

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ENERGY AND CLIMATE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, February 1, 2023

8:00 AM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Zach Luse, Chair
Paul Roth, Vice Chair
Councilor Raleigh Ormerod
Councilor Bryan Lake
Peter Hansel
Jake Pipp
Jude Nuru
Beth Campbell
Clair Oursler
Kenneth Swymer, Alternate

Staff Present:

Mari Brunner, Senior Planner

Members Not Present:

Diana Duffy
Linsey Edmunds
Charles Redfern, Alternate
Lisa Maxfield, Alternate

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

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

2) Approval of Minutes- January 4, 2023

With no changes or edits suggested for the minutes, Chair Luse requested a motion to approve the January 4 minutes. Mr. Peter Hansel motioned to approve the minutes and Councilor Bryan Lake seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

3) Energy Plan Work Group Report-Outs

A) Weatherization

Chair Luse updated the group, noting that the postponed Button-Up Workshop was held on January 31. They expected a good turnout, but he has not heard final attendance. He is working on scheduling a Window Dressers recap to determine next steps. Window Dressers just had a

meeting of their own that he was not able to attend to discuss plans for next year. Discussions included home energy labeling and how that might fit into their workgroup.

B) Electric Vehicles

Councilor Lake noted that the Electric Vehicle workgroup had some scheduling conflicts and were not able to meet in January. They are hoping to resume meeting in February. He noted he has been working on the side and recently started working with Ms. Mari Brunner to get details and numbers on the different types of vehicles in the area to see how the community is growing. He also has been gathering notes around potential ideas for incentive programs for electric vehicles.

Chair Luse asked if Councilor Lake knew if the plans for redeveloping Main Street included plans for electric vehicle charging. Councilor Ormerod mentioned that he had asked City Engineers and was told that Main Street itself is not the ideal location, and that some of the side streets and public blocks seem like they will be a better choice.

Councilor Lake agreed, saying the charging stations create a high priority spot. Mr. Paul Roth added that he heard the necessary electrical infrastructure does not run down Main Street and for that reason, to do it on Main Street would be a challenge. Cars can be parked longer on side streets, allowing the Main Street spots to have more turnover.

Chair Luse welcomed Mr. Jude Nuru.

Mr. Clair Oursler wondered whether there had been any additional contact with Home Healthcare, Hospice and Community Services (HCS) regarding electric vehicles. Mr. Peter Hansel said he had not been to any other meetings since the initial contact and was not aware of the status of the study to convert the public transit system.

Mr. Roth asked if anyone had any updates on the Monadnock Co-op and the status of their project, to which no one in the group had any updates.

C) Community Solar

Mr. Hansel shared that the Community Solar group met and had a lively discussion regarding the sites they have and the potential for getting at least one or two of those sites up and operating this year. They decided to have Mr. Hansel send an e-mail to Duncan Watson requesting more specifics on those sites. It looks like the sites with potential are the Rose Lane and Monadnock View Cemetery site. Currently, those sites have the most potential to be developed this year. There were some good discussions regarding potential funding, but much is still left to be determined.

Chair Luse asked if Keene Housing was being discussed. Mr. Hansel was not sure if Keene Housing was being considered as an off-taker for either of those sites. He added that an off-taker for Monadnock View Cemetery would be Cedarcrest. He was not sure who would be considered an off-taker for Rose Lane or whether that would be open for community members to be involved. Ms. Brunner added that she thought Duncan Watson had a great suggestion of creating a list of potential solar sites along with benefits and drawbacks of each property that could be developed for solar. This list could then be made available to the public for anyone to view and use as a resource to help developers with a starting point. She asked if the Committee would like to pursue this idea.

Mr. Hansel asked Ms. Brunner if Will Schoefmann would be the person of contact if the committee wanted to put that information into a map of some sort. Ms. Brunner confirmed and suggested also looking for an intern to help with it.

Councilor Ormerod asked if this list would have a minimum lot size or if it would include some of the new conservation district. Mr. Hansel thought anything above a half acre would be considered, but mentioned that they are looking at anything above a half acre and up to two acres. A lot of that size will allow for up to 100 kilowatt. Over 100 kilowatt requires more space, but also pushes the project into a different realm concerning the type of project. They are focusing on 100kw or less to serve approximately 20 homes.

Mr. Roth asked how the list would collate the characteristics of a viable property and how to obtain the variables that would be above reproach with the public. He noted the need to be transparent, but also the desire to want to advertise what the constraints are. He asked if there was any standard for sharing what the constraints are and whether it is possible to publish or offer education to the public. Mr. Hansel said that was a good point and suggested referencing any information and material available regarding sites.

Ms. Beth Campbell asked if a solar development consultant had already been utilized. Mr. Hansel responded that Keene is a “SolSmart” city and as part of that designation, the town is able to utilize services of their consultant. Ms. Brunner added that the City of Keene is ranked a gold community (there is one other level above gold) through the United States Department of Energy (USDOE) SolSmart program, The SolSmart Program has a consultant they hired that works with communities. The City of Keene has worked with that person, but she does not believe that we are officially working with any developer.

Ms. Campbell asked if there would be a bid process for that and Ms. Brunner confirmed that it would have to go through a competitive bid process.

Mr. Jake Pipp asked if the Community Solar group, while investigating sites, had looked into some of the big box stores and utilizing their rooftops. Mr. Hansel noted that it was an excellent idea and they did look into that when they first started looking into it. Target already has some solar on their roof and many of these corporations are not local and can be quite cumbersome to

contact. Mr. Jude Nuru added that unless the organizations themselves are interested in developing their site, it can be quite challenging and often there are complications. He noted that because of that, community solar proponents often tend to go for the low hanging fruit.

D) Renewable Energy Loans

Mr. Hansel reported that they did not have a meeting. He has had some conversations with various groups in the area. Specifically, he talked to people connected with Monadnock Interfaith Group, who are trying to figure out if there is interest in the area for renewable energy loans. He also met with Cody Morrison with MEDC, who is looking at a loan fund for the area. It is primarily connected with commercial application rather than single-family residences, but there is potential for multi-family development or mixed-use development.

E) Outreach and Education

Chair Luse discussed that outreach and education had a good meeting with plans to work on a success story of 310 Marlboro Street regarding their wood chip boiler. He noted there was an article written for Green Energy Times that they will either reference or rewrite to create a success story to promote through social media and the Green Energy website. He noted that they have a few other success stories that they plan to utilize in the future. They are also working on a marketing and communication plan for anything around energy efficiency. The plan is to focus on educating people rather than generating or creating our own content in an effort to have more impact with less time-consuming work.

Mr. Roth added that in discussing the planning for the April retreat, they realized that they have roughly 200 people and e-mails addresses that they can utilize to push out information. Chair Luse recognized Nancy Gillard and Carolyn Jones, and asked if either of them minded providing an update on the Button Up workshop last night. Ms. Jones shared that there were 35 people who attended from Keene and surrounding towns. They plan to have another one in the spring where they plan to include more of the surrounding towns.

Mr. Hansel asked if there was any discussion about the funding for the button up process. Ms. Jones responded that if someone qualifies, they pay 75% up to \$6,000. Mr. Hansel asked if that money was available at the same level. Ms. Jones responded that it was, but cautioned that there is potential of that money being cut into.

4) Community Power Update

Mr. Bob Hayden, Standard Power, and Mr. Patrick Roche (on zoom) joined and presented to the Committee. Mr. Hayden was pleased to announce that community power is very close to launching at this point. Mr. Roche added that they wanted to provide an update and as the group knows, the public utilities commission and City Council both finally approved Keene's plan. He continued, "With those two approvals, Standard Power has looked to ensure that all the other

pieces of the market were in place. The big one that we needed to wait for was purchase of receivables, or POR. This is a policy that helps minimize risk for suppliers of nonpayment. If you do not pay your bill, both the utility and the supplier are not paid. The utility can eventually recover the nonpayment through their rates. The supplier does not have a good way to be paid without initiating something like collection action. With POR, states like Rhode Island and Massachusetts have this, and the idea is that the utility company calculates a discount percentage. Essentially, it is an uncollectable percentage each year and the supplier is guaranteed that the utility will purchase and will pay them for their receivables minus a discount rate. If the discount rate is 2%, they know that whatever they have their billings at, they will get paid.”

He continued, noted that as part of the Public Utilities Commission rules that were put into effect, there was a timeframe placed for each utility to propose its own POR program. He added that they wanted to wait and see what those proposals would look like because those will have a big impact on whether a supplier would be able to bid. The proposal from Eversource is looking pretty much like the Massachusetts Eversource proposal. The issue now is that Eversource stated that in order to set this up, they have to make changes to their billing system and those changes will take an estimated eight months. The good news is that when POR goes into place, they have proposed that any receivables on the books currently will be purchased at the discount rate. Mr. Roche said that they are working with the city to move forward on the bidding process with the goal of looking at a May launch. They are in the process of working with the suppliers to confirm their involvement and work through potential contract terms and conditions.

Mr. Roche said that they are hoping to run a bid at the beginning of March, which would enable the launch for May. They have also been working with a few other communities that had their plans approved. There are discussions of doing a group bid with those other communities where they would go out together and make a joint selection on the supplier and get effectively the same base pricing. He noted that this is a new market where POR is not in place yet and the more things that can be done to make this an attractive opportunity for suppliers is really important and scale is one of those things. The suppliers are bidding on opportunities, we need to get their focus and attention, and the group bid is one of the ways to do that.

Chair Luse asked if there was any sense of where the rate might be for the default plan. Mr. Hayden responded that it is hard to say, but there are examples we can give. Townsend, MA has historically saved 2-4 cents. In the marketplace in general, Standard Power is pricing electricity for commercial and industrial customers and they are enjoying rates considerably lower than the 20.221 cent that was put in force today. He noted that today is the first day of the new rate. It went from 22.556 cents to 20.221. He added that it is still in this high plateau area of rate and part of the reason to get a start as early as May. They have found that the number of people surveyed to who prefer lower rates has gone up considerably in the past 6-12 months.

Mr. Hansel asked when the outreach to the community would begin assuming a successful bid is obtained in February. Mr. Hayden responded that would happen immediately.

Mr. Hansel followed with asking if there was a term they were focusing on. Mr. Hayden responded that normally they look at a range of dates, typically somewhere between 15-40 months. He noted that in many ways, they are looking for that sweet spot that is best for the community.

Mr. Roth asked if there was any benefit to surveying the public again given the timeframe of the previous survey. Mr. Hayden responded that while the market has changed, he is not sure surveying the community again is of all that much benefit. He added, "We expect to have a standard product and then a 50% and a 100% option as well. The things the town asked for and are aligned with the rules are in that plan. Everything moves in the right direction and the cost for that extra chunk of renewables is very reasonable. As you move up towards 100%, the cost is higher, but still less than utility rate."

Mr. Roth noted that Mr. Hayden's experience would be very valuable in helping communicate that to the community. Mr. Hayden noted that Keene had about 100 respondents. Milford had about 115-118 and they will be assimilating that data in the near future. He stated that what has changed since the last survey was the volume of people who wants the cheapest rate possible along with the number of people who want more renewables. The group discussed the cost difference as the ratio of renewables increase.

Ms. Brunner said one request of the Community Power Committee was that a calculator be included for the public to determine the total cost of the bill utilizing the data from their bill. Mr. Roche confirmed that they will be incorporating that into the Keene website.

Mr. Nuru said he understands that in terms of economic of scale, the more towns included will impact the rate. He asked if more towns are added, whether that would influence the rate further. Mr. Hayden said the reality of what they find is that when they are buying a small number of hours; say ½ million kilowatt-hours versus a large business using 5 million, there is significant difference. That difference is much greater by volume in the early upticks of total volume. When one gets to 100 million that is the end as that is where the economy of scale peters out. He suspects that the number will be somewhere between 65 and 80 million kilowatt hours. They have a few extra towns to get to that 100 million before they get to the economy of scale.

Mr. Nuru also asked about community power aggregation and community solar. He noted that some people want the lowest rate, but have the appetite for renewable energy. As such, many are investigating generating their own renewables. He asked if the City of Keene buys into this program and later on develops a system of renewables to utilize, could they be allowed to pull out of the deal to meet the needs of those who want the lowest possible rate while still utilizing renewable energy.

Mr. Hayden suggested expanding the opportunity of what the town looks at to below 100kw because of the metering values. He mentioned Swanzey as a current example as they have

approved a solar project location. It will be more than they need, so there is potential to team up with Swanzey. Right now, solar at value costs less than brown power.

Mr. Hansel said he knows there will be some sort of funding to promote energy efficiency in our region and asked about the status of that. Ms. Brunner said that the City participates in a group net metering arrangement. The money the city receives from that is put into a fund that will help seed the energy efficiency fund and that the goal is to come up with a plan to utilize that funding. Ms. Brunner said it might be supplementing NH Saves or creating a completely new program, she is unsure at this point. She believes any approval would probably go through city council. Mr. Hayden suggested considering a 2/10 of a cent add-on for the all power that goes into a community power fund.

5) Legislative Update

Chair Luse said he has only been able to look at one bill. There are a number of them out there and he suggested that Committee members subscribe to the Clean Energy New Hampshire newsletter and take their recommendations on reaching out, testifying and making comments. The one he has been looking at is HB246, which takes the Renewable Energy Fund and rebates it back to everyone in NH, but it is estimated to be less than \$10/resident. He noted that this would annihilate the fund. There is still time to comment and suggested people look at it. The City of Keene is a municipal member of Clean Energy NH, so committee members should be able to go onto the Clean Energy NH website and create an account to access their member page. The member page has more detailed information, updates and spreadsheets for tracking available for members.

6) Annual Retreat

Ms. Brunner said two people responded last night bringing the total respondents up to nine. The top choice for a date is April 11, 2023 from 1:00–3:00 PM. Mr. Clair Oursler added that he was able to make it on this date and time. Ms. Brunner will send out details in the near future.

7) Committee Membership

Chair Luse reminded everyone that there are two regular open positions and a couple of alternate positions open. If members have any recommendations for potential members, it would be good to get additional people up to speed for when there is any turnover.

8) New Business

No new business noted.

9) Next Meeting: March 1, 2023 – 8:00 AM

10) Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Luse adjourned the meeting at 9:08 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Amanda Trask, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner