

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ENERGY AND CLIMATE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, November 1, 2023

8:00 AM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Councilor Bryan Lake
Peter Hansel
Jake Pipp
Diana Duffy
Clair Oursler
Lisa Maxfield
Kenneth Swymer
Rowland Russell, Alternate (voting)
Mike Winograd, Alternate (voting)
Charles Redfern, Alternate (voting)

Staff Present:

Mari Brunner, Senior Planner

Members Not Present:

Zach Luse, Chair
Paul Roth, Vice Chair
Councilor Raleigh Ormerod
Jude Nuru

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Ms. Mari Brunner called the meeting to order at 8:16 AM. She requested a motion to appoint a chair pro-tem given the absence of both Chair Luse and vice chair Mr. Roth. Mr. Jake Pipp motioned for Mr. Peter Hansel to serve as temporary chair and the motion was seconded by Mr. Ken Swymer. With all in favor, the motion was approved.

Chair Hansel invited all alternate members to serve as voting members.

2) Approval of Minutes- October 4, 2023

Chair Hansel asked for a motion to approve the minutes. A motion was offered by Diana Duffy and the second was made by Mr. Mike Winograd. With no discussion and unanimous approval, Chair Hansel approved the October 4th minutes.

3) ECC Fall Retreat De-brief and Continued Work Group Discussions: Food Security, Legislative Tracking, and Education & Outreach

Chair Hansel asked for thoughts on the retreat. Diana shared that she was delighted Sam Evans Brown was the speaker and enjoyed being able to ask questions.

Mr. Redfern thought the venue was lovely, to which Ms. Duffy agreed. Ms. Brunner shared that Stonewall allowed them to use the venue for free.

Dr. Russell shared that they wanted to give a lot of time to the guest speaker but given that they ran out of time for the report-outs wondered if they could have been a bit more efficient. Mr. Redfern thought that the ice breaker used up time that could have been used for report-outs.

Ms. Brunner explained that the ice breaker took ten minutes out of three hours. They purposefully tried to choose an icebreaker that would not go over time. She explained that she included the ice breaker because she has consistently been getting feedback from committee members (and not specific to this committee, but across different committees) that they do not feel like they know each other well or do not feel as though they can have a candid conversation or feel that it is too stuffy or formal. The idea behind the ice breaker was to try and help people connect in a different way than just in a formal meeting. While that was her intent, she is certainly open to feedback about whether it is useful to have or whether folks feel there just is not time for them.

Mr. Winograd responded that he would suggest no ice breaker and said he did not find it useful. He said the venue facilitated communication and setting chairs up in the round helped foster community. He felt people did have good communication back and forth. He noted that Mr. Evans Brown was very engaging and extremely interesting and that was one of the reasons that the group used a lot of time on him. He personally said he profited a lot from the conversation.

Dr. Russell suggested scheduling time limits on the report-outs.

Food security: Dr. Russell reported that the food security work group has had a lot of good participation with two larger focus groups. One was on community gardens and the other was on converting lawns to gardens and both have projects emerging from it.

They are talking to the city about two possible city-controlled sites on the east side of town for additional community gardens and hoping to launch one of them in this next growing season to satisfy the requirements of the grant.

There are other initiatives that are coming out (mentioned in the minutes of the last time). The most interesting aspect is that they have found a phone web app that connects people who have gardening space with those who don't have space but wish to.

There have been a couple smaller group meetings focusing on different aspects of things. They had a deeper conversation with the Community Kitchen as well as a mini forum from the Antioch alums discussing food security and climate change. A couple of ideas emerged from that they are following up on.

The most exciting thing for the group has been the future focus groups that have been planned. He shared that he is on another committee with Todd Horner and he discovered, rather accidentally, that Southwest Region Planning Commission actually has launched a regional food assessment project with grant funding. Two of his steering committee members are on that group, but it did not occur to anyone that the groups should get together. Dr. Russell, upon discovering this, invited himself to that group and he and Mr. Horner are now working together to coordinate the next four focus groups. The first will be on local sourcing for markets/restaurants and is scheduled for December 11th. They are just putting together the agenda for that. The next two in January and February will be at Stonewall and one will focus on climate resilience for farms and the other will focus on land conservation for farms, preserving and renewing agricultural land. Then, tentatively in March, they will focus on food markets including our downtown farmer's market.

Lastly, in April, they hope to connect with the Climate Café folks to do a climate café on food security with an idea jam of people's ideas about how to address food security. He added it is great to have that collaboration and it points out the meta issue that they have been struggling with which he thinks happens across sectors. There are a lot of groups doing great things, but they don't all know each other and tend to function in a siloed way. One of the primary recommendations is how to connect those groups with each other. As part of the final report, they will be doing asset mapping, but the bigger issue is how to connect the strands.

Mr. Hansel asked if Dr. Russell could refresh his memory as to who attends those work groups and how many people are involved.

Dr. Russell responded that it is different for each time. The planning group met the initial time and meet asynchronously over e-mail. They will regroup after April to determine if they have covered enough ground. He added that membership is changing, especially over the last few months. While there are some shifts in membership, the core group is Amanda Littleton, Cheshire County Conservation District, Roe-Ann Tasoulis, Rachel Bryce, and Sarah Harpster.

Legislative Tracking: Councilor Bryan Lake apologized for not making it to the retreat but shared that he was a little under the weather. He shared that they have had some difficulties meeting this year as everyone's schedules have been quite varied. It has been tough to get the group together in a consistent manner as he would have liked, and he is hoping to fix that in the coming year. With the new legislative year, there are going to be a number of bills to track and many things to be looking at in the Statehouse. They have been doing things to try and get set up for a better long-term success getting on different email lists, getting different notification streams to allow for earlier notification of both state and federal legislative ongoings, grants and that type of information. He welcomed anyone interested in joining a workgroup as they do have an opening.

Mr. Hansel said Sam Evans Brown had some good comments about upcoming legislation and the energy efficiency plan that is being reviewed right now and that they track them on their website. Ms. Brunner shared that by creating an account on their website, you can get access to the spreadsheet which is updated in real time as well as the policy calls that they do every Friday afternoon.

Councilor Lake shared that he got added to a federal funding opportunity list.

Ms. Brunner recently learned that the Acadia Center has a grant to help municipalities understand ISO New England and how they operate. This is going back to the retreat earlier in the year where Julia Griffin came and spoke and encouraged the group to consider trying to track what ISO New England is doing. She also mentioned a presentation from an individual from the Acadia Center who seemed really interested in coming to talk to communities and helping them to figure out what's going on there and how to get involved.

Mr. Hansel shared he saw a piece on the news about offshore energy and the fact that it could be huge, which not only generates jobs, but a large portion of the energy that's needed for New England could come from offshore energy. He was wondering if that was an area the workgroup could be keeping an eye on as well.

Mr. Winograd said he believed Virginia was starting a big offshore energy project. One of the things that Mr. Evans Brown brought up was transmission lines and Mr. Winograd stated he did not know enough about Eversource in their capability or if they encourage or don't encourage that type of activity.

Mr. Hansel said he read that Governor Sununu was encouraging the transmission line from Hydro Quebec to come through New Hampshire and enter the ISO grid, which would provide more renewable energy for our region.

Education and Outreach - Ms. Lisa Maxfield spoke as both Chair Luse and Mr. Roth were not present. She said they have been hyper focused on Energy week, which culminated last Saturday with the electric vehicle expo. They had four vehicles on display. She did contact them afterwards and both dealerships said that they appreciated the opportunity, and they would be happy to participate again next year. She did not feel they had significant foot traffic, but the dealers seemed happy with it. The next focus will be Earth Day in April. She shared that they are working more closely with the clean energy team, and the hub. She asked if another retreat was scheduled for April. Ms. Brunner said she believed that Chair Luse liked the idea of doing them every six months. She did not believe that the next one has been scheduled but anticipated it for April.

Mr. Hansel opened it up for comment.

Ms. Duffy announced that she is passing out post-it notes for members to write a little note about the retreat and the space. She thought a personal note from those who attended put together in a card would be a nice way to thank them for the donated use of their facility.

4) ECC Work Group Report Outs

- A) Community Solar**
- B) Grants, Fundraising and Partnerships**
- C) Education and Outreach**
- D) Legislative Tracking**

E) Food Security

No further report outs or updates.

5) Keene Energy Week De-brief

Ms. Maxfield suggested waiting until Chair Luse and Vice Chair Roth are available to discuss, which others agreed to.

Ms. Brunner wanted to thank Ms. Maxfield, Vice Chair Roth and Chair Luse along with Carolyn Jones from the Clean Energy Team for their work and time on the event.

Mr. Redfern apologized for not participating and said it was primarily due to the weather. Mr. Clair Oursler said he had just gotten out of surgery and was not able to attend either. Ms. Maxfield said it was a great way to meet fellow members.

6) Lower Winchester Street Project (www.LowerWinchesterStreetProject.com)

Ms. Brunner shared that there had been a request from Councilor Lake to talk about this project, which is why she included it in the agenda packet.

Councilor Lake explained that they have an opportunity to redesign space from the roundabout essentially through the Swanzey town line. He thought it was a good opportunity for the committee to write a letter to City Council MSFI to recommend that they look at multimodal transportation such as adding some bike lanes in. He knows that it is something that the project has been looking at, but he thinks it made sense from the committee's purview to write such a recommendation.

It would not necessarily be commenting on the specific plans, but specifically the things that relate to the committee's mission. He personally recommended that the committee have the chair write a letter to the council.

Mr. Pipp said he lives in that area and personally sees what happens in that area regularly. He was in support of the letter and recommendation. He shared that they would love to walk or bike rather than get in the car, but it just feels so unsafe. Having no shoulder and then there is not a good spot to walk resulting in many people walking on the road itself and in turn causing delays as traffic is not able to get around given the oncoming traffic. He said it creates an unsafe situation where people are getting passed at close proximity. He said he sees a number of people that he recognizes from around Hundred Nights Shelter walking and pushing or pulling a cart heading towards Market Basket because it is the least expensive place to buy groceries or that may be their only option.

Dr. Russell added that the connectivity with the Cheshire Rail Trail is important. He is aware of a number of people who cannot or do not drive and it takes them a significant amount of time to commute because there really is no safe way to walk resulting in them having to go out of their way. It

underscores the carbon footprint benefits in that it might result in more people commuting if they felt safer.

Chair Hansel suggested adding trees as it is a pretty deserted area there.

Ms. Duffy asked what would be more impactful: letters from the committee or letters from individuals themselves who struggle to make a left in that part of town and take their lives in their hands making their commute. The response from the group was that both individual letters and letters from committees would be the most impactful.

Dr. Russell also suggested writing letters to the editor of The Sentinel to help get the word out to others.

Mr. Hansel asked Ms. Brunner whether the group had already voted to approve the letter. Ms. Brunner clarified that previously it was just asked to be put on the agenda. The project design recommendations will be going before the MSFI committee on November 21st, which would be the deadline to get the letter done.

Mr. Hansel requested a motion for Councilor Lake to draft a letter of support for this project, to be approved and submitted by Chair Luse. The letter will include sidewalks, bike lanes, support of the roundabouts and support of planting trees, all within the context of connectivity to the Cheshire Rail Trail system. The motion was put forth by Mr. Peter Hansel and seconded by Mr. Redfern. It was approved unanimously.

7) Letter Regarding NH DOT Route 101 Road Project

Mr. Redfern explained that the project will be from Optical Ave to Swanzev Factory Road and will include widening, drainage, and straightening. He explained that at one time the project included combining the whole Transportation Heritage Trail to include the bridge over 101, safety improvements to the Stone Arch Bridge, placement of the Island Street Bridge over Swanzev Factory Road and for some reason, the city whittled it down to just the abutments on 101. There is a group advocating for all three. Mr. Redfern explained that he had contacted NH DOT officials who were in support of all three in a “one and done” kind of project. He is not sure where it will end up. The NH DOT is in favor, but he does not know where the Transportation Advisory Committee with Southwest Region Planning stands on it. There is definitely community support for a “one and done” type of project, but the city for whatever reason is reluctant to do so.

Ms. Brunner explained this item was put on the agenda to follow up from the last meeting where the committee authorized Mr. Redfern to draft a letter with the intent to have Chair Luse sign and submit it on behalf of the committee.

Mr. Redfern said he would do it today. Ms. Brunner offered to look back at the minutes from the last meeting and send him what the exact discussion in the motion was.

Chair. Hansel asked how this was relevant to the committee's mission. Dr. Russell explained that it would lower the carbon footprint by providing safe routes for bikes and pedestrians. He mentioned that the original discussion included multi-modal facilities along Route 101 as well as creating interchanges with the rail trail that crosses over this section of Route 101. Chair Hansel said he was a little concerned that as an advisory group to the council, they would be going against what the city has already planned to do.

Mr. Redfern said that Public Works initiated the concept. It went so far up the ladder and, while not placing blame, the City Manager did not follow up on it.

Ms. Brunner clarified that what she understood was that these projects that get into the ten-year plan have limited funding. The state is trying to distribute those funds statewide. From DOT's purview, the ten-year plan is for state projects and from their view, the rail trail might be considered a city project that is just adjacent to this. The city is also going after state funding to help fund the rail trail project. By combining the projects, it would reduce the overall cost for the city and she believes the city in general supports that position. She also added that this is outside what the Committee would normally do (commenting on a state project); however, she recalled that the Committee received a letter directly from the NHDOT's consultant requesting comments on this project. That letter was included in last month's packet, and she will re-send it by email.

Chair Hansel said that his preference would be for the whole committee to review the letter before it is sent out.

Ms. Duffy asked if the Bicycle Pedestrian Pathways Advisory Committee (BPPAC) also received a letter, Ms. Brunner replied in the affirmative and noted that every single board and committee in the city received one. Ms. Duffy said that she can see how this aligns with the BPPAC mission, and added that as long as this aligns with our mission, then we can tailor a letter of support that aligns with energy and climate in whatever way we can.

Chair Hansel asked the group if everyone is good with reviewing the letter at the next meeting, there was general consensus to do that.

8) **Community Power Program Update**

Ms. Brunner said as far as she knew there was an invitation sent out for new residents to sign up. There has not been an influx of calls from residents. Most of the calls she is getting about community power have been from outside areas as there's an online consumer shopping website and people from across the state are seeing Keene Community Power and want to sign up for it. She has been linking them with programs in their area and providing resources.

Chair Hansel added that the County is launching their program and said they are the first county in the state to do so. While this might be confusing for Keene residents, it is an option for residents who live in

communities that don't have their own program. He asked if there were any other updates or items to add.

Ms. Brunner suggested the committee start thinking about the next iteration of the program as it is coming up and offered to start talking about that sooner rather than later. For example, during the planning phase for Community Power they talked about having a 10-cent adder and using that to fund an energy efficiency program. She does not believe it needs to be right away.

Chair Hansel asked if there was a timeframe. Ms. Brunner responded that they wanted to have the program running for at least a full year. In her view, the best time to make any changes would be at the end of this contract term and when they sign a new contract and get a new rate. It will take some time internally to figure out how that will work and how to do that.

Chair Hansel asked if it would be a contract with Good Energy and Standard Power to which Ms. Brunner responded that it is already part of the contract with them. She did not believe it would impact the contract with Direct Energy, the supplier. She did state that it would impact the rate increasing it by 1/10 of a percent (or whatever amount they decide for the adder). She said this was her reasoning for mentioning that the rate has been advertised for 30 months so they would probably want to keep it at that rate and then change it at the end of thirty months.

Ms. Maxfield asked if that falls to any specific workgroup that can work out the details and bring it back to the larger committee. Ms. Brunner said it could be either.

Chair Hansel suggested the possibility of having Standard Power come and talk to the committee about it sometime in the new year.

9) Committee Membership

Ms. Brunner explained that Ms. Beth Campbell resigned and Ms. Maxfield moved up to fill Ms. Campbell's spot. Mr. Winograd joined as an alternate filling Ms. Maxfield's former spot. Chair Hansel has termed out and Mr. Pipp will be terming out leaving two spots open. Both gentlemen could move to an alternate spot or stay involved on a workgroup. Ms. Brunner said she hopes they will both stay involved. She continued that typically they move alternates up into the open member spots if they are interested. If not, they go to the community at large to see if folks are interested in joining. She believed Chair Luse wanted to start having those conversations now as it can take some time to get people lined up. She said sometimes, if a number of people leave over the New Year, they will not have enough people to make quorum for the first few meetings. She did not anticipate that to be an issue with this group as they have a pretty full roster of regularly attending individuals.

She reminded folks to keep in mind that there will also be a new mayor at the end of this year so if there is desire to get someone in and recommended by the current mayor, now is the time to do it. Otherwise, they would have to wait until the new mayor was officially appointed and they may have a new system for appointments.

- 10) **Climate Café Event- November 16 at 6:30 PM, Keene Public Library, Heberton Hall**
- 11) **New Business**
- 12) **Next Meeting: Wednesday, December 6, 2023- 8:00 AM**
- 13) **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Hansel adjourned the meeting at 9:17 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Amanda Trask, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner