

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ENERGY AND CLIMATE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, August 7, 2024

8:00 AM

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

Members Present:

Zach Luse, Chair
Councilor Bryan Lake
Jude Nuru
Diana Duffy
Clair Oursler
Lisa Maxfield
Gordon Leverage
Jake Pipp, Alternate (Voting)
Michael Winograd, Alternate (Voting)

Staff Present:

Mari Brunner, Senior Planner
Megan Fortson, Planner

Members Not Present:

Charles Redfern, Alternate
Rowland Russell, Alternate
Kenneth Swymer
Annu Joshi Bargale
Paul Roth, Vice Chair

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Luse called the meeting to order at 8:07 am. Following the roll call, Chair Luse invited Mr. Jake Pipp and Mr. Michael Winograd to participate as regular members.

2) Approval of Minutes- July 3, 2024

Councilor Bryan Lake moved to approve the July 3, 2024, minutes with a second from Mr. Pipp. With no discussion and no opposition, the July minutes were approved unanimously.

3) ECC Work Group Report Outs

A) Community Solar

Mr. Jude Nuru shared that the community solar group met last month. In trying to determine the next steps, they previously identified a need to review the scope of the work, determining whether their mandate is limited to identifying a site or if there is the ability to expand to commercial businesses.

Ms. Diana Duffy noted that it seemed to be as good a time as any to be reminded that they all are trying to do the right thing, but suggested considering whether the right thing is aligned with what the work group's task is, what the committee's mission is and what the City Council is doing. Ms. Mari Brunner recently reminded her that those kinds of reminders are why the retreats are held. The retreats serve as a time to get realigned and refocused as a larger committee.

Chair Luse added that he and Peter have been working on getting set up as coaches with Hannah Grimes and believe the only thing left to do is to complete their biographies for the website. Upon completion, they should be able to move forward and start working with the Chamber of Commerce to get something in the newsletters advertising the coaching services.

Dr. Gordon Lerversee asked if there would be support for residents or those interested in residential development. Chair Luse responded that the residential support is typically handled by the individual installers and explained that in recent years, the residential solar industry has taken a life of its own and did not seem to need the same level of encouragement as other areas. Dr. Lerversee explained that he asked because he and his friends/neighbors have had different experiences with solar energy and have very different conclusions about cost-effectiveness. While there are some word-of-mouth resources, he wondered what else was available.

Chair Luse suggested anyone interested should contact multiple companies because, he believed, some companies are just out to make a buck and do not have the individual's best interest in mind. Dr. Lerversee said he assumes that others like him are exploring solar energy, but need resources to help them make informed and confident decisions.

Chair Luse explained that the Clean Energy Team used to do a solar tour, which was a great way to find out which neighbors and businesses had solar. Eliminating that activity was a strategic decision to help focus efforts. Mr. Nuru clarified that community solar energy does lead to providing solar power for multi-family housing, notably Keene Housing, which qualifies as both residential and commercial. Chair Luse added that another factor that played into eliminating the solar tour was that commercial installs are generally more significant and have larger roofs and higher electricity demands when they looked at the data. Efforts focused on commercial installs can get a bigger bang for the buck. As rates continue to climb, Dr. Lerversee said he assumes that more people are thinking about how they can reduce their total energy use off the grid, and it seems prime time to him to think about this as a group.

Councilor Lake asked for clarification on whether the Rose Lane site was still in the mix for solar consideration, which Mr. Nuru clarified that it was. Ms. Brunner shared that for anyone with questions, she believed that the Monadnock Sustainability Hub had done a solarize campaign in the past for Peterborough and surrounding towns and had put together resources for residential solar.

B) Grants, Fundraising, and Partnerships

Chair Luse explained that the AmeriCorps option seemed to be a dead end, but it was not. He contacted Volunteer NH, which did not have a program in New Hampshire. The new funds are set to develop opportunities for people willing to partner with AmeriCorps and create programs, not necessarily for a city that wants one position. It would require developing a whole program to work with them to qualify. While talking with the representative, Chair Luse explained that the representative did mention that Clean Energy NH may be looking into doing something like that. It is something to remember for the future, but not a short-term solution.

The American Climate Corps was just recently signed into legislation. He believed that the first class was last month. Chair Luse has just started looking into them and explained that their website mainly focuses on finding volunteer opportunities, mostly with the Forest Service, college campus climate advocates, and climate dynamics. He plans to reach out to them and see what information he can get on possibly working with them in some capacity. He fears they are working with prominent partners, but plans to reach out anyway.

C) Education and Outreach

Chair Luse shared that the main topic discussed was the button-up workshop. Carolyn Jones has been working on scheduling the workshop the week before the Monadnock Sustainability Hub's Clean Energy Fair. She emailed Chair Luse yesterday and confirmed that she had secured September 25th at the Rec Center from 6–8 pm. He was curious if they needed to do anything regarding the City's support since it is at the Rec Center. Ms. Brunner said it would not hurt if the ECC wanted to support it as the Energy and Climate Committee, but she did not believe it would need to be sent to the City Council. The topic was sidelined and discussed further in the agenda item later in the meeting. Chair Luse thanked Ms. Jones for her work. He shared that they met with Jack Lamont to discuss how the ECC could support the Clean Energy Fair. Once they provide the materials, the ECC will help with public relations and publicity through City social media, email newsletters, and various networks.

Chair Luse explained that he would not be in the country for the Clean Energy Fair, which is scheduled on Saturday, September 28th at the airport. He explained that they need a point person from the ECC to help organize volunteers. The Clean Energy Team will be tabling, and the plan is to have a table right next to it, providing some opportunity for overlap and to help each other out. He questioned whether that was something the group wanted and could do. Councilor Bryan Lake offered to help organize through a Google Sheets signup.

Chair Luse shared that Ms. Annu Bargale has been working on creating some brochures and marketing materials related to community power. He has yet to have a final review of them, but they look really good from what he has seen. He said having some updated materials to hand out would be nice.

D) Legislative Tracking

There were no legislative update for this month.

E) Food Security

Mr. Rowland Russell was not present, but had previously emailed an update to Chair Luse. Chair Luse shared that the food security group has a focus group with stakeholders, people from the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, and entities that may be impacted by the food waste ban (set to take effect January 1st) scheduled for Thursday, September 5th at Hannah Grimes.

4) Municipal Solar Grant Program

Chair Luse updated that the City submitted a solar grant application for a 36kw solar installation on the fleet services building next to Keene Ice at the last minute. The ECC submitted a letter of support for that application.

5) 2nd Annual Monadnock Clean Energy September 28 at the Dillant-Hopkins Airport

Chair Luse recognized Jack Lamont. Jack did not have any significant updates for the Clean Energy Fair, but said he would send a press release this week. He also shared that he has a volunteer signup sheet for anyone interested in volunteering and plans to send that to Chair Luse to distribute.

6) NH Saves Button Up Home Weatherization Workshop

Ms. Carolyn Jones requested support from the ECC for the NH Saves Button Up Home Weatherization Workshop. Ms. Lisa Maxfield motioned to support the workshop scheduled for September 25th from 6–8 pm at the Keene Rec Center. Councilor Bryan Lake seconded the motion, and with all in favor and no opposition, it was unanimously approved.

7) Vision Keene Project Update

Ms. Mari Brunner shared that there has been a lot going on with the Master Plan Update projects. The project is currently in phase one, which is the visioning portion of the project. As part of that, a community survey was conducted, and there was a think tank workshop in May. They held public visioning sessions for one week in June and then on-demand sessions throughout July, and they did another round of public sessions on Monday and Tuesday of last week. The night before the meeting, there was a steering committee meeting, which was a joint meeting of the Master Plan Steering Committee and the Planning Board. They started identifying the critical themes for the Master Plan based on the input. She is currently working on getting something scheduled with the Hundred Nights Shelter. They have received feedback that they need to engage more young people, which they plan to do once school is back in session for both Keene State College and the high school.

She requested that if any members are part of a group or organization they believe would be interested; either she or Jesse Rounds from the City would be happy to come do a Visioning Session. The goal of the sessions is to get input on what people think the preferred future of Keene should be. They came up with four potential plausible futures and have started exploring them. Then, they want to figure out what the community wants and how they will get there. She believes they have heard from a great group of people, but she would like to gather even more input and ask if members have ideas of connections. She would love to get out there and meet with more folks.

Mr. Pipp asked if Ms. Brunner had reached out to Keene Young Professionals Network or Keene Rotaract or groups like that made up of permanent residents rather than those in school who are here solely for their schooling. Ms. Brunner shared that she attended a Keene Young Professionals Network meeting. It was not an entire visioning session, but a few minutes to speak. She has yet to reach out to the Rotaract Group. They had done both rotary clubs, which she believes is a very different population and target. Ms. Brunner asked if Mr. Pipp had a contact for the Keene Rotaract Club. Mr. Pipp suggested Yves Gakunde.

8) New Business

Chair Luse asked if there was any new business. Mr. Mike Winograd was unsure if anyone had noticed that on July 26th, CNBC did a little business report on the ten worst states for climate, and New Hampshire was number seven. Infrastructure was rated as an F, and the concern was flooding and wetlands going away. He thought it was an interesting piece to read. The second piece was that one of his neighbors mentioned that there was significant flooding several years ago, with follow-up flooding multiple times. He was aware that an effort was made to put together a program to ensure that does not happen again and wondered where that program stood, especially after seeing the recent flooding in Vermont. He expressed concern about hail and its effect or impact on solar panels. He read that some research is being done on this, but with the changing climate, he believed more effort needs to be put forward to find a solution.

Chair Luse was not sure about the flooding piece. He knew a lot of work had been done on the smaller brooks that came down through town. Mr. Winograd said there was a discussion in 2012, but he did not see that it had gone anywhere after that. Chair Luse thanked Mr. Winograd for his input.

9) Next Meeting: Wednesday, September 4, 2024, 8:00 am

10) Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Luse adjourned the meeting at 8:40 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Amanda Trask, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Megan Fortson, Planner