

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ENERGY AND CLIMATE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, July 3, 2024

8:00 AM

**2nd Floor Conference Room,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Zach Luse, Chair
Paul Roth, Vice Chair (joined by Zoom)
Councilor Bryan Lake
Dr. Jude Nuru
Clair Oursler
Dr. Gordon Leverage
Jake Pipp, Alternate
Charles Redfern, Alternate
Rowland Russell, Alternate
Michael Winograd, Alternate

Staff Present:

Evan Clements, Planner

Members Not Present:

Diana Duffy
Lisa Maxfield
Kenneth Swymer
Annu Joshi Bargale

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1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Zach Luse called the meeting to order at 8:01 am.

2) Approval of Minutes

Councilor Bryan Lake moved to approve the minutes and received a second from Mr. Charles Redfern. Chair Luse noted that on line 39, the minutes referenced two subcommittee members. It should say workgroup instead of subcommittee. With no other changes, the minutes were approved by a unanimous roll call vote of all members, including Paul Roth, who attended via Zoom.

3) ECC Work Group Report Outs

A) Community Solar

Dr. Jude Nuru shared that the workgroup did not meet last month. He apologized and explained that he had nothing to report-out for community solar.

B) Grants, Fundraising, and Partnerships

Mr. Charles Redfern shared that Ms. Duffy had contacted him and expressed interest in pursuing the AmeriCorps volunteer program for the City of Keene. She was very enthusiastic about it. He has completed his information gathering, but further work was needed to draft the recommendations for this group to determine the next steps. He presumed that the next step would be to make a recommendation to ask the city manager to allow them to go forward with an application.

Chair Luse explained that he has been working with Diana Duffy, and it turns out that there is no similar program in New Hampshire and that the program is specific to Maine. They were connected to New Hampshire AmeriCorps and received some information from Clean Energy New Hampshire. Funding is available for programs through AmeriCorps and VolunteerNH. He and Diana are working to contact them to determine what that might entail. The Maine Program is independently funded and partners with AmeriCorps and other organizations. He explained that some conservation opportunities focus on specific areas like the Lakes region or Bear Brook State Park. There are 3.4 million dollars in funding from Senator Hassan's office or AmeriCorps to expand volunteer opportunities in New Hampshire. It will likely be a long-term project, but they are exploring to see if there are any opportunities to create a program with a partner in New Hampshire. He did not believe it would be the type of thing that one individual city would develop and that it would likely be statewide, where the individual cities would then apply to host the volunteers. From his research, most programs are structured to be eleven months long.

Mr. Redfern shared that he had spoken with the head of AmeriCorps, New Hampshire. While there is no such program currently, it would be possible to create one and referred Mr. Redfern to VolunteerNH. He believed there was an unwillingness on their part. Chair Luse disagreed, saying he did not think that was the case. He clarified that no current program exists, but all the right pieces are in place to create one. It would require the right partner, and he did not believe the city was the proper organization to create a program for one attendee. Those programs are designed to have multiple volunteers.

Mr. Redfern said the Southwest Region Planning Commission came to mind while working on this. Henry Underwood is very excited about this program, especially if there is some grant money coming about. Mr. Redfern offered to reach out to Mr. Underwood. Chair Luse said the next step would be to converse with prospects.

Mr. Redfern said he would hate to see the grant opportunity missed. Chair Luse believed they had three deadlines per year. He understood the program would have funding for three years. He explained that some organization would need to create a program or replicate what Maine is doing and then apply for funding, which would come through AmeriCorps. Mr. Redfern asked who the point of contact would be for Ms. Duffy. Mr. Luse said he would contact Ms. Duffy first for a conversation and then reach out to Clean Energy NH. Mr. Redfern requested to meet with Chair Luse between meetings to discuss his ideas around grants, fundraising, and partnerships.

Mr. Clair Oursler asked for confirmation on whether there were 3.4 million dollars available. Chair Luse confirmed, saying he believed it passed in May, and it was for 3.4 million dollars to expand volunteer opportunities in New Hampshire. Mr. Oursler asked if it would be done at the city or state levels. Chair Luse did not believe anything was set up to be done at the city level unless it was a regional opportunity but still does not know that the city is the proper organization to facilitate that. He thought it more appropriate for another nonprofit to take that on. He will talk to VolunteerNH to see what they say. They might have something already in the works, or they might have recommendations for a partner, and Clean Energy NH might be another avenue for resources and opportunities.

C) Education and Outreach

Chair Luse shared that the education and outreach workgroup was working on a flyer. Ms. Annu Bargale was working on that but was absent. He believed she had made good progress and suggested returning to it in the next meeting. He also shared that Ms. Carolyn Jones was working on identifying potential dates for a button-up workshop in the fall. Ms. Jones shared that they are on the radar. She has someone available to help her, but they still need to go to the city council for approval if they use the rec center as they have for previous workshops. She will update as soon as she has additional information.

D) Legislative Tracking

Unfortunately, Councilor Bryan Lake said they did not meet this month due to little happening at the State House. He plans to put together a summary for next time. He would also like to chat about what the rest of the year looks like for the workgroup, whether it is trying to put together a set of bills, they would like to see in the next session or discussing the next steps/focus.

Regarding the grant funding for solar installations discussed in the last meeting, he shared that they hoped to apply for the downtown project. It was determined that it did not fit the needs based on the narrow restrictions that were on it. They are still looking at other programs and projects for solar array opportunities. Chair Luse said he'd like to connect with Councilor Lake later, as he spoke with Mr. Sam Evans Brown, who reignited the district geothermal for downtown. He explained that Mr. Evans Brown is meeting with Liberty, the city, and Mr. Luse to see if they can incorporate that into phase two and phase three of the project. It is too late for phase one, but laying some infrastructure underneath is possible. He would like to discuss a small legislative component with Councilor Lake.

E) Food Security

Dr. Rowland Russell shared that in follow-up to the last meeting in which he mentioned the passed food waste bill that will go into effect on February 1, 2025, he met with Ms. Paige Wilson and Mr. Michael Nork from the Department of Environmental Services (DES). Ms. Wilson was the one who shepherded the bill through, and the DES will be responsible for administering the

bill. They are incentivizing participation. He shared that it was a good meeting. They have agreed to join a focus group that his Food System Assessment Group will put together, likely at Hannah Grimes. They will look at potential funding, including the \$10-20 million Environmental Protection Agency Change Grant. The DES has also done different grants, so he hopes to determine how their interests align, whether that is a regional initiative or a statewide initiative, with the Monadnock Region taking the lead. He plans to invite other potentially interested entities, including Duncan Watson from the City Transfer station. Once they determine the focus, they may also want to include the solar committee.

Chair Luse asked if the goal was to defer food waste from landfills into composting, which Dr. Russell confirmed. He explained that other states have passed that legislation, resulting in significant commercial composting opportunities. Right now, Elm City Compost is being exported to Brattleboro, VT. That is the only and nearest composting facility. There are other smaller stations around the state, but they are further away. Having a facility here would provide opportunities for the hospital, Keene State, SAU 29, and other entities like that. They also want to investigate how to include some of the smaller stakeholders, like restaurants and supermarkets.

The Change Grant has a social justice component. In the Monadnock Region, Winchester is the only town that qualifies as an underserved population, which may not be enough to qualify them for the Change Grant. He explained that Mr. Todd Horner and Jason Cooper from the Southwest Region Planning Commission will be setting up a meeting to talk to the EPA and get clarification on the specific requirements for the grant. The plan is to go into that meeting with some information about the various grant opportunities. DES will talk about the status of how they are administering the bill and how they could partner in any grant application or model project. They are also looking at Winchester as a potential bottle-washing facility to keep bottles in the food stream. Recycling needs to be better, with bottles and cans having problems. It might combine several facilities looking at different facets of the food waste stream, including packaging. Limiting the use of aluminum cans makes bottles more viable. He shared that Diana Duffy has expressed interest in participating in this effort, and he plans to talk to others who have also expressed interest.

4) **New Business**

Mr. Peter Hansel shared that he had been in touch with Bob Hayden of Standard Power to find out if they could get data on community power from them. Mr. Hayden said they do not collect that information, but Good Energy does. He has reached out to Good Energy, who were receptive, and he is hoping to have that data someday.

He also shared that he plans to meet with Hannah Grimes in a week to discuss the specifics of the solar coaching program and get their input on how they might structure it. It is a three-way effort between Hannah Grimes, the ECC committee, and the Monadnock Sustainability Hub. He expected to have some more information next month.

He wondered if the committee might consider asking the city to send a letter to pressure Eversource to speed up the solar approval and installation process. Mr. Winograd expressed frustration and asked how much Eversource was increasing its transmission costs. Mr. Hansel pointed out that much of the increase is on the distribution side, which is the energy company's way of getting its money.

Mr. Winograd referenced an article about how, as electric vehicles age, the batteries must be replaced and old ones thrown out. Recent news of lithium batteries starting fires raises concerns about where they will be disposed of and the potential risk of igniting. He wondered about education around proper disposal. Mr. Oursler asked whether there was any idea of how many electric vehicles were in Keene. Chair Luse shared that they previously had received registration numbers but needed to remember what they were. Mr. Hansel added that data like that is easy to gather. They have obtained the numbers in the past and suggested that they should continue to collect that data going forward.

Mr. Winograd referenced the button-up workshop mentioned earlier. He said that one problem they have seen in New Hampshire and even locally is related to electrical work needing to be up to code and the associated fire risk. He suggested that education be included around the necessity of electrical work being up to code. Chair Luse noted that the button-up does not focus on electrical; it is specific to weatherization and is focused on the NH Saves Program. Mr. Winograd agreed but pointed out that weatherization has an electrical component, especially in heat pumps. He argued that it is essential for people to be aware that they must continue to stay by code and that DIY processes and products can end up costing everyone money.

Mr. Redfern shared that he spoke with a regional manager of Applebee's yesterday who happened to be in Keene meeting with the local manager. The regional manager cited a property across from them behind the Sunoco station. It has been up for sale, and while it is not big enough for a shopping plaza, it is big enough for a decent solar array. Mr. Redfern wondered if he should contact the seller of the property and share that there are grants available for putting up solar charging stations. He questioned the group on handling the private sector in what the ECC does. Chair Luse suggested spending a little more time determining how feasible a project like that would be and how difficult it would be to find a private entity interested in developing it.

Mr. Hansel shared that he believes the parcel is city-owned and has electrical lines running above it, which presents a concern for a solar array. He noted the time it takes to get a fast charger, saying it took the Monadnock Food Coop almost two years to get theirs. He also was not aware of any solar-driven fast chargers. Mr. Pipp asked what the reason for the two-year delay was. Mr. Hansel responded that he knew some of this was due to the VW settlement money and a shortage of transformers.

Mr. Lamont, Monadnock Sustainability Hub, provided an update, saying they had secured Saturday, September 28, for the Clean Energy Fair. He welcomed volunteers and suggested that

anyone interested get in touch with him. Chair Luse invited him to the education and outreach workgroup, saying that the group had already planned to help promote the event.

5) **Next Meeting: Wednesday, August 7, 2024, 8:00 AM**

6) **Adjournment**

With no further business, Chair Luse adjourned the meeting at 8:34 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Amanda Trask, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner