

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ENERGY AND CLIMATE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, August 26, 2026

4:30 PM

**Miller-Vincent Room,
Keene Public Library**

Members Present:

Gordon Leverage, Chair
Maureen Nebenzahl, Vice Chair
Councilor Bryan Lake
Paul Roth
Steve Larmon
Timothy Murphy
Lisa Maxfield
Jake Pipp, Alternate (Voting)
Catherine Koning, Alternate (Voting)
Matthew Boulton, Alternate (Voting)

Staff Present:

Megan Fortson, Planner & Deputy Zoning
Administrator
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner (Arrived at 4:49
PM; Left Early)

Members Not Present:

Annu Joshi Bargale

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Leverage called the meeting to order at 4:34 PM.

2. Approval of Minutes – July 22, 2026

A motion by Councilor Lake to adopt the July 22, 2026 minutes was duly seconded by Mr. Roth.

Discussion ensued about whether there was an error on line 45 regarding the “past six months.” Mr. Roth thought it was correct. Ms. Fortson explained the consultant’s intent behind the statement to explain that any costs for Eversource from the past six months are incorporated and included in their costs for the next six months. There was no decision made to alter the minutes.

The motion carried unanimously.

3. Community Power Update – Implementing Keene Basic Default for Low Income Customers

Ms. Fortson explained that Senior Planner Mari Brunner had been speaking with Good Energy about creating a new lower default option for people receiving assistance from Eversource; they would be automatically enrolled into it. That would require the City to create an updated

Community Power Plan, which would have to be approved by City Council. She also thought it had to be approved by the New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission. She said this is something that would cross Committee members' desks in the future. She called the automatic enrollment exciting. She was unsure whether it would be people already on Community Power or only those newly enrolled. Ms. Fortson recalled the Allison McNeill from Good Energy mentioning this during the July 22nd ECC meeting and said it was happening a little sooner than she expected but it would be great.

Mr. Pipp noted that Keene Community Power has Keene Basic, Keene 10, Keene Standard, and Keene 100 as options. He asked about the base amount of renewable energy included in each option. Discussion ensued.

Ms. Brunner arrived at 4:49 PM.

Ms. Brunner said this would be for anybody who is on the Electric Assistance Program with New Hampshire Electric Assistance Program (EAP). The City had already confirmed with Direct Energy that they have the data they need to auto enroll those customers into the basic option. Moving forward, when there is a sweep or new pricing rollout, those customers would be automatically enrolled in the lowest cost option unless they opt for a different option or want to opt out. For right now, anybody that is already elected to go to Keene 100 would stay on that. If they are currently on Keene 50, they will go down to the Basic. If they had chosen Keene 10, they would stay on Keene 10. Ms. Brunner had posted the plan on KeeneCommunityPower.com. Changes to the plan are on pages five and six under the "Equitable Treatment" section, which would be modified to state that the City would be distinguishing between customers that participate in the EAP and others. Other changes proposed to the plan include instead of specifying a specific company as the community power consultant, just saying "community power consultants." The other change proposed is under the "Historical Overview" section to include changes in liability. Ms. Brunner hoped for a recommendation from the Committee to the City Council on whether the ECC, as the advisory committee for the Community Power Program, supports this change.

A motion by Dr. Koning for the Energy and Climate Committee to support the changes to the Community Power Program was duly seconded by Ms. Maxfield.

Ms. Maxfield asked if the Keene Basic would include 35% renewable. Ms. Brunner said Keene Basic would remain 25% renewable energy as mandated by the state and Keene 10 would remain the option with 35% renewable energy included.

Discussion ensued about whether the consultant had the necessary data to ensure that any new customer enrolled into the Community Power Program that is also part of the EAP would be automatically put into the Keene Basic option. Ms. Brunner was unsure this could be done retroactively for other EAP customers already part of the Community Power Program.

Ms. Brunner said that the current Community Power contract will be in place through 2027 and then they would negotiate new pricing.

Councilor Lake recalled discussions on the Council floor where there had been a lot of debate about costs, especially related to low-income households. He was trying to balance that against the goal of trying to have 100% renewable energy. He said this change technically fits with the goal of trying to get to 100% renewables, so he was in support of it. He wanted to make sure it would be financially responsible at the same time.

Ms. Maxfield said it would only be 300 people out of 12,000 program participants qualify for the EAP, so the potential impact to the 100% renewable energy goal would be very low.

Chair Leversee said the other big variable there is what the electricity rates are for renewals. So, if rates go down, then all the goals line up. He said we would have to see as the contracts come forward too. Mr. Pipp wondered through Councilor Lake if there would be the possibility for some sort of fund through Eversource or Southwestern Community Services to get assistance paying for a percentage of renewable energy. He said right now it is nine-tenths of a cent to go from basic to 50% renewable; he said the marginal cost is not that big to bump people up. He did not know if there would be a way to tweak the financial support through other resources and community services to help cover that. Ms. Brunner replied that the concept was discussed when this program was originally being developed and a part of the confusion around the naming of the various options is that initially the Keene 100 option was going to be 100% additional renewable energy, so customers who chose that option would actually be choosing to purchase more RECs (renewable energy credits) than needed to cover their energy usage, so that it would offset the customers who cannot afford that. She said that is something they could look at again in the future. She said she would be hesitant to try and change any of those fuel assistance programs because they are so heavily regulated already that adding any other variables into the mix could make it unfeasible to work.

The motion for the Energy and Climate Committee to support the changes to the Community Power Program carried unanimously on a roll call vote.

Ms. Fortson confirmed that Ms. Brunner did not need a letter from the Chair for City Council. Ms. Brunner said she would just need a report from the ECC which she would create from the discussion in the minutes. This would go to City Council on September 17, 2026 and to the Council's Finance, Organization and Personnel (FOP) Committee after that. Members of the Committee were encouraged to come and speak to this item at the FOP Committee meeting on the fourth Thursday of September. Ms. Fortson said she would send out the red-lined version of the Community Power Program's proposed changes via email.

4. Community Power Mailer

Ms. Fortson noted that this had come around a number of times. Last month she had plans of providing the Committee with a draft mailer this month and due to life, having Assistant Sustainability Planner interviews, and a lot of background work, she was unfortunately unable to create anything like that. She apologized and said the draft would be to come.

5. Proclamation – Clean Energy Team

Ms. Maxfield reported that she originally suggested a Proclamation for a person who has been in town for decades doing this work and really laid the groundwork for what the ECC is doing today. When Ms. Maxfield spoke with them, they did not want the recognition for themselves and suggested a Proclamation for the Clean Energy Team (CET) in lieu of them receiving one individually. Ms. Maxfield was unsure what that would entail and whether there could be a Proclamation for a group instead; she also wondered whether doing this for one group would open it up to the ECC needing to do it for other groups. She added that there are two CET members on the Committee and wondered if that would be a conflict of interest. Ms. Fortson thought it would be okay to do a Proclamation for a group, noting there are Proclamations for Clean Energy Month, etc. She said it would involve reaching out to the Mayor's office and decide if they would do it at a City Council or an ECC meeting. She noted that they would likely want a few members of the CET to be present (not necessarily the ECC members). Regarding conflict of interest, Ms. Fortson thought it might be cleaner for any ECC member who is on the CET to recuse themselves from the vote even though the decision being made does not relate to money. Ms. Fortson did not think it was an area of concern about opening the Committee up to wanting to do Proclamations for other groups. She thinks it is very nice to want to celebrate work that happens in the community and does not think there will be groups knocking down the Committee's door seeking similar Proclamations. She called it a very low risk thing to do.

Dr. Koning wondered how the CET would feel about the proposal, noting that they would be meeting this evening and could discuss it. So, she suggested tabling this for further investigation.

Councilor Lake mentioned tying off that procedural piece as well, if this is on the agenda in the future, he wondered what the typical motion for the Mayor to give the Proclamation would be, or if at that point, whether it would be more appropriate for the individuals who want to bring forth the Proclamation to be working with the Mayor's office. Ms. Brunner said in the past, the staff liaison would reach out to the Mayor's office, who wants the liaison to provide them with a template, which the Mayor can tweak if he wants to. She said the Committee could take on drafting the Proclamation. She noted that the Mayor will also make Proclamations at events, so they could do something at the Clean Energy Fair, for example. Ms. Fortson was unsure whether the Committee would meet again before the Clean Energy Fair on September 19, 2026.

Mr. Murphy asked Ms. Maxfield, as the person who brought the whole idea to the Committee (remembering the enthusiasm in her pitch), if she still felt as fondly about the new idea for the Proclamation. Ms. Maxfield replied yes, out of respect for the person who suggested it. She said she did not have as much passion as she did for honoring the person.

Ms. Fortson asked if this were to move forward, with Mr. Boulton and Dr. Koning being CET members who would recuse themselves, how they thought this would be received by the rest of the CET. Dr. Koning said she thought the group would be honored, but noted that the group is comprised of different members than it was originally. Mr. Boulton said it is the original generation who really deserves recognition and this group picked up the baton; they would transform the conversation, but the others had laid the groundwork. Ms. Maxfield said the person mentioned that it takes more than one person or one group; it is a continual thing. So, they did mention the current group as well.

Chair Leversee noted that there would be a conversation tonight with current CET members and any original members in attendance to see if this would be a welcome recognition. He asked if the Committee needed to wait until its next meeting to move this forward. Ms. Fortson recommended, depending on the Mayor's availability, that it would be a great idea to make the Proclamation at the Clean Energy Fair. She would be happy to work with the Mayor's office to figure out Proclamation language with the help of someone on the Committee and to see if he would be available for the event. If that were the plan, she said the Committee needed to take some action at this meeting because the Fair is on September 19th and the next Committee meeting is on September 23, 2026. She suggested a motion to have staff work with an ECC member to draft a Proclamation that gets submitted to the Mayor's office, and if the CET for some reason does not want the Proclamation, then the motion will not go anywhere. She said there is no harm.

Ms. Maxfield said they had waited all this time and to rush it at this point seemed unnecessary to her. Dr. Koning said she was so busy working on the Clean Energy Fair that it would be hard, plus bringing in the Mayor, which would be great; she did not think it needed to be rushed. Chair Leversee said the Committee would get a sense from the CET at its next meeting and assuming that is favorable, would hold a vote moving forward, and then Ms. Fortson could work with the Mayor's office on a Proclamation when appropriate.

6. Work Groups
a. Policy (Meets as needed)

Chair Leversee said the Policy Work Group had not met.

b. Resilience

Chair Leversee said he had a short call with Dr. Russell, who was going to pursue heating and cooling centers, so they were still working on that. Mr. Pipp asked to be added to that email list. Ms. Maxfield had also been working with Dr. Larmon and connecting him with the right person to talk to about what already exists for heating and cooling facilities.

Mr. Murphy recalled talking about a potential conversation with the new Emergency Management Director (EMD). Mr. Roth said they were trying to get that together. Now the EMD is Rick Wood and his Deputy, Mike Hagan, would be retiring after 26 years with the City.

Mr. Boulton said thinking of the Work Groups made him think that in the future they will be looking forward to working with members of City staff, such as the Assistant Sustainability Planner. He wondered whether Ms. Fortson knew the timeline for bringing that person on board. Ms. Fortson estimated a few months because prior to the second interviews they were having interviewees take DISC assessments, which are like personality tests for strengths/communication styles in the workplace. All the candidates coming in for the second interview had completed that assessment. If they decide to move forward offering the position to someone at this point, the background check can take one month or so and the speed is determined by the state. So, Ms. Fortson estimated one to two months because HR also needs time to get everything together in terms of the offer letter, etc.

Ms. Fortson reported that Dr. Russell sent her an email report. He said they held a very productive communication plan meeting yesterday; others should be there to report. With limited attendance, the Climate Resilience Group held an abbreviated meeting on August 11, 2026. They plan to invite the new Emergency Management Director, Rick Wood, to one of their Work Group Meetings. They will also be collecting additional information about cooling centers, particularly if overnight solutions become necessary.

c. Outreach

On hold because of the Communications Plan.

7. Communication Plan

Chair Leversee said the group had a phone call the day before that Dr. Koning could summarize. Dr. Koning said the essence of what they came up with was that it would be nice to send out a short communication, maybe a paragraph, once or twice per month. The topic would be decided on by the full group. She suggested finding a fast process for that to not take up too much of every agenda. That would be the first step. Then, the topic would go to the Education and Outreach Work Group to write about it. Once it is written, it would go to staff to review it and then it would be posted to the ECC email list and the City's Facebook/Instagram, and maybe the Library's social media. The idea is not for a big newsletter but something short; the feeling is that people are not going to read something that long but rather to have links to other things. For example, if there is a big report on heating and cooling centers, there could be something short on what was found, with a link to learn more. Dr. Koning said that was the essence of the idea. Chair Leversee added the idea to have that as a regular agenda item: what is the message we want to get out for this next month? He said they may quickly arrive at a message or a list of topics that can go out over several meetings. Then, the Outreach Work Group take those up between meetings.

Chair Leversee said the other question that arose was how to track the traffic going into these, both the email list and web hits, to know if the messages are being heard by anyone. Ms. Fortson said the City sends emails out to email lists using Constant Contact, which will show what the click rate was and how many people read the emails. She added that all the website data is collected through the website's developer, Paragon Digital Marketing on Court Street, so the Communications and Marketing team should have access to see what website page visits statistics are. She said the City's Communications and Marketing team would need to be involved with creating a template and sending these messages out. Mr. Boulton asked how many people are on the ECC email list. Ms. Fortson said she would find out. Ms. Maxfield said the group felt strongly that it would write the content, but they did not want to be the ones choosing the topics each month; they felt that should be a group activity for the whole Committee.

Mr. Murphy asked the frequency of these releases. It was replied that they could be done every few weeks or monthly. Although, Dr. Koning said they would be short pieces. That sounded like a lot to Mr. Murphy. He thought it would be wise for the Committee to help generate a running list of ideas for content that can always be added to. Ms. Maxfield said the Communication Plan

group began creating a list with a lot of different topics, including Community Power or spotlights on solar businesses. Mr. Boulton thought it would behoove the Committee to share the power change for low-income folks: it is not all about getting to 100% renewable but about taking care of each other. Dr. Koning said she did not see this as a heavy lift because something comes up at almost every meeting that she would like to get out there. Discussion continued.

Chair Leversee was thinking on the heating and cooling centers, he said the group could just report the complexity of it and that even if they do not have a solution, they are thinking about it; that could elicit some feedback.

Ms. Maxfield said Ms. Fortson is the contact person for the ECC webpage if there is feedback and Ms. Fortson confirmed.

Dr. Koning said these communications may be something the Committee does for one year and then they may get an idea of how many people are reading them and determine whether it is a good use of time. Mr. Murphy said he really liked the idea of keeping them concise to try to draw the reader in and then using links for different information people need to know to go deeper. Mr. Boulton suggested including an action step with each communication or “news you can use,” so there is a practical take away. He thought that would help to build the list.

8. Staff Updates

Earlier in the meeting, Ms. Brunner provided an update on the Assistant Sustainability Planner. She said they would be interviewing four candidates the next week and doing a group meeting with members of the public. If anyone was interested in participating, Ms. Brunner provided the times; email her for the information. They were looking for two to three members of the public for each time slot because it will be a public facing position and working closely with the ECC. Dr. Koning asked how Ms. Brunner would collect feedback from the public participants. Ms. Brunner said there are two or three questions on a piece of paper to write notes and general impressions. Mr. Pipp said last mentioned there were 60–70 candidates; he asked how staff went forward with the process. Ms. Brunner said they cut off applications on July 17, 2026 for the first round of review. Out of 64 applicants on July 17, they selected 11 for the first interviews. They conducted the first interviews on Teams and from there narrowed down to four candidates, which she said was really hard. The four interviews during the next week would be in person. Chair Leversee hoped some Committee members would be able to attend. He said it sounded like a great pool of candidates and said he was optimistic, noting they interview us as much as we interview them.

9. New Business

Discussion ensued about whether the communication topic should be an agenda item at subsequent meetings. There was consensus to have it on upcoming agendas under the title “Monthly Communication Topics.” Discussion ensued briefly.

10. Next Meeting: September 23, 2026 at 4:30 PM

11. Adjournment

Chair Leversee reminded everyone about the Energy Fair on September 19, 2026 from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM. Dr. Koning briefly described the Fair, with music and other attractions.

There being no further business, Chair Leversee adjourned the meeting at 5:26 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker

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