

**City of Keene**  
**New Hampshire**

**ENERGY & CLIMATE COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Wednesday, April 7, 2021**

**8:00 AM**

**Remote Meeting via Zoom**

**Members Present:**

Peter Hansel, Chair  
Councilor Raleigh Ormerod  
Jake Pipp  
Jude Nuru  
Paul Roth  
Zach Luse  
Suzanne Butcher  
Andrew Dey  
Clair Oursler, Alternate

**Staff Present:**

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

**Members Not Present:**

Cary Gaunt, Vice Chair  
Ken Dooley

Chair Hansel called the meeting to order at 8:00 AM.

**1. Roll Call**

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 platform rules aloud and roll call was conducted.

**2. Approval of March 3, 2021 Meeting Minutes**

Mr. Luse moved to accept the March 3, 2021 meeting minutes, Mr. Roth seconded, and the motion was passed by unanimous vote.

**3. Presentation on NHSaves Program: Gordon Tuttle and Frank Melanson (Eversource)**

Mr. Gordon Tuttle began a brief presentation of the offerings of the NHSaves program for residential customers. He said they have a variety of programs and their funding levels have increased over the last few years. He stated that they are currently waiting for the New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission to approve the three-year plan; therefore, they are currently operating at the 2020 program levels. Mr. Tuttle explained that they have programs for

lighting and appliances, refrigerator recycling, heating and cooling systems, whole house energy efficiency and income eligible programs. He said that they provide instant rebates for Energy Star LED bulbs and appliances which can account for up to 13% of household energy use. Rebates are also available for clothes washers, dryers, refrigerators, air conditioners, room air purifiers, dehumidifiers, and pool pumps. Mr. Tuttle stated that customers can submit their rebates online with a copy of their invoice or mail in rebates. He said rebates are typically processed within 4-5 weeks. He stated that NHSaves offers free haul-away for refrigerators with a \$30 incentive. He explained that new heat pump technologies are increasingly popular among customers in both new construction and existing homes as they offer superior efficiency in moving heat rather than creating it. However, rebates are only available while funding lasts and additional details can be found at [www.nhsaves.com/heatingcooling](http://www.nhsaves.com/heatingcooling).

Mr. Tuttle stated that he manages the Home Performance with Energy Star program, which is a whole house energy audit program. Customers must qualify for the program based on their home energy use. He said that qualification is determined by assessing the square footage of the home and its conditions, the number of gallons of oil or propane, cords of wood or tons of pellets. He said they have increased the rebates from 50% of the measures to 75%; and an increase of \$4,000 per home to \$8,000 per home which allows customers to take advantage of a whole house energy weatherization approach. Mr. Tuttle stated that low interest financing is also available for customers paying the copay portion of their projects. For example, if a total project costs \$10,000, the program would pay for \$7,500, the customer would be responsible for \$2,500 and financing options are available for those who do not want to pay their portion up front.

Mr. Tuttle reviewed a slide with the information that is requested on the Home Energy Performance with Energy Star online form. He said customers must provide their annual electricity usage, two sources of fuel, and if customers have a third source of fuel such as wood or pellets, they must contact the program to convert the third source into the other two sources to determine eligibility for the program. Once customers are qualified based on the Home Heat Initiative (HHI) score, they must complete and submit the online enrollment form. He explained that homes that score in the range of 8 and up are qualified as needing help from the program. Mr. Tuttle stated that rebates for new construction are up to \$4,000 and a Home Energy Rating System (HERS) professional will visit the home to perform an analysis; the home must also pass an audit to be rated an energy star efficient home. Mr. Tuttle stated that they also have a low-income program which has experienced an increase in the amount of funding and use and is currently at the \$21,000 level. If customers qualify based on their income through their local community action program (CAP) agency, such as Southwestern Community Services (SCS), they can receive funding for new heating systems as well.

Councilor Ormerod asked Mr. Tuttle what criteria the program uses to define a home. Mr. Tuttle replied that single family homes qualify for the Home Performance with Energy Star program, but they will also consider homes with up to four units or less. He said the low-income program includes multi-units as well. He said if the home is a duplex, residents can be afforded up to \$16,000 per duplex. Mr. Luse noted that there is a ten-year waitlist with Southwestern Community Services and asked why a backlog is there. Mr. Tuttle replied that the backlog is primarily due to a lack of resources through the CAP programs. He explained that Eversource administers the program, however, the CAP programs perform the audits, and they may be

experiencing a lack of people in the field and difficulty in getting installers and energy auditors. Mr. Luse asked if Eversource supports the CAPs with funding or administration of the program. Mr. Tuttle replied that Eversource has helped support training of energy auditors to assist with that need. Chair Hansel added that there is only one contractor available to do the work which is a drawback and he proposed that the City and Eversource collaborate on providing certification to additional contractors through Eversource to increase the number of auditors and installers available. Mr. Tuttle stated that they added a couple of contractors to the Home Energy Performance program in the past few years. Chair Hansel asked what type of outreach Eversource performs to the public to create awareness of these programs. Mr. Tuttle replied that Eversource performs ButtonUp workshops, energy committee shows around the state and speaks to businesses and employee groups, as well as advertises programs on their social media platforms.

Mr. Mark Wrona introduced himself and said he is with World Energy Efficiency Services based out of Worcester; however, he grew up in Wilton, New Hampshire. He stated that his company has done several buildings in the Keene area and are focused on commercial lighting specifically, such as retrofitting old fluorescent lighting to new LED lighting. He said there are a few different pathways based on customer needs and affordability. Typically, Eversource pays for 40-80% of projects and they aim for a two-year payback for a commercial project. He said there are a few other measures that do not fall into the 40-80% rebates, called prescriptive rebates, for example, a variable frequency drive that is installed on a rooftop unit to assist in efficiency. He said many municipal buildings, like schools, use this to capture a lot of energy usage. However, their primary focus is lighting as it is often the number one energy use in these buildings. Mr. Wrona stated that they worked on number of projects in Keene, including the Monadnock Humane Society and Fast Friends, as well as Cheshire Children's Museum, where they replaced all of the lights and Eversource paid for most of the project. They received the contract two years ago and did not have local electricians on board at that time, however, they are now contracted with local electricians.

Councilor Ormerod asked if Eversource's contribution would be diminished with the availability of new grants and other funding sources. Mr. Wrona replied that he does not work with those grant programs and that would be something the customer does on their own. He can provide Eversource's contribution for a project, however, customers have in the past had their share of the project paid for with grants. He said they work with commercial buildings and not residential; however, if there is a housing complex, they will work on outdoor lighting. He said they have done several homeless shelters in the Boston area and often he is able to get the full 80% on those projects. Mr. Roth added that Cheshire Medical Center recently replaced a thousand fixtures with LED panels at zero cost to the hospital. Mr. Wrona said they also partnered with Hamblet Electric and will be working on the Marlborough School. Hamblet will be the installer on that project. Chair Hansel stated that his company Filtrine received rebates through Eversource in 2009 and they may need to create awareness about these rebate programs in the community. He said that he agrees that grants are separate incentives from the Eversource rebates.

Mr. Pipp asked Mr. Wrona if they work with businesses that rent spaces as opposed to owning. Mr. Wrona said he typically asks the customer who pays the electric bill, and if they are paying,

then it is in their best interest to participate with the project. He always recommends that renters speak with their landlords before starting any lighting project. However, once the lights are paid for the savings begin within 1.5 to 2 years. He noted that landlords typically do not want to place new lighting in a facility as they are not paying the electricity bills so more than likely the cost will fall on the tenant.

#### **4. Energy Plan Work Groups** **a. Weatherization**

Mr. Luse reported that Ms. Gillard and Ms. Jones from the Clean Energy Team attended the weatherization work group, and they had a great discussion around assessing the challenges and needs for existing weatherization programs through NHSaves, SCS, CDFA, as well as Vital Communities. He said they are performing some outreach with these groups to assess how they can support and amplify existing programs. They plan to regroup to discuss how they can have the most impact through promotion and education and other avenues. He said he spoke with CDFA and they are interested in doing a webinar on what is available and sharing success stories of mid to small sized businesses. Mr. Luse said a particularly good idea that came up was the concept of creating a Habitat for Humanity type model for weatherization and augmenting the workforce for auditing. Chair Hansel thanked Mr. Luse and emphasized that there needs to be more contractors available for getting this work done.

#### **b. Home Energy Labeling**

Mr. Dey shared that they also had a great meeting and are in the preliminary stages of figuring out how to best develop this home energy labeling program. They identified some organizations to reach out to and agreed that starting a pilot program at first is best to demonstrate success which can then provide a solid foundation for expansion. He said the process will require a lot of research and the next steps will include reviewing policies and ordinances from other communities and speaking with potential partners, as well as conducting a landscape assessment of what the housing situation is within the community to see how best to approach home energy labeling. Chair Hansel asked Mr. Tuttle if Eversource has dealt with NEEP before and has any experience with home energy labeling and if he has a comment. Mr. Tuttle said that Mr. Melanson with the Eversource NHSaves program is more familiar with home energy labeling. They have been watching the programs; however, the closest thing they have is the HERS rating and Energy Star programs. They are keeping their eye on what is available. Mr. Dey asked Mr. Tuttle if the working group was interested in learning more about collaboration and the possibility of working with the HELIX systems, would they need to reach out to Mr. Melanson. Mr. Tuttle agreed that Mr. Melanson is the key person for those conversations.

#### **c. Electric Vehicles**

Mr. Nuru reported that the working group met and brainstormed strategies, for example, to contact the Transportation and Climate initiative and the Clean Energy NH Team, as well as participation in seminars and workshops that are undertaking these projects in the region. He said the most important issue that was raised was installation of a charging station in the community to demonstrate the importance of EV. They scheduled another meeting at the end of the month

after speaking with some of the entities they identified and plan to bring that information back to the group. He emphasized that they identified action as the most important element. Mr. Nuru asked Mr. Tuttle what role Eversource would play in terms of programs if entities decide to put up an EV charging system at their facility. Mr. Tuttle replied that corporate has been in support of EV charging stations around NH, CT and MA. Mr. Nuru asked if a car dealership wanted to install a system at their facility, would Eversource provide a cost reduction incentive. Mr. Tuttle said he can acquire that information and send it back to Ms. Brunner.

Ms. Butcher asked about the status of the Volkswagen (VW) settlement. Mr. Roth noted that he was able to get some pints of contact at Eversource, including Ms. Rebecca Collins and Mr. James Cater. He said they are working with the State and planning on the distribution of the funds from the VW settlement, however, that has not been finalized yet.

*Mr. Nuru left the meeting.*

Chair Hansel stated that he gathered details about the Drive Electric event which will take place virtually on April 22 through the Monadnock Sustainability Hub. He said he will also contact the City of Keene to find out if there are electrical standards for people who purchase electric vehicles and want to install a charging station in their home. Ms. Brunner was able to gather that information and they should aim to put that information on the Energy and Climate Commission website. He proposed that Mr. Tuttle consider that Eversource consider providing a rebate for customers who want to install a charging station in their homes.

#### **d. Possible new work group: Community Solar**

Chair Hansel stated that Mr. Nuru, Ms. Brunner and Mr. Lamb attended a meeting to discuss if there is a place for installing community solar locations around Keene. They developed an idea of what potential there is for small, community solar groups in Keene. He said it raised enough questions that it might be worth having a work group devoted to community solar that can identify sites as small as a half an acre to place enough solar panels to power twenty homes. It may require access to three phase wiring but not necessarily and there are many questions that need to be addressed. He encouraged members to consider serving on a community solar group.

Ms. Brunner noted that prior to this meeting, she was not aware that virtual net metering was available in NH. She explained that virtual net metering is a bill crediting system that requires a minimum of five members for each project and provides an option for customers who may not be able to install solar on their own homes for various reasons. She explained that it allows these customers to still benefit from solar by purchasing a share of a solar garden or farm and receive credit on their bill for their percentage of the excess energy generation of that installation. She said NH did have group net metering prior to this but did not provide on bill crediting which created many logistical hurdles.

She said there is also a low-income adder for projects that primarily benefit low- and moderate-income individuals that can provide a higher return on investment of projects. Ms. Brunner stated that the Mayor has expressed interest in the possibility of a pilot community solar installation at the neighborhood level in East Keene where there is a lot of three phase power and a high

percentage of renters. She stated that the biggest question is if there is enough interest on the committee to take on another work group. Mr. Dey stated that he is very excited about the idea but cannot commit in addition to the home energy labeling group, however, he would like to see this idea gain traction. Councilor Ormerod stated that he is very interested in solar PV and does not want Keene to fall behind on this opportunity and expressed interest in participating on the community solar working group. Ms. Butcher said she would be interested in the weatherization as well as the community solar. Mr. Luse said he could devote some time to the working group. Chair Hansel volunteered himself for the community solar working group as well. Mr. Bruce Norlund, an attendee, shared that he owns an electric vehicle and lives in Keene and wants to keep abreast of the work of the community solar working group.

#### **5. NHSaves Virtual Button Up Workshop – Tuesday, May 4, 2021**

Ms. Gillard announced that the Clean Energy Team has a virtual Button Up Workshop scheduled for Tuesday, May 4<sup>th</sup> from 7:00-8:30 PM, following the Earth Day events. She said she will forward the flyers to Ms. Brunner to share with ECC for promotion. She said the event is being held virtually and will be co-presented by Mr. Andy Dunkin and Mr. Ted Stiles. Ms. Gillard said they are coordinating with the Earth Day events and will be promoting it heavily within different neighborhood groups. She said she is excited to hear that more local contractors are available as there has been a lack of local contractors. She mentioned that Mr. Stiles has worked with the Conval School District and the Harris Center teaching students how to do the blower-door test and audits for weatherization. She said she would be excited to see the Keene School District do more work in that area. Ms. Gillard stated that the Button Up workshops in the past three years have been very successful and there are nine other communities in the state that are signed up as well. She said Mr. Tuttle may be able to speak to the amount of available funding through Eversource. Mr. Tuttle replied that he anticipates that the program will be funded and open for this year.

#### **6. Community Power Update**

Ms. Brunner stated that on March 30, the Community Power Committee held two public hearings on the draft Community Power Plan. She said the committee did receive a lot of interest and comments from the community at the meeting and in written comments so they met again on April 2 to discuss those comments and there may be some tweaks made to the plan to address comments from the public. The next meeting is tomorrow at 8 am to discuss the draft plan and if the committee is ready, they will be voting on the plan tomorrow morning with the new changes. She said if members are interested in attending, the agenda is posted online and the agenda packet includes a redline version of the plan and a clean copy of the plan and a memo that explains those changes. She said members can also visit [www.KeeneCommunityPower.com](http://www.KeeneCommunityPower.com) and all information will be posted there. Chair Hansel stated that there was an article in the paper after the public meetings with a headline that was misleading and led to community members writing a letter to the editor and others castigating the committee. He encouraged members to not get too discouraged about the negative publicity as they have time to get the right information out into the community.

#### **7. Upcoming Dates of Interest**

- a. Earth Day Electric Vehicle Expo – Thursday, April 22
- b. Monadnock Earth Day Film Festival – April 22-24
- c. Green Up Keene – Saturday, April 24

Ms. Brunner stated that the City was determined to do this event this year in a COVID-safe way and physically-distanced. She provided the link and encouraged members who would like to sponsor an area to contact the Public Works department at 603-352-6550. Ms. Brunner stated that they are also working with the Public Works department on a music video to promote the event and are looking for volunteers to dance to the tune of Jailhouse Rock in a promo video. Chair Hansel said that event can be safely done during the pandemic.

### **8. Committee Membership**

Chair Hansel stated that there are one or two spots that are being filled and are in the works. However, they can still use one or two more nominations and members can send the names of potential new members to Ms. Brunner or himself.

### **9. New Business**

### **10. Next Meeting: Wednesday, May 5, 2021**

### **11. 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