

**City of Keene**  
**New Hampshire**

**ENERGY AND CLIMATE COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Wednesday, October 5, 2022**

**8:00 AM**

**Council Chambers,  
City Hall**

**Members Present:**

Peter Hansel, Chair  
Zach Luse, Vice Chair  
Councilor Raleigh Ormerod  
Councilor Bryan Lake  
Jake Pipp  
Jude Nuru  
Diana Duffy  
Beth Campbell  
Clair Oursler  
Charles Redfern, Alternate

**Staff Present:**

Jesse Rounds, Community Development  
Director

**Members Not Present:**

Paul Roth  
Linsey Edmunds

**1) Call to Order and Roll Call**

Chair Hansel called the meeting to order at 8:02 AM.

**2) Approval of Minutes- September 7, 2022**

Minutes were approved by unanimous approval.

**3) Keene 21 in 21 Program- Keith Thibault, Southwestern Community Services**

Mr. Keith Thibault, Southwestern Community Services spoke to the committee about the 21 in 21 program. He started by providing background explaining that program was the result of discussions going back 10-15 years with Rhett Lamb, Med Kopczynski, and previous and current City managers about how important city neighborhoods are. Many of these neighborhoods are within walking distance to downtown and the business district. Many have decently sized properties with decently sized lots. He noted that roughly, 900-1000 of them are in Keene's east side.

Over the years, the focus went away from these particular neighborhoods and into the more trendy subdivisions and newer housing units. As a result, many of these neighborhoods became rental properties and did not receive as much attention as some other areas.

Recently, efforts have been made to try to revitalize and support these neighborhoods and bring the focus back on them. The creation of Pat Russel Park has been of major importance, as has the reopening of Robin Hood Park. These both serve as an attempt to support the East Side, but more broadly Keene's most robust stock of middle class neighborhoods.

Mayor Hansel wanted to coalesce this more. In talking with Southwestern Community Services (SCS) energy services program services director, they hatched the idea of targeting resources in these neighborhoods, in particular, the weatherization program that SCS controls. At the same time of meeting a local need, this program also met a statewide initiative and urging to do more of these collaborative efforts within the communities. Mr. Thibault noted that while there is limited funding, they have been running it successfully since 1975. They receive yearly allocations, but usually run out of resources about nine months into the year. While the program is not huge, it is effective. The weatherization program typically does 25-30 homes per year. To try to support the 21 in 21 program, they were able to offer to commit resources within these particular neighborhoods. The City worked with them to prioritize neighborhoods within the East Side. With that information, SCS planned the 21 in 21 program. Late last year, they sent the first solicitation to fifty different property owners representing seventy-seven homes. From that, they worked directly with four homeowners consisting of two single family, a duplex and a triplex in that neighborhood. At least one residence had insulation work and air attic sealing. Additionally, the program was able to get some state tax credits (approximately \$470,000) that allowed them to do repairs to the homes that generally as a program they would not be able to do (roofs, heating systems, ventilation system repairs, etc.).

The 21 in 21 program performs a housing quality standards check or inspection as well as a weatherization assessment looking particularly at basic safety concerns. At the end of the day, the goal is to walk away from the home knowing it has been weatherized and it meets basic HUD Housing quality standards.

At the request of the city, 21 in 21 did a second solicitation in the same area. It had been noted that a number of the homes had changed ownership. As a result of that second solicitation, they got another three homes, all new owners since original solicitation.

Mr. Thibault reported that right now, they have fourteen homes they are working on with HEA federal weatherization dollars (income eligible) in six different buildings. All are located in the Water Street, Grove Street, Willow Street/ Court, Gardner Street, and Foster Street area. He noted that Utility companies also have programs available and often people, who are found ineligible for weatherization, may be eligible for the utility company programs, which 21 in 21 can help facilitate.

In Mr. Thibault's opinion, there appears to be a transformation happening locally where properties are returning to private ownership. In a macro sense, what 21 in 21 would like to do is to see the owner occupants move back in. He added that ideally, you revitalize without occupancy for greatest ease, which would hopefully lead to private investment. The 21 in 21 community action program is tiny, especially in comparison to others. The private capital is really going to be what will transform these neighborhoods.

There is a private bank in the area that has invested, and a number of other organizations that are vested in improving the community and neighborhoods. SCS and 21 in 21 is looking to continue what the City has been trying to do, with reinvesting, refocusing and putting infrastructure value back into these middle class neighborhoods.

Mr. Thibault spoke of a gentleman, David Lablond, who owns a 3 family property on 27 Willow Court. He is not interested in renting to students. As his occupants are eligible, SCS plans to weatherize his property. He added they will be doing extensive work in there and Mr. Lablond has now bought 19 Willow and is currently interested in 22 Willow as well. He sees these neighborhoods for their value and is bringing money in from the outside to help revitalize it.

SCS and 21 in 21 would like to continue doing this as much as possible. While Mr. Thibault cannot say they will automatically be eligible for more money if they hit their mark, local and state partners are certainly watching.

An add on to this program has been the formation of the Window Dressers program that are building inserts into some of these 21 in 21 homes. Ten inserts can save up to one hundred gallons of oil, which is not a small change.

They have a few more tax credits to place but even though this program is small, Mr. Thibault said it is big in how it was put together with collaboration and the human aspect of it. Ms. Beth Campbell asked whether this program was separate from the HCS program. Mr. Thibault noted that it was separate. He expanded to say that the weatherization program is a subset of the heat assistance program. The way to get into the program is for individuals to apply to the SWCS home heating fuel assistance program. As long as 50% of the residents in the building qualify and are eligible (they do not have to take the heating assistance), they are then eligible for the weatherization program. He noted that they have that exact situation on Foster Street in a duplex. The upstairs tenant meets the qualifications, the downstairs tenant does not, but since 50% of the tenants qualify, the building is eligible.

Increasing knowledge and awareness of NH Saves and their available resources is something Mr. Thibault sees as only being beneficial. The more that is known about what the utility companies can offer, the more citizens and programs like this can take full advantage and really start to move the bar in a positive direction.

While the income limit is what generally qualifies the home for weatherization, he noted that it is about 2/3 to 1/3; that is, of the people they have gotten postcards back, 2/3 are not eligible for the weatherization, but they are eligible for the utility programs. The 21 in 21 program is serving to make those resource connections. The other way a household could become eligible is through the usage of energy in that home. If the energy company evaluates, then they can recognize the inefficiency and can put money in towards improving the efficiency.

He added that while it is a small program, it is intended to be a catalyst for other programs and connection to resources.

Chair Hansel asked whether and how they are addressing the contractor shortage. Mr. Thibault responded that they have been buying time up front from contractors. They use a particular company for insulation and weather sealing and to make sure they have contractor availability, they will buy hundreds of hours in advance. Even just finding general contractors for repairs has been challenging and the labor element is definitely a hurdle.

Chair Hansel noted that Mr. Thibault had mentioned changing the heating system. He asked if the program identifies that a customer has an inefficient heating system, do they get involved in the decision making process to convert? Mr. Thibault responded that in many of these neighborhoods you have Liberty (Utility) in terms of options available. Generally, it will depend on current heating infrastructure, access, availability and what is available. High efficiency gas is one thing they are replacing in some of these locations. In some cases, their options are limited.

Chair Hansel asked if there were any other questions from board members. Mr. Zach Luse said that while he had no real question, he just wanted to add how impressed he was with the program, the money and the collaborative efforts being made.

Mr. Thibault added that the purpose of community action programs is to serve the needs of the community. The needs of different communities are very different but they can morph them and the program is nimble enough to move where the needs are. When he started this 25 years ago, availability of housing was at the top of the heap in terms of concern. He noted that they work in conjunction with Keene housing and previously, Cheshire Housing, now Brookbend.

Chair Hansel asked if Mr. Thibault saw any potential for scaling this up. Mr. Thibault responded that he could certainly see this becoming a pilot that becomes replicated. There is certainly potential to ramp the program up, but unfortunately, they are capped in the available funding from the ATA Weatherization money. He added if the community partnerships continue to resonate when they are done, the potential is there, but it is always hard to predict with the future. Community power, renewables, and reduction of dependence on fossil fuels is not going away and he firmly believes this is the right thing to put resources and collaboration in.

Mr. Jake Pipp noted Mr. Thibault had said that if people do not qualify for all programs, utility programs step in. He was curious to what extent do they really help- is it more discounted

lightbulbs or is it whole house weatherization? Mr. Thibault said it all depends on the house itself. The future is really on the utility companies themselves and the options they provide. He hopes that those options available will broaden with time.

**4) Request for Sponsorship of NH Saves Button Up Workshop- Clean Energy Team**

Nancy Gillard, Reservoir St, Keene addressed the Committee, and stated they are doing a Button Up workshop on the 12<sup>th</sup> for Keene Energy Week in collaboration with the Clean Energy Team. It will be held at the Keene Recreation Center from 6:30-8:00 PM. Mr. Andy Duncan will be the presenter and Mr. Bob Eldridge (previous presenter) will be there as a resource.

Ms. Gillard asked the Committee to serve as a co-sponsor for the workshop. She noted nothing was required from committee other than promoting it and thanked the group for all the promotion of energy week. Ms. Diane Duffy confessed that she had no idea what is done in a 90-minute Button Up workshop. Ms. Gillard responded and said every time she goes she learns something new. Topics covered include everything from changing lightbulbs, rebates on appliances to home audits and what is required for application, process, etc. It is a structured education seminar and the way she understands it, Mr. Duncan will do a PowerPoint. Attendance ranges, as the largest group was a little over 50 down to just over 25 attendees.

Chair Hansel added that he went to one some time ago and said it is usually a presentation followed by a question and answer session. His biggest take-away was the ABC's- attic, basement, core. He learned that while one might think new windows are in order, much of the energy efficiency could be improved by addressing the ABC's.

Chair Hansel made a motion to approve sponsoring. Mr. Pipp motioned to approve and Mr. Luse seconded the motion. The group provided unanimous approval.

**5) Energy Plan Work Group Reports-outs**

**A) Weatherization**

Mr. Luse reported that the Window Dressers is moving along. They ran into a home or two that was not suitable, but probably have somewhere just north of 100 inserts that they are anticipating right now. While it is not where they want to be, it is a good step in the right direction. He added that Habitat for Humanity has been great at filling in volunteer spaces and he believes they are going to be in good shape. Keene Rotary Club has offered 100 free inserts for those that qualify. If they do not dip into that number, they can roll that into the next community build. Everything has to be measured and paid for by the 17<sup>th</sup>. He added that they have a good core group of measurers that are going out and doing this.

Chair Hansel asked of the hundred inserts that were ordered, what percentage are low to middle income? Mr. Luse responded that they do not know yet as they have not all been measured.

Mr. Pipp addressed the group that if they or anyone they know if are looking for inserts, to put an order in and as long as it is received by the end of this week, there will still be turnaround time. He added that anyone interested can go to windowdressers.org and the sign up and links are all there on the website.

Chair Hansel asked if there was anything else the committee could do to promote that. An audience member suggested posting on the numerous area Facebook pages. Clair Oursler also suggested a public service announcement with Danny Mitchel at WKBK.

### **B) Electric Vehicles**

Councilor Bryan Lake provided an update and said they came up with a few different drafts and recommendations after discussing the guidelines. They are currently looking to work with city staff and incorporate it into city staff review for new construction. While it would not be a requirement, it would at least allow the staff to look at the recommendations when considering new projects. They hope to have an update coming soon. Councilor Raleigh Ormerod added that he did meet with city staff this past week and also found about 5-6 dealers who are willing to help. They are waiting for City to give specification on when and where. The Downtown Group is figuring out where they are going to be. There is definite community interest, but it lies with the infrastructure now. He noted they are going to regroup in early December.

Chair Hansel introduced Charles Redfern, the new alternate and suggested if he had any interest in any of the work groups, to let him know and he will facilitate him getting involved.

### **C) Community Solar- Jude Nuru**

Mr. Jude Nuru provided an update on the community solar workgroup. He thought the community power win is good across New Hampshire. Every town or city is in discussion of how to move forward. This group is very focused on community solar. When they met the last time, they looked at ways to make this happen in Keene. The discussion, in particular, focused on parking canopies. In the last meeting, they looked at potential implementation locations and methods. They then talked with schools to see if there were any available parking lots for use. In their research, they discovered that it is much more expensive to do small-scale canopies. In the face of incentives, it might be doable. They still have it on the agenda and are certainly not giving up. As such, the group is focusing on larger parking lots to be able to get the appropriate scale. He added that they also discussed zoning in the last meeting and are hoping to get support from two councilors on the committee to push through the zoning approval for the cemetery.

The group intends to do a site walk on lower Main Street to assess the site and see what they can do in readiness regarding SB 270. They also looked at potential grant programs, grant/loan programs, other funding programs and potential sites that would be appropriate. While there is

not a lot to say about it currently, the hope is that something will come through with these additional opportunities.

Chair Hansel pointed out that in the upcoming events, the local business or groups will be discussing what they are doing to promote their green energy initiatives. Councilor Ormerod suggested if Mr. Nuru wants city councilors to help on things, it would be beneficial to know where they are. Chair Hansel added he believed Mr. Nuru was more interested to find out what is needed and where things stand. He believes it is just a matter of monitoring that and moving it forward.

**D) Renewable Energy Loans**

Chair Hansel said there was not a lot to report. He had another meeting with Peterborough Energy Group, who are also looking into this process for their community. He is currently waiting to hear back from two banks- Walpole and Mascoma. There are some restrictions on what banks can do and what kind of loans they can generate, but it is moving along. He will be meeting with them again soon and will get further clarification on it.

**E) Outreach and Education/ Keene Energy Week**

Mr. Luse reported that Keene Energy Week is coming together and thanked the Energy Team for their work. Tomorrow night, October 6<sup>th</sup>, Peter is accepting the proclamation from Mayor. NH Saves Button-Up Workshop is happening on the 12<sup>th</sup> as Nancy mentioned. Clean Energy is doing a solar tour again on October 15 and will be virtual for the remainder of the week. There is also a Clean energy Expo, but had to move the date because of the pumpkin fest. They will be looking for people to help on Saturday, October 15<sup>th</sup>, 11am-2pm with tabling and talking about the clean energy plan. Clean Energy is also putting together a climate café on October 19<sup>th</sup>. All dates and times are on [Keeneenergy.com](http://Keeneenergy.com). The Keene Public Library is hosting a movie night with a showing of the movie, Kiss the Ground. The Chamber is doing a regional issue series October 27<sup>th</sup> with a tour of Mr. Luse's space afterwards. Events end at end of the month with the Window Dressers build.

**6) Upcoming Dates of Interest**

- A) NH Saves Button Up Workshop- October 12, 2022, 6:00-7:30pm at Keene Parks and Recreation, 312 Washington Street**
- B) Keene Energy Week- October 16-22, 2022- [keeneenergyweek.com](http://keeneenergyweek.com)**
- C) Clean Energy Expo-October 15, 11am-2pm- Railroad Square**
- D) Window Dressers Community Build- October 27-November 3, 2022, 310 Marlboro Street**
- E) Chamber Regional Issues Series- October 27, 2022, 8:00am at the Cheshire County Courthouse Delegation Room**

**7) Community Power Update**

Chair Hansel mentioned Ms. Mari Brunner is away, but she provided a summary and noted there was a good article in paper last night on community power in which Ms. Brunner answered many of the questions we might have had. Chair Hansel suggested Ms. Brunner's summary be entered into the minutes as an attachment. Chair Hansel then opened it up to community discussion and questions.

With no questions, Chair Hansel summarized Ms. Brunner's notes saying it looks like the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) has given approval, but there are some things that have to happen before the City can go out to bid for energy and some of that has to do with getting information from Eversource. They have thirty days to get that information to the group and the consultant and then there will be a period for review. Following approval, it can then go out to bid with the objective for selecting a supplier and going on line in April. This is a very exciting prospect, particularly with the cost of energy going up so high. He added that it will be an opt-out program, in other words, everyone is in unless they specifically opt-out and there will be several levels of energy options that people can select. Ultimately, the objective is once community power gets going and operating over time, the amount of renewables that the City can purchase at an affordable rate will increase more and more as time goes on and will allow the City to reach their goal of 100% by 2030.

Mr. Redfern asked if Keene State had signed up for community power. Chair Hansel responded that to his knowledge no one has signed up at this point. Businesses may already have contracts with suppliers that they have to fulfill. As those contracts expire, they will have to make decisions.

Mr. Nuru noted Chair Hansel said the program would be opt out. He asked if that would be for residents only and not businesses. Chair Hansel responded that he did not remember whether businesses were included, but knows that residents are automatically in and have to specifically opt out.

8) **New Business**

No new business.

9) **Next Meeting: Wednesday, November 2, 2022- 8:00 AM**

10) **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Peter Hansel adjourned the meeting at 9:17 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Amanda Trask, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,  
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner