

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ENERGY AND CLIMATE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, March 5, 2025

8:00 AM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

Paul Roth, Vice Chair
Councilor Bryan Lake
Maureen Nebenzahl
Steve Larmon
Timothy Murphy
Jake Pipp, Alternate
Rowland Russell, Alternate
Gordon Leversee

Staff Present:

Megan Fortson, Planner
Emily Duseau, Planning Technician

Members Not Present:

Clair Oursler
Lisa Maxfield
Kenneth Swymer, Chair
Annu Joshi Bargale
Charles Redfern, Alternate
Michael Winograd, Alternate

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Vice Chair Roth called the meeting to order at 8:06 AM. Mr. Roth invited an alternate, Mr. Rowland Russell, to participate as voting member.

2) Approval of Minutes- February 5, 2025

Councilor Lake moved to approve the minutes of the prior meeting. Mrs. Maureen Nebenzahl seconded Councilor Lake's motion. Without further discussion, the meeting minutes were approved for February 5, 2025. Vice Chair Roth welcomed a vote on the 2025 meeting schedule. The 2025 meeting schedule was approved with all in favor.

3) Updates

A) Community Power Program

Councilor Lake reported that the Finance, Organization, and Personnel (FOP) meeting had included productive discussions. The council split the voting process on a new tiered plan, taking an initial unanimous vote to establish three levels: 25%, 50%, and 100%. A separate vote on the adder fee was more contentious and passed narrowly with a 3-2 vote due to concerns about the additional cost.

In response to Mrs. Nebenzahl's inquiries, Councilor Lake confirmed that the primary concern was the cost of the adder fee, which had been brought before the full council. While the spread was unanimously supported in a 5-0 vote, a request was made to reconsider it at the next meeting, leading to the tabled adder fee discussion.

Councilor Lake noted that some councilors might propose adjustments, such as reducing the 50% level or making 25% the default instead of 50%. He expects significant discussion at the upcoming council meeting and emphasizes the need for final decisions. Several councilors were concerned about the cost, especially given the current state of the economy. Councilor Lake is hopeful the council maintains its unanimous support for the three-tiered structure while determining how to incorporate the adder fee.

Members questioned the reasoning behind the reconsideration of the vote. Councilor Lake explained that he believed Councilor Bosely was looking for a compromise solution, such as adding the adder fee but reducing the default percentage. Mr. Steve Larmon wondered if the ECC should vote for a recommendation, given the committee's desire to get to 100%.

Councilor Lake did not believe they could meet the deadline for submitting agenda items to the Council for consideration. He reminded members that the best thing they could do was contact or reach out to their councilors and voice their support.

Dr. Rowland Russell added that while council meetings are not open for public comment, they have found that showing community support is often beneficial. He suggested spreading the word and wearing solar power T-shirts to show support.

Mr. Pipp asked Councilor Lake if, despite not being able to submit a letter, the committee could still take a vote. He asked Councilor Lake if he could share the outcome at the meeting as a point of information, reaffirming the committee's support for the program.

Councilor Lake stated that he could reiterate the committee's unanimous support for the program and emphasize its alignment with their plan. He pointed out that if they were to make a motion to send another letter of support, it would not reach the Council in time, as it would not be provided until two weeks after the vote.

Dr. Russell shared that all the city councilors have emails, and if members did not have time for a phone call, he urged them to write a letter of support and email it to each councilor.

Vice Chair Roth recognized Mr. Peter Hansel. Mr. Hansel reiterated that while not all council members may be fully aware, some recognize the committee's involvement in energy matters. He suggested their presence at the meeting could add subtle pressure on the Council.

B) Solar Pavilion- Northern Borders Timber for Transit Grant

Ms. Fortson informed the committee about a nearly \$2 million grant awarded to the Public Works Department through the Timber for Transit program, run by the Northern Border Regional Commission. This organization supports economic development in New Hampshire, New York, Maine, and Vermont. The grant will be used to construct a solar pavilion behind the yellow building and the transportation center on Gilbo, with solar panels designed to help power the downtown area.

Ms. Fortson added that the solar pavilion will include 120 solar panels and a 230-by-30-foot structure. She emphasized this project's importance and wanted to bring it to the committee's attention.

Dr. Russell added that he has a friend who works for Northern Border's and shared that the Department of Government Efficiency has not cut them off. He asked Ms. Fortson if there was any risk of that happening. Ms. Fortson was unaware of the answer but offered to follow up with the Public Works Director, Mr. Don Lussier.

C) 2025 Monadnock Region Earth Day Festival

Ms. Fortson informed the committee about the Monadnock Region Earth Day Festival, scheduled for Saturday, April 20, from 12:00 to 4:00 PM. She noted that the agenda item was to discuss the committee's participation and the need to apply by March 10. While there is no cost to sign up, participants must provide their tent and tables. She asked whether the committee was interested in taking part.

Vice Chair Roth said he would be interested and shared that he has done it for the last three years at Railroad Square. He emphasized the need for a 10x10 tent and a banner to help the committee stand out at the event. They mentioned that Zach had worked on distributing leaflets, including QR codes for scanning. Roth confirmed their availability for the event and inquired whether the sign-up was for volunteers or organizations.

Ms. Fortson clarified that the sign-up was to register an organization for the event. She stated that the committee should have everything needed for setup, including tables, a tent with weights, and a tablecloth featuring the City of Keene logo. She suggested possibly creating a poster for additional display.

Dr. Russell, involved with multiple organizations tabling at the Earth Festival, emphasized that this year is significant for demonstrating strong support for environmental values. They noted

that city committees, such as BPAC, typically participate and encouraged this committee to do the same. They also mentioned plans to organize special activities to enhance the committee's presence at the event.

Councilor Lake emphasized the importance of making the Community Power Program and its options highly visible. He suggested that the Earth Festival would be an excellent opportunity to distribute informative handouts and documentation, incorporating any updates to the program for the upcoming year. He would be in support of participating in the event.

Vice Chair Roth asked if they needed to take a vote. Ms. Fortson felt it would be a good idea. Vice Chair Roth made a motion to vote to have the ECC participate in the Monadnock Earth Day festival. Dr. Russell seconded his proposal. With unanimous support and no opposition, the motion and vote were approved. Dr. Russell suggested that someone on the committee take the lead in filling out the form.

Councilor Lake suggested organizing a meeting this month or next to coordinate responsibilities for the Earth Festival. He proposed that this effort could fit within an existing work group, such as Education and Outreach, or a new group if needed. He expressed a willingness to participate.

Vice Chair Roth shared that Mr. Zach Luse was leading that group. Dr. Russell asked if anyone from the Education and Outreach group, to which Vice Chair Roth shared that he was. He shared that the ECC has one more meeting before Earth Day and agreed with Councilor Lake that they should have a planning meeting. He suggested holding the planning meeting between now and the next meeting. Ms. Fortson reminded them that they need to ensure that any interim meeting should not constitute a quorum and should consist of less than six members. Mr. Larmon and Mr. Pipp expressed interest in participating.

Ms. Fortson also urged to keep Staff in the loop, as they have software to streamline the production of outreach materials. Vice Chair Roth asked if there were QR codes available. Ms. Fortson was unaware and offered to investigate and get back to him. She added that it was easy to create a QR code and did not anticipate that being a barrier. Ms. Duseau offered to share what marketing materials are available following the meeting.

Dr. Russell noted that in the past, assignments varied—sometimes predetermined and other times on a first-come, first-served basis. They mentioned that similar organizations, such as Pathways and BPAC, often cluster together to better engage attendees in shared interest areas, like those near the co-op.

D) 2025 Meeting Schedule & Annual Retreat

Ms. Fortson explained that while meeting availability was shared, no formal survey was conducted due to past challenges in gathering responses. Instead, spreadsheets with potential dates and times were provided to help members determine availability. The scheduling options

included each month's second, third, and fourth Tuesdays, with various morning, afternoon, and evening slots available, and the second Thursday of each month.

She clarified that "availability" refers to booking city meeting rooms. There has been ongoing discussion about adjusting the meeting time, with feedback indicating that early morning meetings can be difficult for those who work, preventing some from attending.

Dr. Russell stated he was the opposition, as most meetings involve West Coast Antioch Campuses, making him unavailable before five o'clock. Mr. Larmon asked if any specifics regarding the options discussed seemed better.

Ms. Fortson noted that meeting scheduling has been an ongoing discussion, but responses to previous inquiries have been limited. She suggested sending out the options again to gather updated input, especially with new members joining and others cycling off the committee.

Mr. Hansel recalled that previous discussions about meeting times were influenced by a member, Mr. Jude Nuru, who had difficulty attending 8:00 AM meetings due to childcare responsibilities. However, Jude is no longer a member and recently emailed to inform the committee that he is moving to Massachusetts.

Ms. Fortson offered to send out a survey and noted that the committee will continue to meet on the first Wednesday of the month at 8 am until a decision is made. Dr. Russell asked if the current time was problematic for anyone, to which no one responded. He noted that the key person would be Chair Ken Swymer, who was not present to offer input. Dr. Russell said that the current Wednesday time was not listed as an option and suggested that be added.

Vice Chair Roth moved on to the dates for the April retreat. Vice Chair Roth listed potential dates for the committee's retreat in April, which is typically a two-hour session. Mrs. Nebenzahl, a new member, asked about the purpose of the retreat.

Vice Chair Roth explained that this would also be their first retreat, as one was not held last year. Ms. Fortson explained that in a previous retreat, Mr. Sam Evans-Brown presented, saying the retreat serves as an annual opportunity for the committee to reflect on priorities, decide on focus areas, and determine whether to maintain or adjust workgroups. Ideally, the committee would have three to five workgroups, with the current structure including five. The retreat also provides a chance to identify speakers who could present on relevant topics, similar to previous guest presentations. Ms. Fortson asked if any members had specific topics or speakers to include in the retreat planning.

Mr. Murphy shared that the city is in the process of updating its municipal hazard mitigation plan, which addresses potential natural and man-made disasters such as floods and ice storms. He emphasized the strong connection between climate, energy issues, and hazard mitigation. Since the plan is about one-third to halfway complete, he suggested it might be valuable to hear from those leading the effort for informational purposes and potential feedback.

In response to a question about whether this is similar to the hospital's Hazard Vulnerability Assessment, Mr. Murphy confirmed that the two are closely connected and involve communication between the hospital and the city to share vulnerabilities. Vice Chair Roth felt it would be a great topic but was unsure of the group and City's bandwidth.

Ms. Fortson noted that the City recently received an update on the Hazard Mitigation Plan from Kurt Blomquist, the former Public Works Director, who now serves as the Emergency Management Director. She clarified that he is no longer in his Public Works role but continues to work in a limited capacity.

She also mentioned that Mike Hagan, the city's plans examiner and certified floodplain manager, updated FEMA's map revisions as part of the same presentation to the Master Plan Steering Committee. Vice Chair Roth felt that with the increase in floods, Mr. Hagan might be a good one to talk to. Ms. Fortson agreed, noting that Mr. Hagan deals with the city's floodplain development permits that come through for large projects and thought it would be an excellent opportunity to learn how all these things connect.

Vice Chair Roth suggested having materials for their booth on Earth Day to highlight the Energy and Climate Committee's role as the city's voice on energy-related matters. He emphasized the opportunity to engage in education and outreach by directing attendees to available resources. The group agreed that this would be beneficial.

Mr. Hansel asked how far along the Comprehensive Master Plan was and whether it was used as informational material in the booth. Ms. Fortson stated they are collecting qualitative data and engaging with students. By Earth Day, they expect their community survey to be ready, making it an excellent opportunity to promote it at the event.

Vice Chair Roth suggested using a QR code for the survey, encouraging Keene residents to participate. Ms. Fortson clarified that the survey is open to anyone who lives, works, shops, or spends time in Keene, not just residents, as they aim to gather broad community input.

Dr. Russell suggested keeping the master planning as a separate document to avoid overwhelming the booth with too many activities. They noted that managing multiple topics would require more volunteers to engage visitors effectively.

Vice Chair Roth noted that while engaging conversations can happen, volunteers may not be familiar with master planning. He suggested that those directly involved, including consultants, should be present to provide accurate information. Due to the expertise, Dr. Russell agreed and felt their materials would get more attention.

Vice Chair Roth was curious about the level of engagement on Earth Day on behalf of the city. Ms. Fortson was unsure whether Community Development Staff was interested in participating,

but she could see how it would be a good opportunity. She offered to contact Ms. Brunner and get back to Vice Chair Roth.

Agreeing with Dr. Russell, Vice Chair Roth felt the ECC could act as a conduit for the City only if the City did not intend to be at the event. Ms. Fortson felt they could coordinate having a city staff member present to provide that information. Mrs. Nebenzahl suggested referring community members to the code. Mr. Murphy said that, at a minimum, they could promote the survey if the point completes it. Dr. Russell felt it would go a long way if the city had three booths of representation to encourage all the various efforts and activities.

Vice Chair Roth asked if there was any other representation from the council. Dr. Russell and Councilor Lake shared that the Bicycle/Pedestrian Path Advisory Committee also attends several events. Dr. Russell highlighted the connection between the Pedestrian and Bicycle Pathway Advisory Committee and multimodal transportation, aligning with the connected mobility pillar. He emphasized that there are six pillars and seven priorities or themes, covering more than just the work of those two groups. To ensure comprehensive representation, they suggested having people at the booth who can speak to the full scope of the initiative.

Ms. Fortson noted that they were at 8:45 and suggested that this could be discussed in the preparatory meetings between now and the meeting.

Councilor Lake focused on planning the retreat, noting the proposed dates in April and questioning whether a survey would be sent out to gather feedback. They suggested April 7th was too soon and to allow for better preparation. Given the early April dates and potential scheduling conflicts, including religious holidays, they proposed considering May as an alternative to avoid last-minute planning. He suggested adding some May options if they send out a survey. Dr. Russell favored holding the retreat in May due to April being busy.

E) Annual Reports from Boards and Commissions

Vice Chair Roth recognized Ms. Fortson. Ms. Fortson informed Vice Chair Roth about a city councilor Haas's request for annual updates from boards and committees on their activities over the past year. These reports, likely due around June or July, would align with the city's fiscal year, starting July 1. The reports are expected to be concise, possibly a one-page summary, and distributed to city councilors. The purpose is to provide insight into committee work without a strict format. Councilor Lake mentioned that the updates might be discussed at an upcoming retreat, allowing members to share ideas on what to include. Vice Chair Roth expressed a desire to get Mr. Zach Luse's input. Dr. Russell noted they have all the past meeting minutes, which could help shape the reports.

4) Work Group Report Outs

A) Community Solar

Vice Chair Roth recognized Mr. Hansel. Mr. Hansel noted that their group has not met recently and acknowledged that their organizer, Mr. Jude Nuru, resigned and had been handling themes and meeting invitations. Mr. Hansel questioned whether Dr. Gordon Leversee is an official member, as only Ms. Diana Duffy and Dr. Leversee seem involved. Dr. Leversee expressed the need for an official member.

Dr. Russell shared that the upcoming retreat would discuss potential committee adjustments. He also mentioned that committee structures are periodically reviewed to determine if new committees or membership changes are needed.

Mr. Hansel shared that regarding ongoing projects, he noted a slowdown in activity due to delays between the City and Revision Energy, with a backlog at Eversource affecting progress. He was uncertain whether these delays resulted from the hold on grant funding.

Ms. Fortson mentioned that a solar conditional use permit application, boundary line adjustment, and primary site plan application are under review for the March Planning Board meeting. The project involves the construction of a medium-scale solar array for Cedarcrest. The meeting is scheduled for March 24th, the fourth Monday of the month, at 6:30 PM in the second-floor council chambers at City Hall.

Dr. Russell expressed concern about the solar project's potential impact on the community garden. Rumors have been circulating that a significant portion of the garden might be displaced, effectively ending its existence.

Ms. Fortson explained that the solar project is on City-owned property, but many line adjustments are being made to transfer enough land for the solar array to be placed on Cedarcrest property. Vice Chair Roth said his boss is on the Board, and he would connect with him. Dr. Russell asked if the project plans are publicly available. Ms. Fortson confirmed they were on record and offered to send them to him.

Mr. Hansel mentioned another ongoing solar project at the airport: a large 5 MW array. However, he has not received any recent updates on its progress.

Vice Chair Roth asked if they planned to meet before the next meeting. Mr. Hansel responded that they needed to find someone with a Zoom account. Ms. Fortson offered to set them up with a team meeting and agreed to coordinate with him to schedule that.

B) Grants, Fundraising, and Partnerships

No representatives present to report.

C) Education and Outreach

Vice Chair Roth shared that education and outreach have not met but expects activity given the upcoming Earth Day event.

D) Legislative Tracking

Councilor Lake shared that the legislative tracking group has not met in a few months and, as such, did not have anything to report.

Vice Chair Roth noted that the state legislature has been active and invited anyone interested to join their efforts. Councilor Lake agreed, stating that significant legislative activity is happening in the House.

E) Food Security

Dr. Russell provided an update on the Food Systems Group working through Southwest Regional Planning, representing the Food Security Work Group. A final report is mainly drafted, with a few sections still in progress, and it is expected to be ready for distribution by the end of spring.

Additionally, Hannah Grimes is planning a public event: a story circle focused on food stories from various parts of the food system. More details will be shared at the next meeting. At the upcoming retreat, Dr. Russell also plans to discuss broadening the Food Security Work Group's scope to include climate resilience, with food security remaining a key component.

Vice Chair Roth recalled last year's retreat discussion on New England's food import reliance. Dr. Russell noted that grocery store supplies would only last two days and shared that only 5% of food in grocery stores is locally sourced and that some locally raised food is exported due to a lack of processing facilities for dairy and other products.

Vice Chair Roth noted that New Hampshire's natural resources focus more on lumber than food, but climate factors are interconnected. Given this, Dr. Russell explained that it makes sense to expand the focus beyond food security to include issues like flooding, which has also been a recurring topic of discussion.

Dr. Russell suggested discussing the committee's future direction at the retreat, noting that wrapping up the current report is a natural conclusion to the work done so far. He believes the committee's work will continue but sees value in reframing or broadening its focus to better align with evolving priorities.

Mr. Hansel wanted to add to the solar report that Eversource recently released the 2024 solar hookup results, which had some notable findings. While the residential solar installations were the second highest on record, there was only one commercial installation for the entire year. He sees this as both good news and a challenge, highlighting the need to improve commercial solar adoption. He attributed some of the difficulties to Eversource delays and other contributing factors.

Vice Chair Roth mentioned that the Volkswagen settlement funds were primarily for charging infrastructure, which he believed the state had yet to spend entirely. He noted that the hospital has installed a standalone solar array for EV charging, but it has not yet been activated. The system operates independently, charging cars when the sun is shining but not when it's cloudy.

Mr. Hansel shared that Ms. Brunner uploaded the solar hookup information and Eversource's solar installation records to the ECC website for anyone interested in reviewing the data.

- 5) **New Business**
- 6) **Next Meeting: Wednesday, April 2, 2025, at 8:00 AM**
- 7) **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Vice Chair Roth requested a motion to adjourn, which was offered by Dr. Russell and seconded by Mrs. Nebenzahl. Vice Chair Roth adjourned the meeting at 9:03 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Amanda Trask, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Emily Duseau, Planning Technician