

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AD HOC COMMUNITY POWER COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, April 8, 2021

8:00 AM

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Members Present:

Peter Hansel, Chair
Councilor Mike Giacomo
Ann Shedd
Paul Roth
Dan Belluscio

Staff Present:

Mari Brunner, Planner
Rhett Lamb, Community Development
Director

Members Not Present:

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 8:00 AM. Roll call was taken.

2) Approval of Minutes

- a. March 30, 2021 – 12:00 PM**
- b. March 30, 2021 – 6:30 PM**

Dr. Ann Shedd moved to approve the two sets of minutes from March 30, 2021 at 12:00pm and 6:30pm as presented. Paul Roth seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Mari Brunner informed the committee that the agenda for the March 5, 2021 meeting had the approval of minutes from February 3, 2021 listed, which was an error. It should have read the approval of minutes from February 12, 2021. She noted for the record that the minutes included in the packet and adopted by the committee were dated February 12, 2021 and were the correct set of minutes.

3) Draft City of Keene Community Power Plan

- a. Discussion and Additional Comments**

Chair Hansel encouraged the committee to discuss the comments they had received during and after the public hearings, and started by mentioning a comment from Scott Maslansky. He had forewarned the committee that displaying rates with specific dollar amounts for the 50% and 100% products was likely going to cause negative feedback, which turned out to be right. Chair Hansel wondered if they should discuss that issue or not. Daria Mark and Patrick Roche stated that it would be great to bring this up in messaging to the public. Ms. Mark went on to state that it

is important to explain that the program's goal is to provide savings and options, which is why there are four different product choices, including the default that aims to be very competitive with the services people are already receiving from Eversource. Ms. Mark added that it's also important to address that the 50% and 100% options, and accompanying rates, are for those who are looking to take climate action immediately and are willing to invest a little bit more for renewable energy. She reiterated that the goal of the program is not to raise rates, it is to provide a good balance and a lot of options so members of the community can choose whichever option suites them the best.

Councilor Mike Giacomo added that there seems to be comments from both sides, some stating that they aren't doing enough and some stating that they're doing too much. He stated that this push back from both directions is something they expected and one of the reasons why the plan has options for people on both sides. He felt the comments were a good sign that they went about the plan in the right way, with options for all levels.

Chair Hansel let the committee know that he submitted a letter to the editor, which was published on April 2, 2021, and will hopefully help clarify concerns.

Dr. Shedd stated that there will be two opportunities where public messaging around the aforementioned points will be significant. First, as the plan moves to City Council there will likely be press coverage and having the messaging clear and preemptive during that process will be helpful. Additionally, when the plan is ready to launch the messaging about the levels will again need to be very clear. She added that the calculator on the website will aid in supporting the messaging and allow people to get an idea of average numbers they might expect to see on their electricity bills.

Chair Hansel added that Mr. Maslansky also raised concern that the 50% and 100% products might not be as clear as they could be. Chair Hansel agreed with the concern and wondered if a footnote in the plan could explain those products in more detail. Mr. Roche stated that on the website and within the messaging they can show the total of both of those products to make sure the math is very clear. He added that in the plan they could do a quick footnote or example to help clarify, or they could leave the plan as is and make sure they do a better job of explaining it in their messaging to the public. Chair Hansel replied that focusing on messaging to the public should be adequate.

Ms. Mark added that the 50% is calculated based on what you're using in a month. She gave the example of 100 kilowatt hours, stating that 50 of those would be matched with renewable energy. She reiterated that all products meet state standards, but the 50% also adds on top of the state standards. In other words, half of the electricity used in a month will be matched with 50% renewable energy to support the push to move towards more new renewable energy in Keene. The same idea applies to the 100% product.

Paul Roth stated since the numbers were already presented they will likely remain a focus of the public, and suggested they continue to move forward and address concerns as needed.

Dan Belluscio suggested they start their messaging by clearly stating that there are options that will not cost more money and highlighting that anyone can opt out at any time. From there they can go into details such as pricing. He added that if they provide those two major points up front, it will get the public's attention and help put them at ease.

Councilor Giacomo stated when the plan goes to City Council there will be another public hearing and having Council craft the narrative could be helpful.

Bob Hayden stated that a simple piece of language stating that it's an additional 50% or 100% of local renewable energy is a good direction to go in with messaging to the public. He suggested pointing out that the greenness is local.

Chair Hansel suggested they address Bob King's comments next.

Mr. Roche spoke to the comment about kilowatt hours versus Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs), stating the important thing to note is that at the end of the day all the electrons purchased are present on their grid and can be drawn from. He added that they did look at the plan language and made some tweaks so that it's clear that they have the option to do bundled contracts. He mentioned that in past programs they have done unbundled, but this plan will now allow for the flexibility to do bundled.

Mr. Roche then went over the clarification of what local means. They want to distinguish renewable energy sources that are on the New England electricity grid from those that are not, noting that the New England grid is the furthest they will include under the definition of local. Within that framework, Keene wants to try and source things as close to Keene as possible. Mr. Roche stated that they added the definition of local in the plan language to reflect the aforementioned points.

With regards to competitive suppliers, Mr. Roche stated past programs have used one supplier that has been able to serve all of the different rate classes. However, the option to use multiple suppliers was added into the plan language.

Lastly, Mr. Roche stated as they move towards 100% renewable energy it will be important, as Bob King suggested, to line up the needs of the city with the intermittency of renewable energy.

Chair Hansel mentioned that they had arbitrarily selected the Monadnock Region as the definition of local and asked the committee if that seemed sufficient. Mr. Roche replied that they adjusted the language to say Class 1 RECs for the greater Monadnock Region, with the biggest boundary in the plan being electrons on the New England grid. The option to go outside of the Monadnock region is allowable but the language states the city would like to focus as close to Keene as possible.

Mr. Belluscio stated he doesn't feel they should limit to the Monadnock region and suggested they could put a distance within a certain amount of miles from Keene.

Ms. Brunner reiterated that this language is for the initial contract to state their intent and it shouldn't limit them in any way. She also noted that the language states "greater Monadnock Region," so it could include renewable energy generated just over the border in Vermont or Massachusetts, for example. She said this language could be changed if the committee feels it should be more specific.

Mr. Hayden stated, with regards to the market scale, that the market for RECs is an annual market and the power is defined by the contract associated with it, which could be anywhere from 2 to 20 years long. He further explained that in this decoupled scenario, the RECs will be available but the green power may or may not be available. With regards to scale, the wastewater treatment plant in Keene may have up to a megawatt in solar and could make about 1.2 million kilowatt

hours, which is less than 2% of the residential load in Keene. To have a great impact on the load and kilowatt hours with solar only, it will require a huge amount of space, so scale becomes very important. He went on to state that when looking across the greater Monadnock area they might be quite limited in the amount of local RECs available. He noted that across the borders in Massachusetts and Vermont the programs they have for renewable energy are much more luxurious than the ones in NH, which means they may be competing with a better value.

There were no further comments from the committee with regards to community questions and concerns.

Bob King thanked everyone for addressing the comments he sent in. He stated he is not quite clear on the bundling and unbundling and asked if the City could simply buy green energy without buying the RECs associated with it. Mr. Roche replied that they need the RECs because if they want to make the claim of using renewable energy it is required that they purchase the RECs and retire them from the facility. If they don't claim them, the facility owner could sell the RECs to someone else. He further explained that RECs are the legal instrument used to track environmental claims.

Mr. Hayden stated there's a difference between perspective and definitions. People don't always understand that they can support a local project by purchasing power through a group net metering program, but they can't say they are green because of it without the RECs.

Chair Hansel added that the Monadnock Food Co-op is an example of this. They host a solar facility and a separate group of investors own it. Which means the investors can take the RECs and sell them on the market and the food co-op is limited in claims they make because the RECs from their facility have been sold elsewhere.

Mr. King asked if this concept is written in law somewhere. Mr. Roche suggested referring to the Environmental Protection Agency which is a good resource and goes through RECs as the legally accepted instrument to track all environmental benefits. He also mentioned the NEPOOL GIS rules as well, stating that for every megawatt hour of electricity that gets created, in their grid or imported into their grid, it gets a certificate from NEPOOL GIS that has all the attributes about it.

Mr. King stated he has customers who buy the small scale hydro energy and don't buy the RECs, and they simply say, "We buy small scale green hydro power." He stated he is unsure if that is breaking a rule but also recognized that they are stating a fact.

Lastly, Mr. King asked if the public gets to see the revised plan before it goes to council. Ms. Brunner replied that the plan is publicly available now in the committee packet and they will also post on the Community Power website once it's adopted. When the plan goes to City Council it will be included in their packet as well and any changes will be publicly posted on the website. Ms. Brunner put the link to the agenda packet for the meeting in the zoom chat for everyone.

Mr. Roth asked if they contract for a supplier, does that constrain them to exclusively that supplier, or would they be allowed to procure power from other people? Mr. Hayden stated it depends on the supplier; most are already willing to include in the power stack any power that they bring to them, at a premium. He stated that each thing you add to a contract increases its costs, so there will be the dilemma of not wanting to add too much cost so they can keep a low market rate option. Sometimes cost of flexibility can be expensive but as they move into the future suppliers will likely adjust.

b. Board Deliberation

Ann Shedd made a motion to approve the City of Keene Community Power Plan as amended and recommend adoption to the City Council. Paul Roth seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

4) Discussion: Future Community Power Project Ideas

Chair Hansel stated that they are an Ad-hoc committee and it is uncertain whether or not they stay established or disband. Rhett Lamb stated the committee should stay established at least until after the plan is adopted by City Council, and there may be a continuing role past that for the committee to continue to support the implementation of the Community Power program. He went on to say that their assignment expires in December of 2021, and if there is a need to continue past that date, that would be a decision for City Council.

Mr. Hayden agreed and stated that the plan will evolve and require continued work in the future. Chair Hansel added that he agreed the committee should remain in existence on an as-needed basis. Mr. Roth added that they will likely continue to receive comments and they could be a sounding board for those and continue to validate concerns.

Chair Hansel stated it will also be important for the committee to stay involved with the discussion around setting up a potential fund for energy efficiency.

Ms. Brunner suggested they keep their regular monthly meetings on the calendar and cancel if there is nothing on the agenda a week prior. The committee agreed.

5) New Business

There was no new business.

6) Next Meeting – Friday, May 7, 2021

Chair Hansel stated if anyone had suggestions for the next meeting to let him know and thanked everyone for their hard work.

7) Adjourn

Chair Hansel adjourned the meeting at 8:54 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Nicole Cullinane, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by Mari Brunner, Planner