

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ENERGY AND CLIMATE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, November 2, 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
Paul Roth
Beth Campbell (Zoom)
Clair Oursler
Charles Redfern, Alternate

Staff Present:

Mari Brunner, Senior Planner

Members Not Present:

Diana Duffy
Linsey Edmunds

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Peter Hansel called the meeting to order at 8:05 AM and roll call attendance was taken. Ms. Beth Campbell joined remotely by zoom.

2) Approval of Minutes-September 7, 2022 and October 5, 2022

Chair Hansel said there are two sets of minutes to approve because at the last meeting the minute taker was unable to record who made the motion and who seconded due to technical difficulties. Chair Hansel asked for a motion to approve the September 7th minutes. Bryan Lake moved to approve the minutes. Zach Luse seconded the motion.

Mari Brunner discussed an e-mail she received from Mike Metell regarding some corrections he had for the September 7th minutes.

Mr. Metell's corrections to the September 7th minutes were accepted as an addendum to the minutes.

Mr. Charles Redfern asked if he was a voting member or if there was a quorum. Chair Hansel stated the committee did have a quorum with other members present so Mr. Redfern would not be a voting member.

Chair Hansel asked for a vote on the September 7th minutes as amended. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Councilor Bryan Lake made a motion to approve the October 5th minutes. The motion was seconded by Councilor Raleigh Ormerod and approved by roll call of those present. Ms. Campbell lost her connection from zoom and did not participate.

3) Energy Plan Work Group Report-outs
A) Weatherization

Mr. Zach Luse spoke and said they completed the Window Dressers build on Sunday and completed 191 window inserts. Over 100 went to homes on fuel assistance or in need. Almost 100 of them were just in the “21 in 21” homes (a program of Southwestern Community Services). Overall, it went smoothly. They plan to have a recap meeting with Habitat for Humanity and some of the other people and groups who provided significant help to decide what they think they should do next, whether that be another build or a separate project. He thinks they will likely plan another build. They have thousands of people on waitlists across New England and are looking at ways to increase the number of builds they are offering. Overall, he thought it was a good program and should save about 2,000 gallons of oil every year going forward.

Mr. Luse continued, saying that they did about seven shifts from Friday to Sunday and wrapped up a third shift on Sunday. The Rotary Club was awesome to provide a donation for 100 of those inserts and also showed up and took over an entire shift of building on Friday night. He said he wanted to thank all the volunteers for all their help.

Chair Hansel thanked Zach and Jake for all their work that was put in. They worked all shifts and it was a significant amount of work. He said the Committee needs to figure out a way, if they do it again, to get them some help and reduce the burden on them.

Mr. Luse Shared a story that he felt made the effort worth it for him. One of the “21 in 21” homes that participated is a veteran who is partially disabled who has a small daughter at home. They live on the first story of an old multiunit building. They had over 30 windows, which were some of the leakiest, loose windows that he has seen that were in poor shape. They were so grateful, and the little was following them around and asking questions while installing the inserts. They are eligible for fuel assistance, but typically go through that in the first month. Hopefully, this year, that assistance will go a lot farther. That one home is going to make a huge difference.

B) Electric Vehicles

Mr. Lake reported that they were not able to meet this month due to scheduling conflicts, but plan to meet next month. Mr. Redfern asked if the electric vehicle group covered electric bikes as well. Mr. Lake responded that they have not discussed it much, but certainly can. They will plan to bring it up in future meetings.

C) Community Solar

Jude Nuru reported that at their last meeting they met in the field to look at potential sites. When they visited 560 Main Street, they discovered that the City had just recently erected a shed on the property. Later, in discussions with the City, he learned that the parcel also has some contamination issues. As such, they have decided to put that particular parcel of land on the back burner. They plan to continue to have discussion and explore alternatives. They also looked at the Rose Lane location for an assessment with the goal to decide which location is best suited. As Mr. Nuru has been involved with Revision Energy, he reached out to a colleague there and learned they have been working on two options. One option being the Rose Lane property with the intent to have it be a location for the community solar farm where members of the community can buy into the program. They would need at least 20 people. The other is the Monadnock Cemetery in hopes of developing it for LMI (low and moderate income) offtakers. Mr. Nuru hopes to be able to present to the City in the coming weeks.

Chair Hansel asked if anyone had any further questions. He said that one of the things they are trying to do is get a prototype up and running, there are not that many installed in New Hampshire and as such stressed the importance of moving forward with it.

D) Renewable Energy Loans

Chair Hansel stated he did not have a lot to report, however he had another meeting with the Peterborough energy group who is working to come up with money to support renewable energy projects (conservation, solar, etc.). Feedback from the Savings Bank of Walpole and Mascoma Savings Bank has been positive and showed interest. It is currently a work in progress, but mentioned that they are also looking into the possibility of a green bank formation at the national level. There is another program that comes out of Brooklyn NY that the Peterborough group is looking into (Bloc Power). It brings investors into a community and helps fund efficiency and energy improvements. They are hoping to have more to report in the coming months. With no questions, they moved onto the outreach and education.

E) Outreach and Education/ Keene Energy Week

Mr. Luse reported on Keene Energy Week and how they believed it to be a big success. The Clean Energy Team really helped to pull together a lot of the events. The energy expo seemed better attended than last year and the electric cars definitely seemed to draw interest and

attention. They are hoping to do something similar next year. The Keene and Peterborough Chamber, SWRPC, and the Monadnock Sustainability Hub put together a panel that he and Chair Hansel were part of and provided a great discussion. The Clean Energy team did their solar tour, a movie night at the Library, and a climate café at Brewbakers. The event generated quite a bit of buzz and got us in front of some new people. The one challenge was that, due to the weekend they chose for the Energy Expo, most of the people he ended up talking to were from out of town. However, he had some good discussions.

Chair Hansel added that it was a great week, in general. It would have been nice to have more people at the regional issue series event at the Chamber. He also attended the climate café, which he thought was a good start. The event was attended by roughly 15 people sharing their ideas and feelings about climate and included discussion of potential ways to start to make progress as a group. They have since decided to have another meeting.

Chair Hansel added that Ms. Nancy Gillard was requesting support for another Button Up workshop. Ms. Gillard spoke and shared that they had significant interest after the last workshop and plan to hold one on December 7th at the Recreation Center from 6pm-7:30pm. They intend to use the same facilitator, Mr. Todd Eldridge, who did the workshop previously. Chair Hansel asked the group for a motion of support. Mr. Jake Pipp moved to sponsor the workshop; the motion was seconded by Councilor Lake and was unanimously approved by roll call vote.

Chair Hansel asked if there were any plans for publicity for the Window Dressers program. Mr. Luse mentioned that they are working on drafting something to get out to the various media outlets. Mr. Paul Roth added that the Rotary Club has expressed interested in wanting to support the program and help get more publicity.

4) Downtown Reconstruction Project

Chair Hansel said that information about this agenda item was attached to the amended agenda for today and introduced Mr. Redfern, alternate member of the Committee. Mr. Redfern said the City of Keene has been planning to improve the infrastructure of the downtown for quite some time to include changing sewer, water, and utilities of various types. Mr. Redfern thought since it was already going to be torn up and will need resurfacing, it would be a prime time to think about what the downtown landscape should look like, including vehicle traffic, alternative modes of transportation, tree lining, sidewalks, etc. This redesign should address the needs of the future city, and not just include what it has been in the past but what it should be for the future.

Mr. Redfern shared three models that were generated as potential designs for Main Street and Central Square. The reason for this discussion today was due to rumors of closing downtown off to bicycle traffic altogether, which caused concern among the bicycle community. Mr. William Schoefmann and Mr. Redfern were asked by the Bicycle and Pedestrian Path Advisory Committee (BPPAC) to reach out to other like-minded committees that are part of the City Government. Mr. Redfern read the charge of the BPPAC group, and noted that the Energy and

Climate Committee also has a charge that includes advising City Council and advocating for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

Mr. Redfern continued, stating that the BPPAC Chair in coordination with Mr. Schoefmann (City of Keene GIS Technician) helped facilitate a letter to the Downtown Infrastructure Steering Committee as well as all City Councilors and the Mayor. Mr. Redfern said he sees no reason why the City Council couldn't come to a consensus on one of these three designs that will meet the needs of the growing bicycle community. He noted that the City has more young people moving in that are interested in biking, and e-bikes are becoming more popular. According to Norm's Ski and Bike shop, 50% of their sales are e-bikes – this could bring more baby boomers out on bikes.

BPPAC is asking the identified committees, including the Energy and Climate Committee, to submit a letter to the Downtown Infrastructure Steering Committee, City Council and Mayor. This is a request for Chair Hansel to facilitate this for this group. They are looking for a motion to allow the chair to write a letter on behalf of this committee advocating for a design to include bicycle infrastructure. He shared a letter with Chair Hansel that was written by the BPPAC to use as an example. He noted that other groups and businesses, including the Monadnock Alliance for Sustainable Transportation (MAST) and Norm's Ski and Bike are also writing letters. They are also going to the Conservation Commission to request that they write a letter.

Councilor Ormerod requested the specific rejections. Mr. Redfern shared that one was regarding how the bike racks were overfilled and unsightly. The other comments seemed to be around driver's perception of bicyclists as a nuisance.

Councilor Lake shared that he had heard arguments that there is not enough space in the downtown for both bicyclists and cars.

Mr. William Schoefmann spoke and shared that the in-line parallel parking that is shown in some of the options is probably not going to happen, it is very likely that pull-in diagonal parking is going to be maintained on Main Street. Some of the center parking is likely to be taken out. He shared that the use for center island was 60%. He knows they have conducted parking counts and those will be reported out this week.

Mr. Redfern added that one of the options shows only the loss of 12-13 parking spaces. He sees a compromise to be made – he agrees that biking may not be the most important consideration, but he believes it definitely should be part of the mix. He is asking that some consideration be given to bicycle infrastructure and that a compromise be made.

Paul Roth said that, in addition to a parking study for motor vehicles it sounds like a parking study for bicycles might be helpful. He shared that the City has some of the best bike trails in the city and expressed his belief that the City really needs to market our City as a "bike friendly" place.

Ms. Beth Campbell asked clarification of whether the question before the Committee is to express support in general for bicyclists in the downtown, or to weigh in on which design should be chosen. Chair Hansel clarified that the group is being asked to express support for the inclusion of bike lanes, not to pick a particular option. Ms. Campbell said she personally feels very strongly about incorporating bikes. She has been an avid bike commuter throughout her life. She noted that safety increases, and ridership increases, once you give people a safe opportunity to ride. It also provides opportunity for those with disabilities or lack of access to a car. It serves to increase the desirability of a city. She is in support of any initiative in support of bike lanes and access.

Mr. Pipp spoke in support of Ms. Campbell's points. He noted he would personally feel more comfortable biking downtown if the bike lane was separated from the general traffic. He added that, if biking is more accessible people might end up on bikes instead of in cars, reducing the overall need for parking. It sounds like there may be a need for more bike racks downtown as well.

Mr. Nuru added that he believes the exclusion of bikes is in conflict with some of the policies the City is trying to implement, for example Complete Streets, also the 21 in 21 program which is in a neighborhood where people live in easy biking distance, and he believes strongly in maintaining an avenue for the continuous use of bikes in the downtown.

Chair Hansel asked the Committee if the group would be comfortable with him writing a letter on behalf of the group. If so, he would look for a motion. Paul Roth made a motion to authorize Chair Hansel to write a letter on behalf of the Committee. The motion was seconded by Councilor Ormerod.

Ms. Brunner said that it would be helpful to list off specific recommendations or items to mention in the letter. Do you want to keep the letter specific to bike lanes? Chair Hansel agreed, and he referenced the sustainable energy plan and the charge of the committee and said that will be the primary emphasis of his letter. He asked if the group had anything else they would like him to highlight.

Ms. Brunner provided a brief overview of the various design options included in the November agenda as a reference for the group.

Chair Hansel thanked Mari and stated the idea of a mini-roundabout really excites him. He questioned whether traffic studies have been done on the single lane of traffic and whether that would cause traffic. Ms. Brunner replied that a traffic study has been done, and said that the City had hired Stantec and their conclusion was that there is excess capacity and we could go down to one lane in each direction. She suggested reaching out to Kurt Blomquist from the Public Works Department for any specific questions about that.

Chair Hansel asked if there is anything else that should be in the letter. Councilor Ormerod suggested including a recommendation for a separated bike path. He said it is important to mention things that are specifically in our charter.

Chair Hansel asked for a roll call vote on the motion. The motion passed unanimously by a roll call vote.

5) Community Power Update

Ms. Brunner said that, now that the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) has approved the City's plan, the next step is for the City Council to approve the various amendments to the plan. She recalled that back in March, the City's consultants were closely watching the PUC's comments on other plans and based on the feedback the PUC provided to other communities, they recommended that the City include a more robust data security plan. This was created and added as Exhibit III at the end of the plan. Then, once the approved rules adopted by the PUC became public in late July, a number of tweaks and adjustments were made to comply with the rules. The amended Community Power Plan went to the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee last week, and they recommended to the City Council that it be adopted as amended. It will go to City Council tomorrow. The City's consultants have already begun requesting data from Eversource; however, due to timing the program launch likely will not happen until April.

6) Committee Membership

Chair Hansel discussed the need for members as terms are coming up at the end of this year. If someone is interested, they can go directly to the volunteer form on the City's website. Once submitted, it is sent to the Mayor. Chair Hansel asked if anyone had any thoughts of new members. He mentioned that he will be going off and Mr. Luse will be coming on as the new chair. Mr. Luse added that he had reached out to three people, but have not heard back.

7) New Business

No new business

8) Next Meeting: December 7th, 2022

9) Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Hansel adjourned the meeting at 9:26 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Amanda Trask, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner