

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AD HOC COMMUNITY POWER COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Friday, November 13, 2020

8:00 AM

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Members Present:

Peter Hansel, Chair
Councilor Michael Giacomo
Dr. Ann Shedd
Paul Roth
Jeffrey Titus

Staff Present:

Rhett Lamb, Assistant City
Manager/Community Development Director
Mari Brunner, Planner

Members Not Present:

Dan Belluscio

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Hansel called the meeting to order at 8:00 AM. He read a prepared statement explaining how the Emergency Order #12, pursuant to Executive Order #2020-04 issued by the Governor of New Hampshire, waives certain provisions of RSA 91-A (which regulates the operation of public body meetings) during the declared COVID-19 State of Emergency.

2) Approval of October 2, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Mr. Roth made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of October 2, 2020. Dr. Shedd seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) Consultant Selection Process Update

Chair Hansel asked for Ms. Brunner or Mr. Lamb to address this. Ms. Brunner stated that at the last meeting they told the committee that they were in the process of negotiating a contract with a consultant and she is pleased to report that they now have a signed, executed contract with Good Energy and Standard Power. She continued that several of the members of the consultant team are present today. They have had internal discussion about options to incentivize the program goals through the way that the contract was structured. That conversation is still ongoing. They are thinking about ways to incentivize energy efficiency and renewable energy specifically with either the contract or program design, and they will want to continue talking about that with this committee.

Chair Hansel asked if anyone from Good Energy and Standard Power would like to speak.

Bob Hayden stated that he is the President and Chief Officer of Standard Power, currently on a broker basis working with a variety of towns and part of the school district and several businesses in Keene. He continued that they are familiar with the community and looking forward to helping the City.

John O'Rourke stated that he is the Director of Marketing and Municipal Affairs for Good Energy, and they are very happy to be on board. He continued that they are looking forward to helping the City.

Emily Manns stated that she has been working with Mr. Hayden at Standard Power for about a year. She continued that she started her career many years ago as an engineer in the oil industry and is now a passionate climate activist and is excited to be doing this work.

Patrick Roche stated that he focuses on renewable energy and program design for Good Energy and is excited to work with everyone.

4) Public Outreach for Electric Aggregation Plan

Chair Hansel asked Ms. Brunner to speak. Ms. Brunner stated that last month they briefly spoke about a proposal to have two public information sessions. She continued that they would start with a session to provide information about community power and help people understand what it is, and hear the public's questions, concerns, and ideas, and what they want to see with this program. The committee would use the information obtained at the first public information session to help put together an electric aggregation plan. At the second public information session they would recap the comments received at the first session, present the plan, and give attendees the opportunity to ask questions about it. Then the plan would be refined before being submitted to the City Council.

Ms. Brunner continued that they talked about doing supporting outreach throughout this process, such as an online survey with embedded short videos; doing direct outreach and presentations to community groups or organizations; and doing social media posts, a press release, an FAQ page (There is a sparse FAQ page already up that could be built up), and an email blast.

Ms. Brunner said that for the first Public Info Session, she was hoping to get a date for that from the committee today. She proposed four potential dates. Chair Hansel asked what time of day. Ms. Brunner replied that she thought evening would be best, but they could do it at a different time of day. Dr. Shedd spoke in favor of an early evening meeting, and Mr. Lamb agreed. John O'Rourke suggested doing both a midday and evening session. Others spoke in favor of having a midday session and an evening session. Discussion continued about the date, time, and duration of the Public Info Session.

Dr. Shedd asked who is primarily responsible for the content of the sessions – the consultants, or City staff? Ms. Brunner replied that the consultants will be doing the heavy lifting for the actual content, although Staff is available to help. The City can schedule it on Zoom and promote it through the typical channels the City has. Mr. O'Rourke stated that they will develop the content, with Ms. Brunner's and Mr. Lamb's guidance. Mr. Hayden stated that they welcome any committee members who have time to be a little more accessible on a regular basis so they can have more ongoing work together. Anyone on the committee who has time available and input to give is welcome to do so. Chair Hansel asked how he anticipates that happening – would Mr. O'Rourke and the others reach out to committee members at various times? Mr. O'Rourke replied that he and Chair Hansel have already been talking, and now that Good Energy and Standard Power is under contract with the City the work begins – maybe even very soon, regarding some questions about long-term plans to look at sites and opportunities for doing renewable energy projects around the community.

Chair Hansel asked Staff if there are any problems with operating outside of regular committee times. Mr. Lamb replied that how he understands this is that a committee member would be working one-on-one with the consultants, or a couple of committee members would be involved, so that is okay, because it would not be a meeting. He just asks that Staff be looped in so they know what is happening. Ultimately the product will come forward with the committee's name on it, so they want the committee to feel that they own it, and he thinks that is what Mr. O'Rourke is suggesting.

Regarding the earlier discussion about date and time, Chair Hansel stated that the first Public Info Sessions will be at 12:00 PM and 6:00 PM on December 8, 2020.

Ms. Brunner asked the consultants to talk about their approach for public outreach. Mr. O'Rourke stated that they want to make a plan to move forward with some initial outreach, to include press releases, newspaper articles, and informational videos that they could put together for Keene. He continued that they would like to put together a website with an FAQ page. They could do social media posts and something with Cheshire TV. They want to contact community stakeholder groups who are interested in giving input. Certainly these public information sessions will be helpful, too. These are all methods they have used in the past and found to be successful.

Mr. O'Rourke asked Mr. Roche if he has one of the videos he created for Providence to show the group. They are effective, short, and to the point. Mr. Roche replied yes, Ms. Brunner had mentioned surveys with embedded videos, and that worked well in Providence. He continued that they could collect public input from the public info sessions and from surveys targeted to who they are trying to reach. He played one of the videos as an example. He stated that they used Providence community members to do the voice-overs, which they could do in Keene as well. He continued that the video uses animation of people and imagery of the city, and information from Providence's Climate Justice Plan. For a video for Keene they could bring in information from Keene's energy planning. The video sets the context for how aggregation fits

in with Providence's broader Climate Justice Plan, which work well with Keene, as Community Power is fitting into Keene's overall energy plan. He will circulate the link so the committee can look at the four videos he has.

Mr. Roche stated that as Mr. O'Rourke said, they want everyone to have a chance to give input at this stage. He continued that there is a larger public input process during the actual program launch, and they will use a lot of the same methods and outreach approaches. They are excited to get going and promote this first Public Info Session.

Dr. Shedd stated that they have had a challenge: they have great turnout at climate and clean energy events from people who are already engaged, and particularly around community power which will impact everyone across the spectrum in our community, but how do they engage the segments of the community who are not aware and not engaged? Some potential venues are the senior center and community services agencies, but in-person education will not be possible right now. It is a challenge they have had with many City initiatives. They will not solve it in the middle of a pandemic, but it is something to work toward.

Mr. Roche replied that it is a great point. He continued that it can be helpful to have online materials, and get the videos and surveys out there, and let people watch the videos in their own time. Standard Energy and Good Power would look to engage with the committee members to get ideas about people who are in those groups to do direct outreach to, to let them know about this and have them distribute the message or content more broadly.

Chair Hansel stated that one other thought he had – last fall or winter they had focus groups meet, and one was the industrial and commercial group, which was a very highly engaged group. They have had several meetings of different groups. Maybe they can be brought into the process separate from these public info sessions that they are planning. Mr. O'Rourke replied that certainly they can bring in any groups the committee feels are important to the process. He continued that they want to get information out to as many people as possible so they are engaged and give input so the plan can be developed in accordance with that.

Chair Hansel stated that one would be the social service groups, like Keene Housing, or Southwest Community Services, or other groups that have tenants who are paying their own utilities. They might have a way of reaching out those people. Their input and understanding of this process would be critical. Ms. Brunner agreed. She continued that they had Keene Housing participate in a focus group and Southwest Community Services had intended to participate but something came up. They are on the list. Both organizations have been following along and would be pretty easy to reach out to and engage. If people think of other groups to engage, they can let her know and she will pass the information along.

Chair Hansel asked if anyone else had anything else to say about this. Daria Mark stated that sometimes for reaching senior citizens, print media (such as a printed letter) works better than electronic communications. She asked what that is like in Keene. Chair Hansel replied that

there is a Senior Center in Keene and he cannot remember if they have a regularly scheduled newsletter. There are other organizations they can tap into.

Mr. Bohannon stated that the Senior Center does have a regular newsletter, and also a Facebook page and weekly email updates that they could tap into. He continued that this would be a great opportunity to engage them. They would greatly appreciate the engagement.

Dr. Shedd stated that the other avenue they have talked about, but have not yet gotten their foot in the door with, is the PTA groups. If anyone has connections, that would be great. Mr. Lamb replied that they had some connections in the past, especially around the Safe Routes to School concept. They have contacts with the individual principals. It is a good idea. Perhaps there is an opportunity there, too. It will reach folks who are typically harder to engage, just because of the press of life. There is also a great opportunity – Med Kopczynski and Tara Kessler, regarding the Land Use Code project, are going to be interviewed by Dan Mitchell on one of his radio shows, which reaches a remarkably large population in Keene. That is something they should talk about.

5) Summary of Feedback from October 20 Energy Plan Forum

Ms. Brunner stated that she summarized the notes from the October 20 Energy Plan Forum, which had three breakout sessions, one specific to Community Power. She continued that some of the takeaways she got were: among the attendees, there was really strong support for increasing renewable energy and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, but they recognized that they are “the choir”/the people who are most passionate about climate change and renewable energy. They discussed that it is really important to have an equitable approach to the program and reach out to those in the community who are not “the choir” and are more concerned about costs, for example. They asked questions about outreach and heard that there are a mix of outreach methods that people would prefer, with a slight preference for website and email, but attendees also mentioned mailings and newspaper articles are also important. Regarding information to include in outreach, this will be more for when they are launching the program, but people want information about the costs and how it compares to the base rate through Eversource. They want an idea of what the program is offering, and information about how to opt up, opt down, or opt out. With respect to the program goals, there was a good discussion about resilience, and a couple people talked about the concept of micro grid. There was a lot of discussion about increasing not just renewable energy, but locally-generated renewable energy, because of some of the co-benefits such as positive impacts on the local economy. They also talked about energy efficiency, increasing renewable energy overall, offering cost-competitive rates, and supporting green jobs in the community.

She continued that Staff asked how the City should get public input on the plan, and an attendee who works in communications and marketing suggested an online video with a short survey, virtual meetings, and an FAQ page; and she recommends they make sure they are getting responses from a representative mix of residents.

Ms. Brunner stated that she was not actually at the session but many people here were. She asked if anyone has anything to add. Councilor Giacomo stated that he thinks she captured it well. Mr. Lamb stated that it is important to note that it was a small group of people who were self-selecting to attend, and they really do need to make sure the product that comes out of this process fits the whole city – all of its consumers and citizens. That brings up the cost competitive piece again, which they need to keep reminding themselves of, as well as their goals for renewable energy.

6) New Business

None.

7) Next Meeting: Friday, December 4, 2020 at 8:00 AM

Chair Hansel stated that the next meeting is Friday, December 4, although they will be communicating with each other in the meantime. Mr. Lamb asked for Ms. Brunner to talk about the next steps. He continued that it seems like everyone is in rough agreement that the Public Info Session will be December 8. The next communication the committee will see from Staff is more details on how those two sessions would be configured. Ms. Brunner replied yes, and it would be extremely helpful for members of this committee to invite their contacts to the events that they create on social media, and use their networks to help get the word out in the community. This is key. Chair Hansel replied yes, as soon as they have firm date and times, they can send notice to their networks. This is less than a month away.

8) Adjourn

There being no further business, Chair Hansel adjourned the meeting at 8:43 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by Mari Brunner, Planner