

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ENERGY AND CLIMATE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, July 22, 2026

4:30 PM

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

Members Present:

Gordon Leverage, Chair
Maureen Nebenzahl, Vice Chair
Councilor Bryan Lake
Paul Roth
Steve Larmon (Arrived at 5:07 PM)
Lisa Maxfield
Jake Pipp, Alternate (Voting)
Catherine Koning, Alternate (Voting)

Staff Present:

Megan Fortson, Planner & Deputy Zoning
Administrator

Members Not Present:

Annu Joshi Bargale
Timothy Murphy
Matthew Boulton, Alternate

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Leverage called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM.

2. Approval of Minutes – June 24, 2026

A motion by Dr. Koning to adopt the June 24, 2026 meeting minutes was duly seconded by Councilor Lake and the motion carried unanimously.

The Committee held a moment of silence for their long-time member Clair Oursler, who recently passed away.

3. Community Power Update – Patrick Roche & Allison McNeill from Good Energy

Chair Leverage welcomed Allison McNeill, Community Electricity Aggregation Consultant from Good Energy, for a Community Power Update. Ms. McNeill said Good Energy had been working with regulators from 2017 to 2020 and started to actually have plans approved with the Public Utilities Commission (PUC). The current buying group, Keene, Swanzey, and Marlborough—has been active since June 2023. They just did a program renewal this past winter and those rates are in effect through December 2027. As a reminder of how this works, before a contract is active, Keene puts out a bid for the electricity supplier. For both contracts now, Direct

Energy (now Priority Power) has served as the supplier for the program. She said they are always trying to attract more suppliers to come here, and New Hampshire's climate is really changing, so they are hopeful for 2027. Direct Energy is a competitive supplier who they work with throughout the country, and they have a good relationship with them and trust them to be able to supply electricity for the entire municipality. They also supply the voluntary RECs (renewable energy certificates) that are added to the standard and optional products. They are also open to Good Energy's innovation and have been a great partner in that.

Ms. McNeill showed the current rates that started in December 2025 and the upcoming Eversource rates starting August 1, 2026. She said the entire suite of Community Power products from basic to 100% renewable would be below the Eversource rates starting in August. She discussed the ability to provide breathing room come August. She has seen the Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and the New Hampshire Governors respond to ISO New England's "crazy" capacity change in the market and she thought that was being reflected in these upcoming price changes. Every time the utility has an auction, the past six months to one year are baked in, so she thought that would show in Eversource's upward movement, which would be great for the Community Power Program to get the residents a consistent rate, so they know what their bill will be until December 2027. She cited excitement for that \$0.02 rate that the Community Power Program will be below Eversource starting in August 2026.

Ms. McNeill said she has been speaking with Ms. Fortson and Ms. Brunner about scheduling a sweep, which means sending a letter to all newly eligible accounts (she showed an example). This is what everyone received when the program launched in 2023. It is an opt-out letter, which means if you are an Eversource Basic customer, you have 30 days to take action to pick a different product or opt-out entirely and stay with Eversource. If they enroll, they would opt-into Keene Standard, which is the default 12.1 cent rate with 50% renewable energy. She said they want to take advantage of being below the utility market rate and try to sweep in as many customers as possible who are still with Eversource. So, if they do nothing, customers will automatically be enrolled and start to reap those savings, and they can opt out at any time. They had been waiting to do this sweep until the rates were below Eversource, so she said the good thing was a lot of people would get this letter. She estimated being back at 9,000 to 10,000 accounts participating, which would be fantastic after some natural periods of attrition during the first few years, especially when rates were above Eversource's. Ms. McNeill looked forward to being able to provide some reporting over how the next six months would go.

Mr. Roth said he heard on the radio that the new Eversource rate was based on previous bidding and trying to make up for the amount of money they spent on energy previously. He asked if they do not bid out energy in advance. Ms. McNeill said a part of the Eversource rate is called the cost adjustment factor, which could really be any extra variable that they leave blank; sometimes it is a spot market purchase, but it is exactly that: to fill in a gap. Discussion ensued briefly on this business model. Ms. McNeill provided some brief perspective from Massachusetts, which is a very different market, with higher delivery rates, among other factors.

Ms. McNeill noted that a lot of the language in the sweep letters came from the PUC or was adapted by New Hampshire from the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities and needed to be in there for legal reasons.

Councilor Lake asked if the opt-out letter would go to every Eversource customer or just new customers. Ms. McNeill replied that the letter would only go to people who are new in town or have new accounts with Eversource. So, only those people who never got a chance to see the program and say “yes” or “no.”

Mr. Pipp asked if those who have opted out would be given a chance to opt-in again: could they be reminded of the program? Ms. McNeill said there could be City-wide outreach to those demographics, but it would not be an opt-out letter; they would have to choose to opt into the program. She discussed the PUC guidelines and respecting people’s choices. She cited an example in Massachusetts of a 10-year contract and wanting to mail an opt-out to the whole community again, which she said could require a conversation with the regulators.

Mr. Pipp wondered how many had opted out already who would not be receiving letters. Ms. McNeill said that at launch, about 80% to 90% of the households opted in. She said that was pretty common; that was most of the community who were eligible. She thought what would be picked up in this sweep would bring the numbers back up to that 75% to 80% mark.

Ms. McNeill moved on to a new idea she was working on with Ms. Brunner, stemming out of Massachusetts. She said Good Energy was the first consultant to do this and was looking for feedback. She said the current Keene rate classes had been developed so that residential, commercial, or industrial customers are automatically enrolled in the Keene Standard product; that default was developed to be “green” with a little bit of economic savings, for a reason, so people could take no action and still make a good environmental impact. For the low-income accounts (e.g., if you have SNAP, etc.), the innovation under discussion was to have their default be the Basic plan. This would require a plan amendment by the PUC and some red tape, but it was an idea they were pursuing to ensure residents could get the best possible electricity rates, especially those who need it the most. It is possible that could take effect during this contract, but it is a process, so it could be after the December 2027 contract begins. She said it does not have to be approved by the state, but an amended plan must be submitted to the state. For example, in Massachusetts, that process involved a public hearing. Councilor Lake thought this would also have to go to the City Council at some point. Ms. Fortson agreed. She was just unsure whether the state had to approve the City amending its plan first.

Councilor Lake asked what percentage of accounts in Keene this would affect. Ms. McNeill said it would be pretty small. Out of the 6,000 or so households/accounts served at this time, she thought it would benefit approximately 300 low-income accounts. She thought that might double after this letter sweep. She said even if it was 10, they want to make sure those 10 households get that savings. She added that they always have the choice to opt-up. This would just start those new automatic enrollments at Basic. Councilor Lake asked if Keene Housing’s accounts go through the Community Power Program. Ms. McNeill said she could look at it but had a feeling they probably had their own contract. Ms. Fortson said she could contact Josh Meehan or Carolyn Sweet. Ms. McNeill also made a note to look at the supplier.

Mr. Roth said that currently those low-income accounts would be at the Default/Standard rate. Ms. McNeill said yes, if they did not take any action to change. Mr. Roth asked if this low-

income default was already in place in Massachusetts and Ms. McNeill said only in a few communities. This was quite new there: only one community was actively enrolling members in Basic, and three others were in the approval process. Mr. Roth asked if that would involve sending out a letter to those members, letting them know what is happening and to others letting them know that the option exists. Ms. McNeill said exactly, the current low-income participants would receive a letter stating that they are being moved to Basic if they are currently in the Standard tier (not if they are in an optional package) and the routine opt-out letters would include language for low-income participants.

4. Community Power Mailer

Ms. McNeill talked about the Community Power mailer. She shared examples of ideas and outreach from the past and opened the opportunity to talk about what Good Energy had done for community-wide outreach in other towns. This once per year mailer is included in the City's Electricity Services Agreement. She explained various creative opportunities: opt-up inserts in utility bills, other opt-up campaigning especially for 50% and 100%, and a letter from the City Manager, which could be helpful to see as a new resident from the City government. Discussion ensued with suggestions.

Dr. Koning said that since the price of the Community Power Program was higher for a while, it would be nice to have a City-wide mailer highlighting this rate change and how to opt-up or opt back in. She gets similar mailers all the time and thinks this should compete. She added that it would be cool for people to post lawn signs that "this house runs on Community Power." Ms. McNeill said they had lawn signs and window clings for a while. Discussion ensued on those being less environmentally friendly and Dr. Koning said it could also be available as an Instagram post.

Ms. Fortson said she had forwarded the committee an email from Ms. Brunner with potential things that could be included in the mailer. She saw that other communities had made social media posts. With this included in Keene's contract, she wondered whether Good Energy would cover the cost of boosted social media posts or whether this would only cover mailings. Ms. McNeill said Good Energy has a lot of flexibility. With the supplier in the ESA, anything print is allowed once per year. She said Good Energy has a lot of flexibility and makes social media graphics on environmental impact, especially if it is not only related to the aggregation. The supplier would probably only pay for graphic design for things that are related to aggregation.

Ms. McNeill said Good Energy is open to social media and she could bring it back to the team too. Ms. McNeill wondered if the City interacts with social media more than mailers typically. Ms. Fortson said that there are typically inserts included with the quarterly water/sewer bills and those are probably a good way to get in touch with the more mature residents of Keene. However, Keene has a Communications and Marketing Director who does a lot of really good social media posts for the City, so Ms. Fortson thinks it is a successful way to get the word out there. Ms. McNeill said the good thing about all those ideas was they could go to anybody in town, not just those participating in the program, vs. the opt-out letters.

Vice Chair Nebenzahl thought this was great and said it was important to really impart the dollars and cents. She said that would make the difference. She would like to think she is saving the environment but said it comes down to the money, so she would focus on that as the lead.

Councilor Lake suggested emphasizing that the Community Power Program would cost less than Eversource. He suggested including on one side of the mailer how to opt-up in the program, with a quick link. He also wanted to add the NHSaves information as a good resource that would be the most accessible to the most people from the resources that Ms. Brunner shared. Dr. Koning also suggested Electrify Monadnock because it is a lot of money (\$7,000) for qualified households. She thought everything Ms. Brunner shared, even if just one line, with a short link, would be valuable.

In preparation for the next meeting, Ms. Fortson and the internal team would come up with some concrete ideas for a two-sided mailer for the Committee to review and provide feedback on. Then, she said the Committee could present to the City Communications team what it thinks would work for social media, and work with Good Energy from there. Ms. McNeill would take that back to the team to make sure where that social media content could lie if it is not all aggregation but said there is the manpower.

Lastly, Ms. McNeill shared her contact information at Good Energy and the general Good Energy contact. She noted that they use the Keene Community Power website for a lot of outreach and announcements as well, so that is another tool. Ms. Fortson added that they always try to answer questions in the Community Development Department as well.

The Committee thanked Ms. McNeill for the conversation and she departed.

5. Annual Report to City Council – Review of Draft Document

Chair Leversee referred to the draft annual report and asked if there was feedback. There was consensus that it looked good.

A motion by Mr. Roth to approve the Annual Report as written was duly seconded by Mr. Pipp and the motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Fortson said she would print that Report for the Chair to sign and it would go to the City Clerk's office to distribute in the City Councilors' mailboxes.

Dr. Larmon arrived at 5:07 PM.

6. ECC Donations

Ms. Fortson explained that there are certain Committees under City Code whose function and purpose allow them to accept donations. This Committee does not have that laid out in City Code as a provision. So, another option would be for the Committee to potentially donate a certain amount of money from its budget to the Monadnock Sustainability Hub or whatever organization is looking to get materials, but the ECC cannot request donations from other organizations.

However, ECC members as private citizens could donate items to the Monadnock Sustainability Hub on behalf of the Energy Fair. That opened the door to having the raffle prizes.

7. C-PACER Updates

Ms. Fortson said the City was still working on this. There was a recent change put out by Clean Energy NH saying that the adoption process was changed by the Governor; so, it can be adopted through one public hearing vs. a town meeting. She did not think that would change how Keene would need to proceed. She still thought it would need to go through City Council, Joint Planning Board-Planning, Licenses and Development Committee, and Planning, Licenses and Development Committee. Unfortunately, she said this is a more complicated program than it looks like on the surface when it comes to actually assigning responsibilities; staff were trying to do their due diligence to not bury the Assessing Department in unanticipated work as a part of this. Ms. Fortson said the C-PACER Ordinance is on its way slowly.

8. Work Groups

a. Policy (Meets as needed)

Chair Leversee said the Policy Work Group had not met.

b. Resilience

Dr. Larmon reported that the Resilience Work Group had not met.

However, Dr. Larmon reported that he had been working on the heating/cooling centers project. He called it fascinating. The places in town that are centers only operate during the daytime. He said there had not been that much of a problem with that, but he thought it was fertile ground to work on. He had been making some phone calls and thought that might be where the research ended. Dr. Larmon thought this could be something for the Committee to work on to have a plan for the future if some disaster happens. He mentioned working with some emergency groups to see if they have a part of the plan. He would report more to the Committee after his fact-finding.

c. Outreach

Work Group was not meeting right now in lieu of the Communication Plan.

9. Communication Plan

The Task Group had not been organized yet. Dr. Koning would organize a meeting.

10. Staff Updates

Ms. Fortson said that at this time, there were 60 to 70 applicants for the Assistant Sustainability Planner position. Everyone agreed it was very exciting. Senior Planner Mari Brunner had begun narrowing down that list to a more manageable group. They have an internal interview committee to begin the process and might have an outside group of a few individuals to meet

these people later on. The people who applied had a very wide range of experiences: worked at DES for a long time, freshly out of school, etc. It would be interesting to meet them in person.

Ms. Fortson also had an update on the proclamation process. The City Clerk's office directed her to the Mayor's office. The Mayor's Assistant said if one or a few of the Committee members could share details about the person they want to celebrate, then she would draft the proclamation. It could be presented to the person at a City Council meeting (typical) or ECC meeting. Ms. Maxfield said she would take the lead on getting the person's history. She had just contacted the person and would find out if they wanted something like this. Ms. Fortson put Ms. Maxfield in contact with the Mayor's assistant.

11. New Business

Ms. Maxfield asked, with all the construction on Central Square upcoming, whether it would make sense to change this meeting's location to the Recreation Center for the near future. Ms. Fortson said she could see the Recreation Center's availability, with it varying by the season. Dr. Larmon asked if anyone was sure the construction would really impede access to City Hall. Ms. Maxfield thought about parking. Ms. Fortson noted that at this hour, there is always public parking on the 2nd floor City hall parking deck for free after 5:00 PM. Discussion continued about parking on Washington street and unknowns about the construction.

12. Next Meeting: August 26, 2026 at 4:30 PM

13. Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Leversee adjourned the meeting at 5:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Megan A. Fortson, AICP – Planner & Deputy Zoning Administrator