

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ENERGY & CLIMATE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, March 3, 2021

8:00 AM

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Members Present:

Peter Hansel, Chair
Cary Gaunt, Vice Chair
Ken Dooley
Jake Pipp
Jude Nuru
Paul Roth
Zach Luse
Andrew Dey
Clair Oursler, Alternate

Staff Present:

Rhett Lamb, ACM/Community
Development Director
Mari Brunner, Planner

Members Not Present:

Denise Thomas

1) Roll Call

Chair Hansel called meeting to order at 8:00 AM. Chair Hansel read a prepared statement explaining how Emergency Order #12, issued by the Governor of the State of New Hampshire, pursuant to Executive Order #2020-04, gives authority for public meetings to be held remotely and shared information about how members of the public can listen and share comments. He then read the Zoom meeting platform rules aloud and roll call was conducted.

2) Approval of February 3, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Mr. Roth moved to approve the February 3, 2021 meeting minutes, Vice Chair Gaunt seconded and the motion was passed by unanimous vote.

3) Presentation on Home Energy Labeling: Carolyn Sarno & Emmeline Luck, Northeast Energy Efficiency Partnerships (NEEP)

Chair Hansel introduced presenters Ms. Sarno and Ms. Luck from the Northeast Energy Efficiency Partnerships (NEEP). Ms. Luck introduced herself and her colleague Ms. Sarno and stated that they aim to help the City kickstart the process of developing a home energy labeling program and share resources, examples from other communities and overview of the process. She provided an overview of the home energy labeling process they are involved with in Montpelier, VT. She shared that NEEP is a nonprofit that works with states and communities

across the Northeast and the mid-Atlantic region to reduce building sector energy consumption and emissions to support a healthy and sustainable built environment. Ms. Luck stated that community-led residential labeling programs have been popping up all over the country and are starting to gain momentum because of their ability to be cost effective and reduce emissions.

Ms. Luck presented a slide outlining Montpelier's home energy labeling ordinance and the key steps and considerations that have emerged from that community's home energy labeling process. She highlighted these four areas *(1) Landscape Assessment and Goal Setting (2) Stakeholder Engagement (3) Policy Creation, Communication and Implementation and (4) Tracking, Analysis and Revision*. She said some questions to consider are the landscape, or how the policy fits in to the community's larger climate plan and what methods will work to serve the local population. For example, how well will renters and students be addressed and engaged? Other considerations include vulnerable populations and what type of energy futures are important to highlight and how the program can be most effective, for example, solely as a voluntary program or a mixed voluntary and mandatory phased approach. She stated that stakeholder engagement is key to ensure a smooth process and successful results. In addition to identifying members of the project team and methods for soliciting public feedback, community leaders should also be engaged closely in the process. She said it is helpful to have energy champions in the community involved as well.

Ms. Luck continued, stating that some components to consider when creating the policy include whether or not this will be a time of sale or listing policy, i.e. will the seller or the renter disclose this information at the beginning or the end of a renting or sale process? Do contractors exist, and what are their workforce training needs? What will compliance and administration look like down the line? Will staffing need to be hired for implementation, or is the capacity already in place within the City? She emphasized that evaluation of the efficacy of the program is also very important, and it would help to have measures included for evaluating success and remaining open to change to ensure the program is serving the community's needs.

Ms. Luck presented a slide of a custom home energy label. She said in Montpelier they are using an energy estimator to create the Vermont Home Energy Profile, provided by NEEP's tool Helix and their partner ClearlyEnergy who have developed an automated energy modeling tool. This tool allows the label to be generated without an in-home energy audit, which keeps the cost of the program low for homeowners. She noted that the energy estimator tool does not replace in-home audits but allows the homeowner or real estate professional to easily input data into an online form in order to model the home's energy use. The label generates custom recommendations for next measures that can be taken for the home to reduce energy use. She said this is a detailed label and not all of them will appear this way, but this is an option.

Ms. Luck stated that a landscape assessment of the built environment and occupant needs is a first step in developing a program. Setting clear goals based on the climate plan and soliciting feedback from community members throughout the process is also key. She said it is also important to consider types of disclosure, metrics or labels the City will be using to report the energy usage data, or instead work with an online energy model. She stated that it also may be worth exploring a hybrid phased approach that will lay out from the beginning that the program will become mandatory in a certain number of years. Ms. Luck stated that NEEP has already

assisted Montpelier with this process, and they are ready to pass their ordinance this month. NEEP is now ready to provide technical assistance to other communities and can provide an analysis around ordinance language, technical aspects for assessments and share best practices and models and facilitate stakeholder engagement.

Chair Hansel noted that home energy labeling generated more questions than any other element in the Energy Plan and much of it came from realtors and developers who expressed concern about the cost of home energy labeling. He asked if that concern was expressed equally in other communities. Ms. Sarno replied that yes, they often hear concerns about the cost of doing a HERS score or home energy score, which can range from a few hundred dollars to \$1200. She said that is why Montpelier developed a home energy labeling tool which pulls data from existing sources and costs much less (\$15-\$20). Ms. Sarno stated that they spent about two years of stakeholder engagement in developing the tool statewide, including with real estate professionals, due to the cost concerns, however, they have tried to streamline that process and make it more transparent to realtors. Chair Hansel noted that the information may already be out there, and Ms. Sarno replied that for some homes that may be true, but not all. She said through HELIX they auto populate solar data so solar data is already available, however, in New Hampshire the HERS score is not often populated.

Councilor Ormerod stated that he has some experience implementing and executing a project where the State and City governments were reimbursed for installation of conservation equipment. He works from the commercial side but asked the committee if that model would be interesting to this group. Chair Hansel said the labeling workshop would be a better place to pose those questions. Mr. Dey asked about the tool that was developed for Vermont and the transferability for NH. Ms. Sarno replied that they developed it so that it could be transferable, and they can avoid the two-year extensive process; however, there may be elements that require fine-tuning or refinements that resonate for the stakeholders in Keene. She said they are offering the stakeholder engagement piece to the City, helping to navigate the consensus building process and bringing together the issues that realtors or others may raise in the utilization of the tool. She said they are also willing to show a live demo of the tool when the time comes. Ms. Sarno said that they can also incorporate the NH Saves utility programs as they help fund HELIX.

Mr. Dey asked if there are other communities in NH that NEEP is working with that are further along that can serve as examples. Ms. Sarno replied that over the years they have had discussions with other communities; however, the City of Keene would be the first in home energy labeling. She said a few years ago there was more interest on the commercial side, however, in the past two years it has focused on existing home and adopting policies. Vice Chair Gaunt asked if Montpelier has successfully championed local utilities. Ms. Luck replied that Mayor Ann Watson of Montpelier was the champion, however, they have also been contacted by real estate professionals in other states who have spoken behalf of their customers wanting to see green energy data and in that way they can bring that back to the utilities and bring together the stakeholders that might have competing interests. Ms. Sarno stated that the City and ECC are all champions right now; however, bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders is important, and they will help carry the message forward as those perceived barriers are brought forth by those groups themselves. She said hearing those concerns can help transform them into champions. Vice Chair Gaunt added that at KSC they are trying to employ a Climate Action

Leaders program, and they recently talked to the President of the College and they will start to appoint those leaders as they want comprehensive coverage. She asked if there are examples of cities or towns consciously selecting those people as opposed to a voluntary process. Ms. Sarno said that yes, in New Jersey, they are working with a community on selecting those champions and they can provide those examples through the process. She said in her hometown of Bedford, MA, they brought people to the table themselves and she can also provide examples of that.

Mr. Nuru asked if there is a space for individual homeowners to consider this process and if a community decides to go with the app, would they benefit from a discount. He said that cost is always an issue. Ms. Luck replied that funding for developing the policy and the tool depends on the City's funding stream, however, ultimately the goal is to provide a level of transparency in the process of purchasing or renting a home to allow residents and consumers to make more informed decisions to save costs and to improve the health of the building environment. Ms. Sarno added that in Montpelier they are passing this as an ordinance and it will be required when listing a home, but statewide in VT they use it as a voluntary program. She said there have been a number of communities in NH as well that have gotten together to do collective purchasing of air source heat pumps and other technologies within a community and use the incentives to share this information with utilities and the NH PUC to offer more robust savings or bundle together discounts with contractors. She stated they can share those examples with the City as well.

Mr. Pipp asked about heating oil and heat sources like cord wood or pellets that do not come from a utility. Ms. Sarno replied that many homes in NH have a couple of different heating sources and the tool allows the homeowner to enter that information. She said they tried to automate the tool as much as they could to allow the homeowners to enter in information the most accurately. She said that on the realtor side, there were concerns about homeowners filling out the form; however, homeowners can authorize a realtor or contractor to fill out the form them and claim it. She said they are ultimately aiming to have the most equitable, energy efficient homes in Keene and make sure people are making those improvements and taking advantage of the rebates and incentives that are available.

Chair Hansel asked Ms. Sarno if she is aware of NH Saves and how NEEP charges for their services. Ms. Sarno replied that NEEP as an organization works on public policy as well and they are tracking public policy and doing what they can to make sure incentives remain. She said NEEP is a nonprofit and does not charge for their work in providing technical assistance and guidance; however, the only fee-based piece is if a community decides to use the energy estimator tool and that is because they have to maintain the IT infrastructure that works on that tool. Chair Hansel replied that is good to hear and hopes they can take advantage of their expertise. He thanked Ms. Luck and Ms. Sarno for their presentation.

4) Energy Plan Work Groups

Ms. Brunner stated that during the ECC retreat, the committee went through a prioritization process to choose the top strategies to work on this year. In addition, members selected the strategy they were most interested in and formed three work groups: weatherization, home energy labeling, and electric vehicles. People who have an asterisk next to their name represents a second choice.

Chair Hansel stated that an important part of the whole process is to get the community involved and see what the partners are out in the community, so one of the first things they should do is discover what resources there are in the community. Mr. Dey stated that he is concerned about the efficacy of the work groups as it is adding a great amount of time from members who are taking a lead role in the groups and he worries that they will not be able to make the progress they want due to lack of resources. He said in terms of work groups meeting before April 7, that he believes that is a reasonable expectation for the Home Energy Labeling group. Members of the Home Energy Labeling group agreed. Chair Hansel asked if that is possible for the EV group. Members of that group agreed as well. Chair Hansel asked if members of the Weatherization group can be available and members of that group agreed as well.

a. Weatherization

Ms. Brunner stated that for the Weatherization group, she reached out to Eversource to see if NH Saves could work with that group and the Clean Energy Team as well. She stated that there will be varying support for all three of the groups. She said Councilor Ormerod has already been nominated to join the committee but has not been appointed yet. He stated that he would like to go into the Weatherization group. Ms. Brunner asked Mr. Pipp if he would be willing to join the Weatherization group; Mr. Pipp agreed.

b. Home Energy Labeling

Mr. Oursler stated that he wants to go into the EV group as well as Home Energy Labeling. Mr. Dey stated that he has a preference for Home Energy Labeling group. Ms. Brunner asked if the groups would be willing to meet once before the April 7 meeting to start a work plan. Vice Chair Gaunt asked what level of support the working groups would receive from the City. Ms. Brunner replied that the work groups will run informally, and each group will have less than what is required for a quorum therefore they will not be required to take minutes. However, they will not make any major decisions on their own and have to report back to the full group. She said for the Home Energy Labeling group, there is the opportunity to receive technical assistance from NEEP.

Vice Chair Gaunt asked if the Home Energy Labeling group wants to research more examples of what has worked, would they work with NEEP and come back to ECC and get approval or do they go directly with them. Ms. Brunner said she will make herself as available as possible to help each group out and NEEP will do so as well with the Home Energy Labeling group. She said her available time changes from week to week, but she will help to the extent possible, however, the heavy lifting will be done by the work groups themselves and their partners. Chair Hansel asked that the NEEP presenters make their presentation available to the Home Energy Labeling work group as well. Ms. Luck agreed that they would.

c. Electric Vehicles

Ms. Brunner stated that for the EV group, they can reach out to some other groups in the community that are working on EV issues, like the Monadnock Energy Hub. Mr. Roth stated he will go with the EV group.

5) Correspondence

a. Letter of Support for Keene TAP Grant Application – Chuck Redfern

Chair Hansel stated that they received two requests this month, one from Mr. Chuck Redfern regarding the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP). Mr. Redfern is asking that ECC endorse the City's application to the State for grant funding. Ms. Brunner explained that the City of Keene can apply for grant funding for a federal grant administered by the state and requires a 20% local match. She said it is increasingly competitive each round. She stated that the City's focus is the Transportation Heritage Trail which extends the Cheshire Rail trail south, which currently starts in downtown Keene and runs down the old rail bed to Eastern Avenue and is a popular rail trail. She said the City would like to extend it; there are unimproved crossings along the trail that the City would eventually like to install a bridge over 101 which is a dangerous and busy crossing, and then the trail goes over the historic Stone Arch Bridge, however, in order to make it safe for pedestrian and cyclist crossing they would need improvements. She stated that the proposal is to improve the section of the trail between Eastern Avenue and Route 101 and there would be some connections to Marlborough Street and Chapman Road. Mr. Redfern has asked the ECC to write a letter of support for the grant, which may fit into the goal of the Sustainable Energy Plan which is to support alternative modes of transportation including walking and biking corridors. Chair Hansel emphasized that ECC does allude to transportation in the Sustainable Energy Plan so there is alignment between the two committees.

Chair Hansel asked if members would like to recommend that they endorse the grant and write a letter of support.

Mr. Roth moved to authorize the ECC Chair to draft a letter of support for the TAP grant, Mr. Oursler seconded, and the motion was passed by unanimous vote.

b. Request for Endorsement of Carbon Fee and Dividend – Nancy Gillard & Carolyn Jones

Chair Hansel stated that the committee sponsored an educational program about this a month ago. He asked if members of the public would like to speak to this request. Ms. Jones explained that Carbon Fee and Dividend entails charging a fee at the source and the money is returned to households rather than the government as it is revenue neutral and not market based, she stated that there can be deductions in emissions at the scale and speed that is needed. Studies show that the lowest income households come out ahead which makes it especially fair and viable politically. She said even the American Petroleum Institute is coming out in favor of carbon pricing and it also has support from many businesses; however, to make it attractive politically on a bipartisan level, the package of the fee and the dividend is attractive. She stated it would create a context for the City where prices reflect the cost of carbon pollution rather than individual mandates and regulations. Ms. Jones said she hopes that the City of Keene will join other cities across the country and twenty-eight NH towns that have endorsed carbon fee and dividend as there will be action in Congress soon, and this would be the most helpful effort to reach one hundred percent clean energy. Ms. Jones asked that the City Council pass a resolution and the Mayor write a letter to the President, the Governor and State representatives.

Chair Hansel asked if members have questions about the request before drafting a motion. Ms. Gillard added that the carbon fee and dividend is very consistent with the Sustainable Energy Plan and all the work the City is doing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. She said it makes a lot of sense for the City to endorse the carbon fee and dividend and urged the committee's consideration of it. Chair Hansel asked how many communities in NH have already passed the resolution. Ms. Gillard replied that there are twenty-eight that have endorsed it at town meetings as well as the City of Portsmouth. She said in Cheshire County there are also six townships that have passed it, and four have it on their radar after receiving enough community support. Ms. Jones said that the County Commissioners are also considering the resolution. She said that the County drafted their own resolution, however, the ones from the town meetings are modeled on the Carbon Cashback Coalition and the one they are suggesting today is along those lines as well.

Ms. Brunner stated that the committee can make a recommendation today or wait until their April meeting. She said the recommendation would go to City Council and then the Mayor would most likely refer it to one of the City Council committees. She stated someone from ECC would probably be asked to explain their reasoning for making the recommendation along with members of the public and that committee would then refer the recommendation back to City Council and they would vote on it at their next regular meeting. Chair Hansel asked Ms. Jones and Ms. Gillard what the timeframe is for a recommendation from the City to the State government. Ms. Jones stated that climate is one of the big packages coming forward after the stimulus package within Congress, therefore it would be most effective to make the recommendation soon to add to the public expression of wanting carbon fee and dividend. She stated that once the package is put forward there will be a lengthy process in congressional committees. However, the most important need right now is to make sure this is part of the initial package so it would be most effective to make the recommendation in the next month or so.

Mr. Lamb shared that City involvement in state law development and statute amendments is a well-trodden path, however, in the past the City Council has taken a different view of its role with respect to providing input on federal law and rulemaking. He said he is not suggesting that ECC does not make the recommendation to City Council; however, the Council may question what their role is in the federal lawmaking. He wanted to make sure the committee was aware of this difference.

Vice Chair Gaunt said that carbon fee and dividend is a very effective way to enact the type of change that is required at the state and federal scale in the timely fashion that it requires. She proposed that they write the endorsement and state how it will assist the City of Keene in achieving their own climate goals. Mr. Lamb said that regardless of what City Council choose to do, it provides an opportunity to create awareness and community involvement which is paramount. Chair Hansel said the recommendation does not specifically mention the Sustainable Energy Plan so that is something that can be added. He asked what members' thoughts are on endorsement. Vice Chair Gaunt added that the recommendation states that the City of Keene has been a leader in climate and energy issues and proposed that they include a statement about the adoption of the Sustainable Energy Plan and tie it into the City's goals. Mr. Nuru stated that the ultimate goal as an energy committee is to see these policies take effect, this is a move in the right direction.

Mr. Oursler moved that the City Council adopt the resolution from the Clean Energy Team with reference to the City of Keene's Sustainable Energy Plan's goals, Vice Chair Gaunt seconded, and the motion was passed by unanimous vote.

6) Legislative Updates

Ms. Brunner stated that HB 315, the bill that would make it difficult to do community power, is facing a lot of opposition and the City Council voted to send a letter to the Governor in opposition to the bill per the ECC's request. There have also been informal work group discussions about possible amendments to the bill. The House's Science, Technology, & Energy Committee meets this Friday at 10:00 AM for a work session on the bill, which is when the amendment is expected to be introduced. She said they are hopeful that most of the issues in the bill will be fixed with the amendment.

Ms. Brunner said HB 213, relative to the elimination of thermal energy from renewable energy classes, also faced strong opposition and has not been acted on yet. It will also go to the work session this Friday and the executive session on Monday.

Ms. Brunner stated that HB 539, relative to the energy resource standards and benefits charge, will be retained but it may come back around in the next session.

HB 351, relative to the systems benefit charge, will most likely pass the House legislature and will eliminate the PUC oversight of energy efficiency funds. For example, energy efficiency funds would not be able to be used for low-income weatherization projects and would be a big blow to energy efficiency in the State. They will have an opportunity to oppose the bill when it goes to the Senate and she will provide an update on when that may take place at the next meeting.

HB 225, relative to the calculation of net energy metering payments or credits, will not be moving forward so that is good news. She said if anyone is interested in attending the information session on Friday, she will send out that information via email.

7) Earth Day 2021

Ms. Brunner stated that the Monadnock Sustainable Energy Hub will be doing a virtual expo for EVs that will feature a short video. She said they are also looking for profiles for EV owners so if any members own EVs she can put them in contact with Ms. Annie Henry from the Hub. She said the short video will be part of the virtual Earth Day Festival from April 22-24 with a series of films for Earth Day.

Chair Hansel said he is now the owner of a Chevy Bolt which is a fully electric vehicle so he can perhaps be a part of that event.

8) Community Power Update

Chair Hansel stated if HB 315 passes in its original form that would be a big setback but hopefully the amendment will be passed. He said the draft Community Power Plan has been made public and there are going to be some public hearings on the Plan on March 30 at 12 PM and 6:30 PM. He asked members to stay tuned about those hearings.

9) Committee Membership

This item was tabled to the next meeting.

10) New Business

No new business for the April meeting was brought forward.

11) Next Meeting: Wednesday, April 7, 2021

12) Adjourn

Chair Hansel adjourned the meeting at 9:15 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Ayshah Kassamali-Fox, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by Mari Brunner, Planner