadlines, costs (host fee and expenses), and timeframe from AmeriCorps. Chair Luse said if the timing is right, then they could start having those conversations and prepping to present and recommend to the City Council.

With no further discussion, Chair Luse asked for a motion. Mr. Swymer moved to move forward with gathering information to submit for the submission of the application of the AmeriCorps Volunteer Program. Mr. Pipp offered a second. Councilor Lake asked for clarification on the motion in terms of who is being directed to do the work and what is the intended outcome of the motion. Ms. Brunner stated the motion may not be necessary at this point, but it is good for solidifying what the committee wants to do. When it gets to the point of needing city staff, then that is the point to which it probably needs to go before the City Council. She clarified that she could provide support, but if it starts taking up more than the normal amount of committee support, it will need to go through the City Council. Dr. Russell asked Mr. Redfern who else was in his work group. Mr. Redfern responded that it currently is just him and Mr. Swymer. Ms. Beth Campbell was on it, but she moved.

With all in favor and no opposition, the motion was approved.

7) **ECC Work Group Report Outs**
A) **Community Solar**

Mr. Hansel shared that they spent most of their discussion on the community solar rebate concept, which is available to municipalities and the school district. Time was spent discussing how to get the Keene School district on board and working towards a solar solution. He thinks they have support at the facilities level at the school. They hope to get some students involved or students with their teachers to generate some groundswell of support in the school district. He highlighted information included in the committee's packet from Eversource regarding solar installation numbers in Keene during 2023. There was a total of 70 new residential solar arrays installed in Keene, which doubled from previous years. Five commercial arrays were installed, which was lower than in previous years. He stressed the need to do more work on the commercial side. The workgroup is working on promoting coaching for commercial and industrial sites. Mr. Hansel noted that Chair Luse is helping to create an e-mail blast to go out through the Chamber of Commerce members advertising the availability of the program.

Mr. Redfern asked if the report could be distributed to the members of the committee. Mr. Hansel clarified that the email is intended to inform that coaching is available and provide instructions on how to apply. He added that they are working with Hannah Grimes to ensure there is a webpage for those inquiries to land on. Ms. Jones shared that Clean Energy NH has a staff person, Gabe, who works on Rural Energy for America. Mr. Richter mentioned a new staff member, Catherine, who does similar work to Gabe and how both would be excellent resources.

Mr. Haas asked if it was known what the oldest PV array is in the city. Mr. Hansel responded that the oldest he knows of and has tracked was 2009. There may be some older ones, but he believed this installation to be the oldest. Mr. Haas pointed out that a common concern with installing solar is the lifespan and suggested reaching out to some of the early installers as to their experience. Mr. Hansel noted that since 2009, the cost of solar installations has come down significantly and their capacity has gone up providing a better "bang for the buck". Mr. Haas and Mr. Hansel agreed that it is an obstacle. It was suggested by Mr. Hansel to start gathering information on what to do with the solar arrays once they are taken off.

Ms. Brunner reminded the group that Eversource has provided data on the interconnected solar installations within the city of Keene. It is generalized data and does not provide contact information or anything like that, but the Clean Energy Team has done a lot of work reaching out to those folks with solar arrays and may be able to provide contacts.

B) Grants, Fundraising, and Partnerships

Mr. Redfern did not have anything to add. Mr. Richter mentioned the New Hampshire Department of Energy released information on the municipal solar grant program, which is for

sixty kilowatts or less for municipally owned systems. He did not know if any schools or municipal facilities were able to apply but shared that the deadline was August 1st.

C) Education and Outreach

Mr. Luse shared that they are working on some marketing materials. They are creating flyers that make a clear case for what they are doing and how outsiders can help. The intention is to create something visually appealing to hand out during events. He recognized Ms. Bargale for the work she had done gathering information to create a draft.

D) Legislative Tracking

Councilor Lake shared that the landfill bill, which was to put a pause on new permits for landfills in New Hampshire until 2031, did not pass. The other bill which required the nuclear energy committee to send a report out by 2025 did pass.

Mr. Winograd asked if New Hampshire brings in garbage from everywhere else. Councilor Lake noted that fifty percent is brought in. Mr. Winograd questioned whether that should be an area for the committee to voice their opinion. Councilor Lake was aware that concerns had been voiced at some point throughout the process. He believed it was a little too late for the committee to do any additional communication as the bill had already been killed for this session. Should it be brought up in a future session, he thought it would be worth sending a formal communication.

Mr. Redfern suggested rather than communicating with only the representatives, he urged the idea of having a public campaign to increase awareness. Mr. Luse said there is a lot that is not known about the garbage, and it would require significant research and information gathering before they could make any sort of comment.

E) Food Security

Dr. Russell shared that their group did not meet this past month, but they have had a lot of communication. He shared that they did submit the grant to the Regional Food Systems Partnership Program through the Federal Government. He has not heard anything back yet. They are looking at a Community Change Grant through the Environmental Protection Agency related to reducing climate change pollution and the economic impacts of associated projects. Their group had already been looking at food waste as a potential focus group. He noted that he learned a new law is slated to become effective February 1, 2025, for entities that generate as much as one ton of food waste a week. Other states have this ban, and it has fueled commercial compost facilities. Their focus group would likely focus on the potential for applying for that funding and what a program like that might look like in this region.

Chair Luse asked if Southwest Region Planning Commission was applying for these grants. Dr. Russell explained that they participated in the one they did submit. He explained that they have

been doing the research for the grant and then the follow-up will be to take all that research and start creating a concrete plan for a project.

8) New Business

Ms. Shedd shared that they will be meeting with the Airport Director, Mr. Dave Hickling, in a couple of hours. He has been very interested in and supportive of the concept of having the energy fair at the airport on Saturday, September 28th. They have tried to avoid conflicts with other events but discovered that it will be the same day as the International Festival and the Source to Sea clean-up. It is a busy week. The event would include a drive electric expo. At the Earth Festival, they had a good cadre of private electric vehicle owners and the Peterborough Public Works department also brought their F-150 pickup. There were a couple of other pickups in addition to passenger cars. They are hoping to have an electric school bus at the upcoming event to tie into the idea of solar-run schools. She agreed with the previously mentioned suggestion to solicit some efforts on the part of the school stakeholders to encourage the school district to take advantage of some of the opportunities. They will also have a vendor exhibition with some nonprofits as well as vendors.

Their meeting today with the airport director is to discuss the possibility of using the airport operations and maintenance hangar, which is adjacent to the terminal as the setting for the exhibition. Mr. Jude Nuru was hoping to determine the feasibility of doing some tourism promotion of the installation done at the Wastewater Treatment Plant and the proposed installation at the south end of the runways. She had briefly discussed with Mr. Hickling the rain date for the following day, but she had since learned that the marathon was the next day, making that a little less feasible. The airport director did mention that he thought there was a fair chance they could get the electric aircraft manufacturer in Burlington, VT to participate. She added that they will be meeting with City Staff next week to go through the city property permit process, which is now a decision that must be made by the City Clerk's office. She intended to have the ECC tabling at the event and plans to situate them next to the Swanzey Energy Commission to allow for more opportunities for informal explorations of synergy. She intends to have more information and details to report next month.

Dr. Leversee noted the rise of electric motorcycles and wondered if there were plans to exhibit any of those. Ms. Shedd responded that they have not been able to find a private owner willing to bring one. She did check with the Harley Davidson dealer in Troy, but they did not have any electric bikes in stock. Dr. Russell shared that electric bikes have come up a lot in the BPPAC meetings to which Ms. Shedd said she would like to have a conversation with the BPPAC committee about that.

Ms. Brunner announced that the master plan workshop finished last week and there were a lot of great discussions. The thinktank workshop was a deep dive into the scenario planning for the future of Keene and now they need to test what came out of the workshop with the public. They have a series of visioning sessions coming up for the week of June 17th. She did not bring the flyer with her to the meeting but shared that there were three public sessions planned for Tuesday

including a table at the Community Event. This is the first Community Event in several years and will be happening at the Marlboro Street Municipal Complex.

The sessions are scheduled for 11-12 pm at the YMCA, 1-2 pm at the Keene Senior Center, and the third from 4-7 pm at the Community Night event on Tuesday, June 18th, 2024. There will be a visioning session from 4-5 pm at Heberton Hall and there is also going to be a presentation to the City Council on Thursday, June 20th, 2024, and then Friday from 2-3 pm at Heberton Hall. She will send those dates out as they are trying to get as many community members involved as possible and would appreciate any assistance the committee members could provide in getting that information out. She thanked Chair Luse for the opportunity to share that information.

9) Next Meeting: Wednesday, July 3, 2024, 8:00 am- Date to be Confirmed

Chair Luse asked for a show of hands for those planning to be present for the July 3rd meeting. With six members intending to be present, they decided to move forward with the meeting scheduled for July 3rd, 2024. Ms. Brunner did say that she would not be available for staff support but was sure that they could identify someone to be available to run the Teams meeting.

10) Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Luse adjourned the meeting at 9:20 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Amanda Trask, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner