

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

**ENERGY AND CLIMATE COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Wednesday, March 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  
Diana Duffy

**Staff Present:**

Mari Brunner, Senior Planner

**Members Not Present:**

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 February minutes. Mr. Peter Hansel made a motion to approve the minutes. Mr. Paul Roth seconded the motion and was unanimously approved.

**3) Energy Plan Work Group Report-Outs**

**A) Weatherization**

Chair Luse said the group did not meet because it had fallen off his calendar, but will resume next month.

**B) Electric Vehicles**

Nothing to report.

**C) Community Solar**

Mr. Hansel reported that the Community Solar group did not meet, but the group did have communication back and forth. They are still pursuing the previously mentioned sites and starting to put together a spreadsheet for monitoring those sites.

**D) Renewable Energy Loans**

Mr. Hansel reported that this group also did not have a meeting as they are on a temporary hiatus as they work on developing a strategy for what they want to do going forward. He shared there is a group in Peterborough, The Peterborough Renewable Energy Plan, that is also looking into renewable energy loans and going forward with a company called Blockpower out of Brooklyn, NY. This investor-funded program works to recruit large numbers of homes in communities to which they facilitate energy improvements to homes in various communities and then lease the improvements to the owner of the house. The renewable energy workgroup plans to monitor the Peterborough program and determine if that is something to further investigate.

**E) Outreach and Education**

Chair Luse discussed that outreach and education had a short meeting with discussion around their plan to utilize various marketing channels for information dissemination as well as writing an article for Monadnock Shopper in October. The goal is to do much of this marketing right before Keene Energy Week and use the various marketing methods to help promote the activities planned for the month.

The workgroup also discussed reaching out to partners as well as the Monadnock Sustainability Hub to inquire on their level of interest in assisting. The hope is that the retreat, planned for April, will serve to help refocus the work groups.

**4) Guest Speaker - Mr. Rowland Russell**

Chair Luse introduced guest speaker, Mr. Rowland Russell, who will be speaking on food insecurity and the potential of a workgroup. Mr. Russell thanked Mr. Luse and shared that he comes at this from a couple different lenses, one being ecological and the other being his teaching and advising at Antioch. Through his work at Antioch, he has had his finger on the pulse for a while. The last few years, he has developed “another lens” which is through the Monadnock View Community Garden. Two years ago, he and another gardener started a “giving garden” on a plot donated by the City. They grew over 450 pounds of produce that they donated to the Community Kitchen. Last year, he was able to expand it significantly.

In talking with another Antioch Alum, Sarah Harpster, regarding the plots and Community Kitchen and how to expand that relationship, there have been a couple different grants that have come through. Cheshire County Conservation District received another Urban Agriculture grant and they will be working with them to survey the current gardeners and assess their needs to see what can be done to improve conditions. Mr. Russell is also in the process of another grant, New England Grassroots foundations, which will work with underserved populations in Keene who might want to garden but do not have the space or the means to do so. This program would offer them subsidized plots. There are three populations of focus. The first are the clients of the community kitchen, who they plan to survey. Mr. Russell has also been contacted by the Keene Veterans Center who are looking for a therapeutic gardening space, which will be the second population. The third population they would work with is immigrant populations in Keene who have expressed interest about having space to garden.

He has met with Andy Bohannon with Amanda Littleton, and Mr. Bohannon agrees that if there is interest from those surveys, they would be able to add a fourth section, which would total about 65 plots. Currently, there are three sections, which total roughly sixty-five plots. He is also on the City Bike Path committee and has seen what being on a city committee can mean concerning effecting policy, making policy, building relationships and building infrastructure to effect change.

He added that this group is the only City entity that has ever talked about food security and that goes back to the 2007, “Adapting to Climate Change and Planning a Climate Resilient Community” report. Every few years, the topic resurfaces and for one reason or another the timing is not right. He believes the timing feels right now. He has talked to groups that need the food, groups that help produce the food and groups that help facilitate that process like Community Garden connections. He is interested in creating a space where people from those groups with people from the City and ideally, sponsored by a committee like this, can come together and dig into how to channel this up through the City to effect policy. In a couple of years, the City will be looking at completing the next iteration of their Master Plan. He has met with Mayor George Hansel and Mari Brunner and believes one way to do this is to integrate it into the City’s Master plan.

As part of his groundwork, he has looked into the various workgroups, more specifically, the through Keene’s Housing workgroup and their work and recommendations, and believes this feels like a parallel track to that.

Mr. Russell explained that 15 years ago he attended a panel discussion on New England twenty years into climate change. Tom Wessels was on that panel. In listening to him, Mr. Russell said his biggest take away was that in 20 years, New England needed to be positioned to feed itself because high food producing areas like California and the Mid-West would be significantly impacted by climate change. It is presently 15 years into those 20 and New England is still quite far from that goal. Mr. Russell said it is imperative that New England not only be able to feed ourselves, but also be ready and able to ramp up to feed people in other parts of the country.

Mr. Russell suggested the development of a workgroup, ideally through this committee because this group is the only one to have looked at this topic through time. He noted he is happy to take the steering wheel on it.

Chair Luse thanked Mr. Russell and asked as far as policy goes, what was Mr. Russell's goal. He responded that he is looking to incentivize for homeowners to convert lawns to pollinator space or garden space/roof top gardens, help bring together the organizations currently doing great work and to facilitate and capitalize on the work already being done. He added that it is not only preserving current agricultural land, but also look at what can be done to return and/or optimize very productive land.

Mr. Hansel thanked Mr. Russell for coming and said he would like to see a work group established, but would like to see it expanded. Mr. Hansel looks at the land in Keene as a resource that we have not really addressed. He would like to see not only agricultural land, but forestland and resources to investigate which are carbon sustainers for our community or a carbon "depleter". He thinks there is plenty of tie-in with the group's current mission to move forward and sees significant opportunity to collaborate with other groups.

Chair Luse opened the floor to Nora Hanke, guest. Ms. Hanke wanted to mention that Mr. Todd Horner, Southwest Region Planning Commission, has some GIS work she completed last spring relating to data from the American Farmland trust about conversion of agricultural land to develop a plan in our region specifically. Through this, she identified high value agricultural land throughout Keene and the wider area. She said Mr. Horner might be able to provide information about which plots would be best suited for agriculture and which would be best for other opportunities.

Councilor Raleigh Ormerod stated he agreed with a broader scope and believed a greater impact could be had if a model was developed and the group could demonstrate how much food could be contributed to the Community Kitchen. He added that the request for funding from the City for the Community Kitchen has gone up 35% and predicts that would continue to increase. A sustainable model will get a lot of attention and momentum started in this group.

Mr. Russell added that any given year probably one third of the gardeners give up part way through the year. Giving more support will likely help the gardeners keep growing, but if they decide to give up, volunteers from the community kitchen can adopt those plots and continue producing food for the kitchen.

Chair Luse said it seemed as though there is sufficient support and interest. His biggest concern was bandwidth and asked Mr. Russell if he had people willing to support him on the workgroup. Mr. Russell said he definitely has support from the outside. He added that it does not make sense to be a sub-committee as it puts additional pressure on the committee members themselves. He believes the workgroup seems like the most sustainable option. Chair Luse said he would like to see the workgroup also look at composting.

Mr. Nuru stated he was very familiar with Mr. Russell's work and was excited to see Mr. Russell lead this group. He had absolute trust in his ability to make it happen and was particularly impressed with Mr. Russell's inclusion of solar. He noted that conflict has been seen between farmers and solar farms. Given the growth of solar and the lack of space in the community, he asked Mr. Russell if he anticipated dual use for any of the lots.

Mr. Russell was aware of the desire to have solar arrays out there and is happy to hear it is in the works. He thinks it could be model for other locations as the two could go hand in hand. He does not know if that particular location would be ideal. There is a significant amount of theft that occurs out there, as it is not monitored all the time.

Mr. Nuru said he wondered about the owner's willingness to make the land available for this purpose. Mr. Russell said the land was classified as wooded wetland. The owner found a loophole that allowed previous agricultural land to be restored to agricultural land. That loophole was used and the trees were all cut down. According to code, after five years, the owner could apply for a zoning change to commercial. Mr. Russell said that did not happen, but the threat is there and it is still owned by the family.

Ms. Beth Campbell said she sees one of the main areas that are most critical to look at is making sure development is not occurring on land that is considered a carbon safe. Secondly, she believes it is important to create and facilitate partnerships with organizations that are looking at advancements with community gardens to increase the productivity and success. Mr. Russell responded that while there are some hi-tech things they could be looking at; there are also numerous low-tech options to use fewer resources.

Chair Luse asked if Mr. Russell would be open to broadening the scope to include the composting, solar and advancements. Mr. Russell was in support.

Chair Luse asked Ms. Mari Brunner if there was a formal procedure to adding a work-group. She stated in the past, they have done that at the retreat, during the reassessment of the workgroups. However, if the group is in favor of integrating, they could certainly start the process of incorporating Mr. Russell in the group as an alternate. Mr. Hansel reminded the group that the workgroups are not confined to committee members.

Chair Luse expressed support of incorporating this into the committee and suggested Mr. Russell attend the retreat. Mr. Nuru suggested that in looking for people for the workgroup, to be mindful of those who might be interested in the Committee and the larger work.

## 5) **Upcoming Events**

March 2, 2023 there is a Keene Climate Café at Keene Public Library at 6:30pm. Mr. Hansel encouraged everyone to attend and noted that Ms. Brunner will be speaking about the ECC.

April 11, 2023 is the ECC Annual Retreat at the Keene Recreation Center from 1:00 PM–3:00 PM.

April 22, 2023 is the Monadnock Earth Festival at The Monadnock Food Coop. They will be looking for volunteers to table there. Chair Luse asked if anyone was interested in tabling. He noted that he would be out of town as will Ms. Campbell. He suggested the education and outreach workgroup reach out to see if anyone is interested.

**6) Community Power Update**

Ms. Brunner said there was not a big update this month. Everything from last month is still in play. They are looking to go out to bid soon and eventually launch, which will be dependent on how the bid goes. So far, everything is looking good. Chair Luse asked if the Eversource data had been received and Ms. Brunner confirmed that it had.

**7) Legislative Updates**

Chair Luse shared that HB246 had been tabled.

**8) Committee Membership**

Chair Luse shared that Mr. Ken Swymer was promoted from alternate to regular member starting this meeting, making him a voting member. He noted that there is still a regular spot and an alternate available.

Ms. Campbell said she was willing to reach out to the board of the Co-op to see if there is anyone interested in joining.

**9) New Business**

No new business noted.

**10) Next Meeting: April 5, 2023 – 8:00 AM**

**11) Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Luse adjourned the meeting at 8:54 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Amanda Trask, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,  
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner