

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AD HOC COMMUNITY POWER COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, March 30, 2021

6:30 PM

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Members Present:

Peter Hansel, Chair
Councilor Mike Giacomo
Dr. Ann Shedd
Paul Roth

Staff Present:

Mari Brunner, Planner
Rhett Lamb, Community Development
Director

Members Not Present:

Dan Belluscio

Chair Hansel 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.

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Hansel called the meeting to order at 6:32 PM. Roll call was taken.

2) Public Hearing: City of Keene Community Power Plan

a. Consultant Presentation

Chair Hansel introduced the Keene Community Power Committee, Keene Community Development Department staff and Community Power consultants. He provided some background behind establishing this team by mentioning that the City of Keene had an objective of becoming a 100% renewable energy community by 2030 for electricity, and by 2050 for thermal and transportation energy. As a result of this goal, the City appointed this Ad-hoc Community Power Committee and in November of 2020 they hired consultants from Good Energy and Standard Power to help with the project and creation of a Community Power Plan. Chair Hansel went on to provide a timeline overview of the committee's activity thus far. He stated that they began the process of developing the plan with a series of public meetings in December of 2020 and shortly after launched a survey aimed at gathering information from the public and increasing awareness. In January of 2021 they finalized the survey results and used them to begin working on a draft Community Power Plan. Another series of public meetings were held later that same month and a first draft of the plan was completed and made available to the public in February of 2021. Chair Hansel stated they are currently in the review process, which includes these public hearings and obtaining feedback from the community.

Chair Hansel then introduced Daria Mark from Good Energy to present an overview of the Community Power Plan.

Daria Mark from Good Energy started her presentation by highlighting Community Power basics. She explained that there are two parts to an electricity bill, the delivery and the supply. Delivery includes all parts required to get electricity to you such as wires, trucks and poles. She informed the audience that the delivery portion will remain the same, noting that they will still receive a single bill from Eversource. She explained that what will change with the Community Power Plan is the supply portion. In NH you have the option to choose your own energy supply, so the city of Keene is buying electricity in bulk for residents, which results in cost savings and local control. Ms. Mark stated the plan will bring about more supply options so consumers can select a choice that best suits their household.

Ms. Mark then went over outreach, which she stated included a survey asking the community what they'd want to see in the Community Power program. They did this through digital avenues, such as social media and the Community Power website, as well as newspaper ads. Ms. Mark added that the Community Power website has the aforementioned presentations from January and detailed information about survey results for anyone interested. She stated one of the most telling survey questions was an attempt to tease out how much interest there was in renewable energy and how that played out against price. Ms. Mark showed a graph with the results of this question which demonstrated a strong interest in renewable energy, as well as the feedback that the community wanted cost options. She mentioned that the survey feedback is reflected in the options they presented in the draft plan. Ms. Mark reminded everyone that they can learn about the program via email updates and can easily sign up for those on the City of Keene website.

Patrick Roche from Good Energy then reviewed program implementation steps. He started off by saying they will work with the committee to review all public comments received and incorporate those into the Community Power Plan as they see fit. He went on to say that in the beginning of April 2021 the committee will need to vote to approve a final plan. They will then move into the summer and fall period when the City Council will vote to adopt the plan. This process will also include rulemaking and review by the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) per the amendment of HB 315. He reminded everyone that HB 315 was very restrictive, so the city of Keene and the consulting team worked with the sponsor of the bill to come up with an amendment that would satisfy all parties. That law adds the requirement that the PUC must review and improve the Community Power plan, and they have 60 days to do so. Mr. Roche noted the amendment to HB 315 could become law sometime in the summer and review by the Public Utilities Commission will hopefully take place by late fall. Once they have those approvals they will be looking to identify favorable market conditions to go out to bid for electricity supply, which will put them in place to launch the program in the winter of 2021 or early 2022.

Mr. Roche then went on to review key aspects of the Community Power draft plan. He reiterated that the plan is firmly grounded in the City of Keene's goal to get to 100% renewable electricity by 2030. The first key aspect he covered was economic and environmental value. Mr. Roche stated they want as many people as possible to participate in the program so it has to offer both affordability and meaning, something people can afford and feel good about.

The next key aspect was flexible framework and tools. Mr. Roche stated that not everyone in the community is the same; there are different abilities to pay and different levels of interest in the program, so they aimed to provide options for everyone. They also want to take advantage of other tools, such as supporting rooftop solar and energy efficiency programs to both reduce and clean up the power supply.

Next was harnessing community ideas and resources. Mr. Roche stated they want to have constant conversations with the community to uncover what they are valuing about the program and what could be added to further increase value.

He then discussed crafting solutions and removing barriers by stating that the City of Keene and the committee have already been engaging in conversations at the state level with regards to policy and restrictive laws. The plan is to continue these efforts which could include fighting to increase the renewable portfolio standard and exploring new potential with grid modernizations and smart meters.

Lastly, Mr. Roche spoke to leading by example and collaboration. He stated that Keene is going to hopefully show the way for other communities. They also want to partner with other communities to increase the scale of purchases and bring about more competitive prices for everyone.

Mr. Roche then moved on to discuss extra renewable energy, stating that the focus of this program is on NH Class 1 which is called "new renewable energy." He explained that this means it has to have been built after 2006 and come from New England, NY or eastern Canada, and is primarily wind, solar, incremental new small hydro, anaerobic digestion, or biomass. He noted that this aligns with the Environmental Protection Agency's definition of green power. Mr. Roche further explained that all of the offerings in the program will meet the state's minimum renewable portfolio standard, but some of the products will purchase extra renewable energy, which will focus on NH Class 1.

Mr. Roche then spoke about the 4 electricity supply products that will be offered in the plan. He stated the program will automatically enroll eligible members into the default product unless they opt-out. The goal of this product, named Keene Local Green, is to increase renewable energy use while maintaining competitive rates compared to the utility. Mr. Roche then went over the three optional products in the program. The first being Keene Basic, the most competitive and lowest cost option, which will just meet the state's minimum renewable energy requirements. For people who want to use a lot more clean energy and have a bigger impact, there will be the Keene 50% Local Green, which would add 50% of extra renewable energy on top of the state's renewable energy

requirements. Then they have the Keene 100% Local Green adding 100% on top of the state's renewable energy requirements. Mr. Roche stated with the default product, Keene Local Green, they are likely looking at the extra renewable energy being 5 or 10 percentage points, and hopefully increasing that over time.

Next, Mr. Roche touched on the monthly cost difference between these products, based on a typical household and relative to the default product. He explained that if you move into Keene Basic you save around \$3 per month. If you choose the Keene 50% Local Green option you will pay around \$10 extra per month, and around \$23 extra for the Keene 100% Local Green product. Mr. Roche noted that these numbers are based on current pricing in today's market and they will reassess these when they are going out to bid after program launch. These numbers also assume 10% extra renewable energy in the default option and an average household energy consumption of 7,500 kWh/year.

Mr. Roche mentioned net metering next, stating the program will seek to offer the same or better terms than Eversource. He explained that net metering is a way to provide economic credit to those who have their own solar systems that send electricity back to the grid. He noted that if there are differences between the Community Power program and Eversource, they will make sure it is very clear in their communications so people can make the most informed choice about whether or not they want to participate in the program.

With regard to energy efficiency, Patrick Roche stated that the program aims to promote existing efficiency efforts, such as NH Saves, and over time look to directly fund efficiency efforts to supplement other benefits out there. He also mentioned that the survey results showed a lot of opportunities around Keene and across income levels for energy efficiency, noting that most people hadn't done an energy audit and reported that they could benefit from energy efficiency measures.

Mr. Roche stated the plan has the option for Keene to explore group buying opportunities, which would mean Keene working with other communities if it would benefit the program. He went on to say that each community would have their own plan and own product choices, but they would come together for the bidding opportunity to have a bigger scale and pooled buying, which would help everyone achieve more competitive prices. As they move through the approval process, they will assess if there are opportunities to work with others.

Mr. Roche then moved on to program enrollment, stating the program will have voluntary participation with automatic enrollment. He explained that this means the program is open to any electricity customer in Keene; however, if you are a customer of Eversource you are eligible to be automatically enrolled in the default product, unless you opt-out. To check if your supplier is Eversource, Mr. Roche instructed everyone to look at their electricity bill under the supply section where it will say "Eversource" under supplier. He went on to say that everyone who is eligible will receive a postcard followed by a customer notification letter, and there will also be press releases, flyers, presentations, and notices to raise awareness of program launch and how to opt out if you

don't want to participate. Mr. Roche highlighted that, even after launch, you can leave the program at any time without penalty.

In summary, Mr. Roche stated that the plan's key considerations are to offer a range of choices with a mix of competitive costs and renewable energy, to bring local control over electricity supply to Keene for the first time ever, and to combine competitive prices with support for local renewable energy.

b. Public Comment

Chair Hansel opened up the meeting for public comment.

Bruce Norlund of 267 Gilsum Street in Keene, NH inquired about the opportunities for an individual home owner to install solar cells and sell to the utility. Mr. Roche stated that initially they will, at a minimum, give the same opportunities as are already in place with Eversource, and hopefully offer better incentives over time. He explained that when you produce extra energy it accrues in an account that you can draw from later so you're getting the value of that extra energy, and the Community Power program will have this at the start.

Ruth Goldstein of 61 Laura Lane expressed her support and excitement over the program, stating she is looking forward to being able to participate.

Suzanne Butcher of 44 Felt Road in Keene, NH commented that she is excited about such a great program. She inquired about the pricing and how it compares to other renewable energy programs. She mentioned Arcadia, a third party electricity supplier that likely uses energy supply from the Midwest, stating that they offer their 50% product for no additional charge, and their 100% product for about \$10 extra per month. Mr. Roche replied that there is some very cheap renewable energy in certain markets, like the Midwest and Texas, and the program could have gone that route; however, the idea behind this program is supporting and helping the growth of renewable energy within their region. He explained that, in New England, when someone is developing a renewable energy project they have to look at both the value from the electrons and the renewable energy certificates because they need both of them to make the project economically viable. Whereas in places like Texas, the value of the electrons alone are enough to make the project economically viable, which allows them to sell renewable energy credits at very low rates. The Community Power program could buy those low cost credits for Keene, but it wouldn't help to expand renewable energy here in New England and as locally as possible. Mr. Roche stated that part of the education and outreach of the program will seek to make this concept very clear and will explain how the impact of the renewable energy source is different.

Nancy Gillard of 72 Reservoir Street in Keene, NH stated her household has already chosen 100% renewable energy for the past couple of years, recognizing that it's not local, so they like the local focus of this program and applauded the team for explaining the components so clearly. Mrs. Gillard went on to state that she's interested in hearing

more about the energy efficiency piece and the mention of possibly funding some energy efficiency efforts over time. Mr. Roche stated energy efficiency is often overlooked, so the program will do a lot of education and outreach on the topic. He mentioned that there is also the possibility for part of the program rate to include a small fee that goes into a fund specifically for energy efficiency. He brought up the idea to have grants for individuals going through the NH Saves program to help with the cost, noting that it may be that they could target certain income levels. Mr. Roche added that this energy efficiency focus will not be proposed right at the start of the program because they want to focus on the core pieces first, and not add too many other costs.

Mr. Roche asked Emily Manns from Standard Power to speak to this. Ms. Manns began by mentioning that energy efficiency is an important aspect of the energy plan. She stated the current situation with NH Saves is that the docket is open at the PUC for the 2021 programs, which means the funding is being held up. She went on to explain that there is an opportunity for people interested in promoting energy efficiency to provide comments at the PUC. For anyone interested in furthering funding for energy efficiency in the state, she provided the docket number of EE20092. Ms. Manns also mentioned that there will be significant gas price increases in Keene for the upcoming summer, noting that energy efficiency can make an even bigger difference in that situation.

Councilor Mike Giacomo wondered, in light of upcoming increases in gas prices, whether there is a mechanism in place such that if people are enthusiastic about energy efficiency that they can help subsidize those that anticipate struggling with cost increases. Mr. Roche replied that is a great idea and stated the products as envisioned don't have that built in currently. He added that they are in some ways constrained to the Eversource billing system, but it could be something they add in an efficiency fee, but would have to decide whether they'd want to do that right away with program launch or wait. He mentioned another idea of doing cross-promotion with efficiency and connecting people who want to help with those in need that way.

Bob Hayden from Standard Power stated they could make a small, direct investment to help develop solar projects and also have a charitable fund, putting them both on the website. He mentioned that they are just starting to look at how to retain these types of funds in the communities, and thinks they will have better answers soon. Mr. Hayden stated that it's a great idea and could be a keystone for financing other things such as efficiency, weatherization and heating projects. He added that it could be part of the second phase for the program but that there may also be some time to spend on the website features while the PUC does their rulemaking.

3) Update on status of HB 315, "Relative to the aggregation of electric customers"

This item was tabled to the next meeting.

4) Next Meeting: Friday, April 2, 2021 at 8:00 am

Chair Hansel mentioned the upcoming meeting on April 2, 2021. He thanked the presenters and committee for their hard work and thanked everyone for attending the hearing.

5) Adjourn

Chair Hansel adjourned the meeting at 7:21 PM

Respectfully submitted by,
Nicole Cullinane, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by Mari Brunner, Planner