

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ENERGY AND CLIMATE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, September 24, 2025

4:30 PM

**2nd Floor Conference Room,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Timothy Murphy, Chair
Paul Roth, Vice Chair
Councilor Bryan Lake
Maureen Nebenzahl
Annu Joshi Bargale (Remote)
Gordon Leverage
Jake Pipp, Alternate (Remote)
Charles Redfern, Alternate
Rowland Russell, Alternate (Voting)
Catherine Koning, Alternate (Voting)

Staff Present:

Megan Fortson, Planner
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner (left early)

Members Not Present:

Steve Larmon
Clair Oursler
Lisa Maxfield

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Murphy called the meeting to order at 4:32 PM.

Members of the public were present, including but not limited to Sam Jackson, Michelle Chalice, Carolyn Sweet, Peter Hansel, and Matt Boulton.

2) Approval of Minutes – August 27, 2025

Revision: Line 65, replace “solstice” with “equinox.”

A motion by Councilor Lake to adopt the August 27, 2025 minutes as amended was duly seconded by Vice Chair Roth and the motion carried unanimously.

3) Sustainability Coordinator Discussion

[Agenda items 3 and 4 were heard out-of-order.]

Chair Murphy welcomed Senior Planner, Mari Brunner, for this discussion. Dr. Koning noted that there had been some behind the scenes conversations about how to fund a Sustainability Coordinator position for the City. Dr. Koning and Matt Boulton of the Monadnock Sustainability Hub talked to Ms. Brunner about raising money from sources outside the City to fund the position. Dr. Koning said there was a potential lead for having one-third of the position funded by local business leaders, Zach Luse thought he could get one-third funded by private individuals, and the City would fund the final third. Dr. Koning said Ms. Brunner was working on the job description, but noted that the City had not provided an official signal that it could do this.

Ms. Brunner explained that the conversation about a Sustainability Coordinator began approximately one year prior. The former Energy and Climate Committee (ECC) Chair, Zach Luse, proposed the idea to the City Manager and Clean Energy Team, who were supportive. The City Council would have to approve of adding this position because it would affect the City's budget. However, Ms. Brunner said this timing was early in the City's budgeting process. So, she thought there was plenty of time for the ECC to bring a proposal forward to the City Council. Ms. Brunner suggested the Committee write a letter to the City Council, recommending the Sustainability Coordinator position, so the Council could decide ahead of the Budget process.

She recalled the ECC trying to propose this position in 2018 halfway through the Budget process and it was unsuccessful; the main problem was the timing. Ms. Brunner noted the City has the Community Power Fund that could be used to help cover the City's share of funding this position. She explained that the fund was built over time and is intended to be used for local energy solutions projects and related matters. She added that the details of the position (i.e., pay grade) were still to be determined; Ms. Brunner was still drafting the job description. Once the ECC made its recommendation to Council, staff would be directed to draft the job description more formally based on the Budget, City match, and intended salary.

Ms. Nebenzahl asked if anyone currently on City staff could fulfill this position. Ms. Brunner said no, the staff already had a full workload and part of the issue was not having one person dedicated to this type of work; the work was dispersed among different roles.

Councilor Lake confirmed that before preparing a job description, Ms. Brunner suggested the Committee should present the high-level idea/details to the City Council, see how that would go, and then form the job description. Ms. Brunner agreed, adding that she hoped the City Council would then direct staff to work with the ECC to develop a proposal for the job description. She agreed that starting higher-level by presenting the concept of the position to the Council, perhaps with the first paragraph of a job description developed by the ECC, could be effective. Councilor Lake suggested that this could be a good project for the Policy Workgroup to work on before the October ECC meeting as opposed to making a motion at this meeting.

Dr. Russell asked for the optimal timeline of sending this letter to the Council. Ms. Brunner suggested submitting the letter before the end of the 2025 calendar year. She agreed the Policy

Workgroup discussing the letter to Council before the October ECC meeting would work well for this timeline.

Mr. Redfern wondered if the City was tracking how much local citizens were saving annually on their bills from the Community Power Program. He said tracking that data would be a good representation of the City's sustainability actions and savings, though it demanded staff time. When Mr. Redfern first joined the ECC a few years prior, he was assigned to determine whether AmeriCorps could help the ECC create a sustainability position within the City. Unfortunately, he found that the state of Maine has the means to be able to do this, but New Hampshire does not.

Mr. Redfern explained that a sponsoring entity is required (e.g., the City of Keene) for an AmeriCorps Volunteer. He called it a great program and while he was not recommending it in this case, all the materials were gathered and provided to the Community Development Department for reference. He thought those could be useful in developing the Sustainability Coordinator job description. Dr. Russell agreed that there were materials available, so staff would not have to start from scratch on the job description.

Ms. Fortson asked for the approximate amount of money accrued in the Community Power Fund. Ms. Brunner said she had not received a recent update, but when the City Council debated the new round of the Community Power Program, there was approximately \$75,000 available.

Vice Chair Roth asked if this would be a full-time position. Ms. Brunner said yes if that was the ECC's recommendation. She said it could be part-time, noting it could be harder to find someone to do this work part time. She added that if a current City employee was already doing this work part-time, this could be added to their job description to make them full-time.

Chair Murphy said the Committee did not need a motion at this time, only consensus for the Policy Workgroup and Committee to proceed with their planned actions. Chair Murphy noted that a Sustainability Coordinator could mean the potential for a lot more savings through the Community Power Program, he heard agreement, and he thought there would be opportunities to finesse that idea through upcoming discussions. Dr. Russell noted that he attended a few meetings and commented on the value of cities with similar sustainability positions for documenting these savings.

Chair Murphy called it an exciting opportunity that the Committee would be revisiting at the upcoming Policy Workgroup meeting (Councilor Lake, Ms. Nebenzahl, Dr. Russell, and Mr. Boulton) and ECC meetings. All materials and emails should go through Ms. Fortson.

4) Discussion with Mayor Kahn

Chair Murphy welcomed Mayor Jay Kahn for a discussion about Committee members' overlapping memberships and potential conflicts of interest. The Mayor explained that he tries to carefully appoint Committee members in a way that avoids overlapping memberships that could

cause conflicts during voting and plan creation, etc. He said that when it comes to topics of the environment/conservation, it was easy for those overlapping memberships and interests to arise, especially in a small city like Keene. Mayor Kahn said that if he was fortunate to have a second term as Mayor, he would be making committee appointments for two more years. He recognized that inevitably it would be hard to sustain the criteria for his nomination process, stating that his ethical standards are high.

The Mayor asked Committee members to check themselves during conversations. For example, if the Monadnock Sustainability Hub was interested in a collaboration with the ECC, which would be healthy and good, it would be the Committee's responsibility to remain independent of that at meetings and in other forums and to recuse themselves from votes when necessary. He said the thoughts of one committee member could easily influence the thoughts of another, which is not ideal in these settings. The Mayor hoped Committee members would maintain independence and be conscientious of their potential conflicts of interest.

Dr. Russell asked if the Mayor was talking about conflicts with other City committees, between City committees and outside organizations, or both. Mayor Kahn said he was talking about an overlap between City committees and outside organizations. He thought that a concerning overlap on this Committee had been eliminated. The Mayor said it is Committee members' responsibility to be aware of their potential conflicts.

Chair Murphy agreed that it is important to maintain those high standards. He welcomed the Mayor back any time to discuss this in more detail. The Mayor's time was limited, so the question-and-answer time was short, and he was not available to return in October. This was Mayor Kahn's first ECC meeting and he was delighted to see so many people he knew in the room.

The Mayor urged everyone again to be cognizant of their potential conflicts when making Committee plans or motions/votes on funding requests involving outside entities. He said it was great that the Committee had participants who were interested in its topics. He recognized that the Committee had accomplished a great deal on the Community Power Plan and other projects. He thought this would be a great time for a check and refresh to ensure the Committee is doing the best thinking and is not on the verge of anything that could cause conflicts for members.

Megan Fortson, Planner, reminded everyone that during their new member orientations, the City Attorney taught them about Conflicts of Interest, and Ms. Fortson would provide documentation of the City's policy again. If members ever see something upcoming on the agenda that they perceive as a potential Conflict of Interest, they should bring it to staff's attention in advance to ensure that there will still be a quorum of members at the meeting for a vote. For example, if it were an item related to the Monadnock Sustainability Hub, Dr. Koning could recuse herself if needed. Ms. Fortson can keep track of those logistics to ensure quorum or consult with the City Attorney. Chair Murphy agreed that it was appropriate to share the Conflict of Interest rules with the Committee again, which Ms. Fortson said she would send out with the Rules of Procedure.

5) Sun Day – Recap of Event on Sunday, September 21, 2025

Dr. Leversee reported that it was a perfect day for the event. Although everyone thought it was lightly attended for the whole day, it was the first time and there was a conflict with the Pride Festival downtown; there was a small influx from the Festival after it ended. Dr. Leversee appreciated Chair Murphy helping at the beginning and Dr. Koning helping set up the tent and run the table. Dr. Leversee reported that over 30 people visited the table during the event. The main attraction to the table was the free raffle; 21 visitors completed a survey for a chance to win two prizes: a hat with solar powered fans and a solar cell phone charger.

He said people were very engaged with the raffle. Mr. Redfern reported on helping with the second half of the event and breakdown. He said it was good to see the people who came and engaged with the ECC, so he called it a successful event. Next time, Mr. Redfern suggested having more chairs because he saw other booths with up to five chairs that were used substantially. Another problem was the conflict with traffic cut-off from Main Street and everyone using side streets. He did not suggest having this event coincide with other major City events; he did not think it needed to be on the equinox, Earth Day, etc. Mr. Redfern thought attendance would be more important.

Dr. Koning noted that the Monadnock Clean Energy Fair would be on September 27th at Peterborough Elementary School, sponsored by the Monadnock Sustainability Hub. The 2026 Fair would be in Keene again, and Dr. Koning suggested the ECC should co-sponsor during the years the event is held in Keene. She said the September 27th event would be much bigger than Sun Day, with more vendors. Dr. Koning suggested that during the years in Keene, the event could even be incorporated with the Pride Festival because she noticed there were parts of the Festival that were not just Pride related this year, so she thought maybe a section could be dedicated to Clean Energy. Ms. Nebenzahl agreed.

Dr. Leversee thanked Ms. Forton and City staff for their invaluable hard work organizing all the materials and revising the survey. Dr. Leversee added that many attendees were already aware of the event (i.e., not walk-ins) and indicated on the survey that they were positive about solar power and contemplating solar panels on their properties. He suggested a good place to reach a more general, curious population for solar tabling would be the Monadnock Speedway or a Swamp Bats game. Dr. Leversee suggested it as a thought for the future, noting it would be a lot of hard work. He distributed copies of the survey results to the Committee and suggested discussing them at the next meeting. Individual questions could be emailed to Dr. Leversee (do not email the whole Committee due to quorum concerns).

Chair Murphy recognized Peter Hansel with the Monadnock Sustainability Hub, who noted there was no control over the Sun Day venue and date, which were chosen by the organizer.

Ms. Fortson thanked all the Committee members who volunteered to transport and set up the materials in staffs' absence. She noted that it helps City staff to have engaged Committee members who are willing to prepare for events.

6) Eversource Main Streets Event – Recap of Weeklong Event Held from September 8–12

Ms. Fortson anticipated having an update on the number of businesses canvased or people taking advantage of the Liberty Utilities and Eversource NHSaves program. She had not received this information yet because the event was continuing through the end of October. Ms. Fortson would update the Committee at a future meeting or send an email.

7) Workgroups – Report-Outs from First Meeting
A) Outreach

Mr. Redfern reported on the Workgroup's idea to place an article in the Monadnock Shopper News. Dr. Koning provided Mr. Redfern with some ideas. Mr. Redfern said he had been delayed and talked to Mitch Shakour of the Shopper News, who recommended an article of between 300 and 500 words, with the maximum being 700. Mr. Redfern felt that 500 words was appropriate and used AI to help check what he produced. The article would be printed in the Monadnock Shopper News on September 29th.

Ms. Koning commented on the Monadnock Sustainability Hub being committed to writing once per month, so she wasn't sure if Mr. Redfern's September 29th Shopper News article would be published using the Monadnock Sustainability Hub's rotating system. She said with this, the Shopper would have two "Green Monadnock" columns. Mr. Redfern said he did not write much about the Monadnock Sustainability Hub, which related to the Mayor's comments on delineating different public organizations. They agreed that Mr. Redfern's article was only meant to outline the ECC's work in Keene.

Mr. Redfern said he tried to include the logo Ms. Forton developed for the ECC stickers with the Monadnock Shopper News article as Committee branding. Mr. Shakour suggested a small advertisement in the Shopper News when it is time to publicize the updated community power rates. Mr. Shakour said he would provide a very reasonable rate because the Committee is a nonprofit. If reasonable, Mr. Redfern said he would pay for it himself to avoid bureaucracy.

Dr. Leversee recalled that Ms. Fortson helped confirm facts in Mr. Redfern's draft letter to the Monadnock Shopper News. Dr. Koning was also involved, with a small paragraph on Community Power and some data from *The Keene Sentinel*. Dr. Koning pointed out that finding actual data on how many people participate in Keene Community Power and their levels of signing up on the City of Keene's website was impossible, which she found concerning. She said AI could not find it on the City of Keene website either. Mr. Redfern said keeping the website updated and full of pertinent content would be something good for a Sustainability Coordinator to focus on.

B) Policy

Councilor Lake thanked Ms. Nebenzahl, Matt Boulton, and Peter Hansel for attending the September Policy Workgroup meeting. Councilor Lake recalled that Clean Energy New Hampshire recently updated its solar guidelines, which were not really targeted toward Keene's already robust Land Development Code solar guidelines; he said it was still good to hear the updates that were available online. The Workgroup also reviewed emails and the Clean Energy NH policy tracking webpage that Ms. Forston sent to the Committee. Councilor Lake noted that for a few years, there had been a monthly meeting of other energy committees around New Hampshire (every third Thursday at 3:00 PM; the ECC had not been sending a representative). Councilor Lake was going to try to start attending.

The August meeting was about available grants and legislation on energy projects and September was about window dressers, for example. Councilor Lake said there was good information available, which sparked conversation for the Workgroup about whether to revisit the idea of hosting a window dressers event. He recalled the previous weatherization program that resulted in energy savings for residents in older buildings. The Workgroup could follow up with Zach Luse about the idea. Councilor Lake said the Workgroup also discussed the Sustainability Coordinator position and he thought the Group was prepared to discuss more in October.

Chair Murphy recognized Michelle Chalice of Keene, who really hoped the ECC would revisit the window dresser program. Ms. Chalice said one aspect of that program Councilor Lake did not mention was the huge volunteer component. Ms. Chalice stated that there is a community "knitting" aspect linked to energy efficiency. She could not speak highly enough of this program and said she talked about it all the time. Ms. Chalice would be willing to come to another meeting to discuss window dressers.

C) Resilience

Dr. Russell reported that the Resilience Workgroup met the week before this meeting to discuss how to organize as a workgroup. He noted that he would be responsible for the monthly reports to the ECC, and members of the workgroup would take turns facilitating their meetings. Dr. Russell said the next Resilience Workgroup meeting would focus more on specific topics and priorities.

Dr. Russell said this Group's overarching intention would be to bring "*Climate*" back to the Energy and Climate Committee. There had been a lot of emphasis on energy for the prior several years and this Workgroup wanted to ensure a lot of emphasis on climate as well—from resilient infrastructure to resilient food systems. The Workgroup briefly discussed clarifying what "*resilience*" means within the context of climate, this Committee, and City of Keene; this will set the framework for topics that the Workgroup chooses.

Dr. Russell added that the intention of this Workgroup—if not this Committee—would also be to engage strongly with City staff, particularly the Public Works Department. The Resilience Workgroup would like to invite Public Works staff to its meetings. Lastly, the Workgroup would bring climate-related events in the community to the ECC’s attention.

Chair Murphy mentioned that Steve Larmon is also a member of this Workgroup.

Chair Murphy recognized Carolyn Sweet, who said Keene Housing was looking forward to engaging on the topic of community gardens, as well as working with the City toward installing standpipes to separate Keene Housing’s water usage. At this time, Keene Housing could not accurately measure its utility consumption of water and looked forward to being able to do so. Chair Murphy wondered if a Sustainability Coordinator could help the City better understand this. Ms. Sweet said yes, she had worked with the City of Wilmington previously through the Delaware Urban Farm Coalition on a grant program for things like that. She explained that they installed standpipes for community control gardens to increase food security and moved lateral stormwater infrastructure to meet multiple benefits in their proposed 2025 Comprehensive Plan. Chair Murphy noted that those were good things to have on the Policy Workgroup’s radar too.

As another member of the Resilience Workgroup, Chair Murphy’s standpoint was that the initial meeting was an organizational one. He said the Group had no shortage of subject matter/topic areas, so it would be challenging to be more strategic and not take on too much. Dr. Russell noted that the Workgroup shared the following materials with the ECC: the 2007 Climate Action Plan, the City’s 2010 Master Plan, and the new 2025 Master Plan Pillar goals. He suggested that it would be important to reinforce the Pillar goals and different City Departments’ priorities related to climate and climate adaptation. Chair Murphy noted that Ms. Sweet created a digital folder with a lot of helpful information.

8) New Business

None presented.

9) Next Meeting: Wednesday, October 22, 2025 at 4:30 PM

Chair Murphy recognized Matt Boulton, who announced the Climate Café on October 23 at 6:30 PM at the Keene Public Library on the topic of climate and finance with expert presenters.

10) Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Murphy adjourned the meeting at 5:29 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Megan Fortson, Planner