

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ENERGY AND CLIMATE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, May 1, 2024

8:00 AM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Zach Luse, Chair
Councilor Bryan Lake
Diana Duffy
Annu Joshi Bargale
Jake Pipp, Alternate (voting)
Charles Redfern, Alternate (voting)
Rowland Russell, Alternate (voting)
Jude Nuru

Staff Present:

Mari Brunner, Senior Planner

Members Not Present:

Michael Winograd, Alternate
Clair Oursler
Lisa Maxfield
Kenneth Swymer
Paul Roth, Vice Chair
Gordon Leverage

1) Roll Call and Call to Order

Chair Luse called the meeting to order at 8:01 AM. Chair Luse invited Dr. Rowland Russell, Mr. Charles Redfern, and Mr. Jake Pipp to participate as voting members.

2) Approval of Minutes- April 3, 2024

Chair Luse welcomed a motion to approve the minutes from April 3, 2024. Councilor Bryan Lake moved to approve the minutes from April 3, 2024, with a second from Mr. Redfern. Chair Luse welcomed any discussion. Mr. Jake Pipp noted that he arrived shortly after the roll call during the first report and it was not reflected in the attendance of the last meeting. With all in favor, the minutes from April 3, 2024, were approved pending the attendance change reflecting Mr. Pipp's attendance.

3) Introductions for New Members

Chair Luse welcomed two new members, Ms. Annu Joshi Bargale and Mr. Gordon Leverage. Mr. Leverage was not able to attend, but Ms. Bargale was present. Each member shared a brief recap of who they are and how long they have been involved with the Energy and Climate Committee (ECC). Ms. Bargale shared that she has done electrical and electronics engineering in India. She is currently an MBA student and will be earning her degree from Southern New Hampshire University on May 4th, 2024.

4) **Recap of 2024 Earth Fest and Earth Day Event**

Ms. Lisa Maxfield was not in attendance but had sent Mr. Luse an email about the Earth Fest, which he shared. In it, she said she was there for about four hours. They did not have a lot of traffic, but the clean energy team did and she recommended talking to Carolyn Jones. She reported that about eighty percent of the people they spoke to were interested and had questions about the future of electric vehicle (EV) charging stations. Gathering information on that for future events would be useful as would increasing the number of volunteers. Her other suggestion was to investigate offering a raffle for the attendees who sign up for the email list. She suggested a basket of LED lightbulbs or seeing if Eversource would donate something.

Chair Luse asked if anyone else attended and wanted to share their thoughts. Ms. Bargale shared that she attended until 1:30 p.m. She said the event was good but noted the importance of promoting themselves more. The title board was not there highlighting that the ECC represents the city and she believed it would be a nice gesture to do that in the future.

Ms. Mari Brunner asked if they used the department's pop-up tent. Chair Luse was unsure. He said there was a pop-up tent with the city logo on it. Mr. Hansel shared that he went by during the day and had a hard time finding the ECC tent.

Mr. Bruce Norlund, Keene, shared that he was there with his electric Tesla. There were fifteen electric or electrified cars there. Dr. Russell noted e-bikes and other electric vehicles have been a big topic of conversation within the Bicycle and Pedestrian Path Advisory Committee (BPPAC) that he is on and wondered if there were any of those there. He suggested that might be an area or topic that the committees could collaborate on to promote more of this and have them there as it has come up a lot with the downtown infrastructure project. It could be a good opportunity for education about the different types of vehicles and what they can or cannot or should and should not do. Mr. Jude Nuru joined the meeting at 8:11 am.

Ms. Diana Duffy stated that this event is tricky because of the timing coinciding with school vacations. Not only that but determining what the message is that the ECC wants to portray, and what their role is within that framework. She wondered if there is a way for the City's presence to be at the event with representation from the various committees. Having each committee table makes it hard to keep them straight and she wondered if there was a way to consolidate and reduce the burden or onus on any one committee to represent at the event. Chair Luse pointed out that the Green Up Keene event is also held around the same time frame.

Mr. Redfern pointed out that the biking committee and various biking groups consolidated in one area of Railroad Street during the event. They had the Southwest Region Planning Commission, Monadnock Alliance for Sustainable Transportation, Pathways for Keene, the Monadnock Rail Trail Collaborative, and the Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee. They had different booths, but since the number of volunteers tends to be low, it allows one person to be able to move from booth to booth to help answer questions. Another suggestion he had was to try to get a spot on Railroad Square since many people come into Railroad Square that way and tend to congregate. Some trickle down to the bike path, but spacing is important because the prime real estate seems to be in that area.

Mr. Peter Hansel wanted to speak at the mention of Green Up Keene. He was heavily involved in that on Saturday and noted that they start handing out materials at Public Works at 8:00 am. They are pretty much done by the time of the Earth Day festival starts and believed it would be good for them to also have a presence at the event given most of their work is done by that time.

Chair Luse suggested an email signup for next time. Mr. Nuru provided a quick introduction for Ms. Bargale.

5) ECC Work Group Report Outs

A) Community Solar

Mr. Nuru shared that the community solar group met on April 10th. He reported that Mike Putnam attended as a guest from Monadnock Energy, a new company that is solely dedicated to developing community solar. Monadnock Energy was the only winner in New England for the U.S. Department of Energy Community Solar Accelerator Prize for developing community solar. As such, the organization is currently exploring options to develop a community solar farm in the Monadnock Region. They mentioned to him that they are looking at a site in Dublin, but they have the intention to prioritize the Keene area. They shared some of the strategies they are working on to make sure they grow their company and bring communities together in their region. Mr. Nuru said it was exciting to hear about their plans, especially given the fact that they are in Keene. The work group also discussed how to bring three-phase power to the landfill because that would make it feasible to potentially develop a community solar project at that location. Right now, the challenge is the lack of three-phase power at that site. They discussed other potential options for that site as that would be a good site for a large or megawatt solar system. They also further discussed working with landowners or private property owners, to determine whether those sites can be an opportunity to develop community solar, especially those that own larger buildings like Walmart, the Shopper, etc. They hope to work with partners such as Monadnock Energy to make Keene the leader in community solar.

Mr. Hansel added that there is a project in Jaffrey that is a community solar garden approach. Although located in Jaffrey, it is available for anyone to sign up, including residents in Keene. He believes that Jaffrey residents will get priority, but other communities and businesses can sign up and become a part of that solar array essentially making the participant part owner.

Mr. Hansel referenced an article he wrote that recently appeared in the Monadnock Shopper News regarding the solar coaching program. Developing the solar coaching program was another item that the group has been working on. They recently got the Chamber of Commerce to agree to advertise or send that out to their membership through an email blast and noted that folks should be seeing that soon.

Mr. Nuru recommended that Mike Putnam and his partner be invited to attend a future Committee meeting. He shared that they are enthusiastic about doing this work and want to pioneer it in the state. Chair Luse thought it would be great and welcomed the idea.

B) Grants, Fundraising, and Partnerships

Mr. Redfern presented a report on behalf of the Grants, Fundraising, and Partnerships group regarding a sustainability or energy coordinator position. He pointed out that it had an index. While he had written up a recommendation, Ms. Mari Brunner had suggested that the recommendation should come from the committee at large rather than from the working group. He presented all the contacts they made with phone numbers and emails. He offered credit to Ms. Beth Campbell as she did much of the initial legwork for setting them up on a good footing.

Mr. Redfern pointed out that the position was previously titled “Climate and Sustainability Coordinator” but it has morphed to be titled the Resiliency Coordinator. The position has become more dynamic than just dealing with energy. He explained that the AmeriCorps Vista Program is a strong entity to connect with and they have the actual application that Maine gave to them of what they fill out every year to get a replacement for a similar position that they have. Portland, Maine has three AmeriCorps volunteers for their city as well as a director. AmeriCorps offers a stipend along with housing assistance and other perks, which could blend in well with any of the city’s offerings. The city would have to offer it as a learning opportunity for a bachelor’s level candidate. In his opinion, a master’s level would not likely be feasible for Keene to start with.

He referenced the explanation of the resiliency program in the handout and referenced the various communities with similar positions. He outlined the report for the committee. He said he imagined that any summary or recommendation would come after the committee gets to review the material and report. He envisions that the committee, by way of the chair, will go to the City Council and recommend this and noted that there is great fodder to support this on the left-hand side of the document.

Mr. Redfern shared that he did try to get a meeting with Julia Brule, Greater Portland Council of Governments as she is the host site from which candidates are drawn but was not successful. He referenced meetings with Mr. Troy Moon and Ms. Christa Daniels that he put in the report. He shared that in his research, he came across numerous grants currently providing ample opportunity. Some of the grants even point out the results of having these positions in the sense of what monies came in or were saved resulting from adoption of the position.

Mr. Redfern turned the conversation back over to Chair Luse and supplied him with the report.

C) Education and Outreach

Chair Luse reported that their primary focus was Earth Fest. They did speak at the last meeting about where they wanted to focus their efforts for the remainder of the year. He said he had not heard anything about the energy fair at the airport. Mr. Hansel reported that there is a meeting planned for late May in which they will talk to the city to see if that works for them. Chair Luse shared that assisting and participating in the energy fair was top on their list.

Other things they discussed were promoting the solar buddy system to which Mr. Hansel explained that they will be reaching out to the chamber soon. Chair Luse explained that Carolyn Jones had recommended Chair Luse speak at one of the climate cafes or someone from the city.

Lastly, they discussed updates to the energy plan website or ECC section of the city website. He did not believe either had been touched in some time and thought it would be a good place to showcase some of what the ECC group has done, is doing, and plans to do as well as to provide resources. Some of the information is on there, but lacking traffic and promotion. Finding more events to table at and figuring out how to spruce up their presence at these events are items they intend to focus on. Since the Clean Energy team is no longer doing button-up workshops, the workgroup discussed potentially offering one themselves in collaboration with the Clean Energy team or the Sustainability Hub in the fall. The workgroup plans to regroup later this month to decide where to focus efforts going forward.

Mr. Nuru spoke regarding the promotion of the solar coaching program and shared that he did reach out to The Keene Sentinel. He was informed by them that most of the reporters were at the eclipse. He was provided with two contact e-mails, which he emailed with an explanation of what they were looking for. He has not heard back yet. He requested if any members had a strong connection with someone at The Sentinel to reach out. Chair Luse noted that The Shopper News tends to be more open and suggested reaching out to them. Mr. Redfern explained that they do not have a reporter so it is up to the individual organization to write the letter which The Shopper then publishes.

D) Legislative Tracking

Councilor Lake referenced Ms. Brunner's email that was sent out the day before regarding one of the bills he has been tracking, HB 1623, which is relative to state energy policy. Previously, he had mentioned some concerns about the potential for deregulating some of the good regulations that are out there. The bill stems from a desire to push for the cheapest energy they can get, which is not great for the environment and many times cuts back on promoting good clean energy. HB 1623 is a bill that individuals can reach out to their representatives on and Councilor Lake suggested doing so if people are interested and willing and offered to help facilitate that.

Another bill, SB 543, made it to the House. This bill is about establishing a state environmental adaptation, resiliency, and innovation council. Councilor Lake is in support of this bill and is hoping that it passes. He explained that this council would be charged with looking at changing weather events and climate temperatures and developing a plan and resources to combat those changes in the future. A hearing is set to take place on May 14th in the House Public Works and Highways Committee. If people were interested in contacting their representatives about this bill, Councilor Lake asked that they please reach out to him offering to help them get in touch with the appropriate representative.

Councilor Lake invited Chair Luse to speak about home energy labeling. Chair Luse explained that it has stalled due to New Hampshire not being a part of NEEP (Northeast Energy Efficiency Partnerships). Mike Metell has been looking at alternatives. He investigated how they could hold together things that already exist. Chair Luse was not confident this would be anything that would be used in the same way that home energy labeling could be in the sense of entering it in the MLS listing when a house is listed for sale.

Ms. Brunner shared that she did the NH Saves Program and found it useful and suggested having a laptop or tablet at tabling events to show people how to do it and help them fill it out.

Mr. Metell explained that his position was that there is copious information that is not shared well. He believed that creating a website with incorporated links to the programs and initiatives that are already in place along with significant public promotion would be helpful in getting the word out as to what is available.

Mr. Redfern pointed out that one of the representatives, Phil Jones, is also a city councilor and is on the transportation committee, which would be crucial for electric vehicle charging stations.

E) Food Security

Dr. Rowland Russell shared that they met at the Community Kitchen on the 22nd. He shared that their focus was on the USDA's Regional Food Systems Planning Grant. While it has an aggressive timeline, they decided to apply for it. The Southwest Region Planning Commission is drafting the application likely on behalf of the Monadnock Farm and Community Coalition, which is under the umbrella of the Cheshire County Conservation District. There will be a version that will be what the Southwest Region Planning Commission must do to satisfy the entities that they got the grant for. There will be another version that will come to this committee for approval and recommendation to the city council. He hopes that some of that will migrate into the conversation for the next comprehensive master plan the city does.

6) New Business

Chair Luse shared that next week is New Hampshire Energy Week. There was an email that went out announcing a virtual button-up workshop planned for Wednesday as well as numerous other virtual workshops.

Chair Luse suggested it would be a good opportunity if anyone was interested in attending or willing to promote it. Councilor Lake asked if they post the button-up workshops on any city pages. Ms. Bruner shared that the process has changed, and everything goes through the City of Keene Communications Director, Rebecca Landry, and Asah Cramer. She added that both are open and good at posting things and suggested utilizing them.

Councilor Lake suggested promoting the virtual workshops and New Hampshire Energy Week. Ms. Brunner said to send them the information they want in the announcement and Ms. Landry and Ms. Cramer will create it. Ms. Brunner offered to send the information about the button-up workshops.

Mr. Hansel said this time of year they usually contact Eversource to try and get the past year's solar data to update their solar worksheet that they maintain. He suggested it would be good to check with them.

Ms. Brunner referenced Dr. Russell's mention of the Master Plan and how the planning process is now underway. There is a steering committee that meets the first Tuesday of the month and if anyone is interested in attending, they are welcome to. The next meeting will occur on May 7th, 2024, at 6:00 pm in the council chambers. She noted that there is also a community survey circulating and they are trying to get as many respondents as possible and urged people to fill it out. She offered to send the link to the survey and mentioned that it is not just for residents and visitors to Keene can also fill it out. There is also a think tank workshop coming up at the end of May on Thursday evening and Friday morning. Interested parties will need to sign up for both days, but it will include dinner and breakfast the following day. She plans to send the registration link to committee members once she receives it.

7) **Next Meeting: Wednesday, June 5, 2024-8:00 am**

8) **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Luse adjourned the meeting at 9:09 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Amanda Trask, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner