



## Newton Citizens Commission on Energy City of Newton, Massachusetts

<http://www.newtonma.gov/government/climate-and-sustainability/citizens-commission-on-energy>

**Halina S. Brown**, Chair

Cory Alperstein  
Michael Gevelber  
Stephen Grody  
Philip Hanser  
Asa Hopkins  
Jonathan Kantar  
Jon Slote  
Jay Snyder  
Ann Berwick (ex-officio)  
Bill Ferguson (ex-officio)

*Advisory Members:*

Beverly Craig  
James Purdy  
Philip Vergragt  
Puja Vohra

### Summary of May 30<sup>th</sup> meeting.

**Present:** Halina Brown, Michael Gevelber, Stephen Grody, Philip Hanser, Jon Kantar, Jim Purdy, Cory Alperstein, Bob Persons, Jon Slote, Jay Snyder, Asa Hopkins (on zoom) Nathan Phillips, Beverly Craig, Bob Persons, Peter Barrer, Cassidy Flynn (on zoom), Leslie Zebrowitz, Ellie Goldberg (on zoom).

Owing to Halina's upcoming travel **next meeting will be on June 20<sup>th</sup>**, Tuesday (instead of June 28th)

**1.** All agreed to send a letter to the Mayor in recognition of the new Newton Power Choice contract with 95% of Class One renewables. Halina and Phil will draft it.

### **2. Updated Mass CEC Website**

Bev Craig presented the newly updated Mass CEC website and asked for feedback. Jon will coordinate feedback to Bev on the new Mass CEC site, e.g.

- Allow easy filtering of heat pump installers by municipality (Grody)
- Consider linking directly to heat pump info from NEEP, not Mass Save (Hanser)
- How well will non-Mitsubishi HP's work at low temp's (Kantar)
- Include information about electrical capacity and ways to manage electric load (Brown)

### **3. Follow up on NCCE Residential Recommendations To The City and the Mayor's response on May 10th.**

Halina summarized the meeting with the Mayor on May 8<sup>th</sup> and the follow-up actions. She would like to assign an NCCE member as a point person for each of the five main recommendations. That person will work directly with a point person designated by the Mayor among her staff.

*1. Targeted outreach* - This topic will be discussed at the next meeting. An NCCE contact person will be selected then to work with Liora Silkes, Mayor's designee.

*2. Modernized communications* - Jon will contact Jonathan Yeo to follow up with the Library Director.

*3. EUI requirement for residential* - Halina, Stephen and Phil will continue working with Ann Berwick. Halina summarized the recent progress in her conversations with Ann: an agreement that it has to be a mandate, not a voluntary program; that Halina aims for a general requirement for all Newton resident while Ann is leaning toward a point-of-sale policy; that Newton very likely has no authority to require such energy labeling though this question is still open; in the latter case the City will have to take the home rule petition route; Halina wants to follow the precedent set by BERDO to argue that Newton does have the authority.

4. *Improving data quality and flow* – At the May 8<sup>th</sup> meeting Jonathan Yeo reported that progress has been made. Liora Silkes will attend the June NCCE meeting to update us and to plan for next steps. The new ISD commissioner, to be announced very soon, will be the central person in moving forward with this recommendation. Halina will contact that person early on in their tenure. She will also contact the IT Commissioner Joe Mulvey to start a conversation with the members of the Energy Commission.

5. *Electric HVAC inspector/advocate* – Jonathan and Asa volunteered to be the NCCE contact persons to work with Ann Berwick and with the ISD Commissioner when he/she comes aboard. Phil is potentially interested in contributing. Jon mentioned that the Berkely (?) in California has a service similar to the one we recommended as #5. He will send out more detailed information.

We think that the Mayor mentioned \$250K budget for Recommendation 5 at the May 8<sup>th</sup> meeting but nobody could confirm that with certainty.

### **Newton Gas System Retirement Initiative**

- There is a tension among different NCCE members over the approach to facilitating the retirement of gas infrastructure. Long-term issues, such as incentives for utility companies, such as electrical infrastructure capacity, gas company stranded assets, gas pricing death spiral complicate the problem and make choosing short-term actions challenging.
- Peter and Bob are mapping Newton's opportunities for eliminating stretches of gas pipes, street by street. This requires mapping of the gas network.
- Peter points out that Newton gas line map is kept secret by the utilities, which Phil believes is not legitimate given that these are not interstate facilities. We do not know if Newton Department of Public Works has such a map or not. Hard to get an answer.
- Peter's goal is to build a Newton gas line map from existing available information (street markings, manhole cover locations, repair activities, operating pressure map, etc.) to identify targets for fuel switching to facilitate cutting off gas line branches.
- Peter proposed that a volunteer be used to walk the streets to help record the available data. It would be a huge project and some expressed skepticism about this approach.
- Jonathan wondered if AI could be used for this.
- Michael said that Brookline has a system map. Based on that, it looks like it is structured more like a neural network than like a tree or blood circulatory system. If so, removing small stretches of pipes would be even more difficult. Michael and Peter will continue this conversation.
- Phil wonders if we should use the rationale of safety to get the map: i.e. Newton needs to see a map to find and correct points vulnerable to explosions.
- Phil made a motion to appoint an *ad hoc* working group comprising some members of NCCE and associate NCCE members, the goal of which would be to develop a plan to incrementally reduce the number of residents on gas. Halina was asked if this work is consistent with the NCCE charter. She read that our charter included "*to encourage energy conservation and alternative forms of energy*" which sounds like it is consistent. Halina was also asked what procedure is used to appoint associate members of NCCE. She quoted from the NCCE bylaws "*Associates shall be appointed upon an affirmative vote of six or more members for terms of two years*" [*the last sentence was added after the meeting*]. Cory volunteered to lead this group. Jonathan seconded the motion. The group approved the proposal unanimously.
- Halina will include this decision in the draft letter of support for the City Council's recent [Resolution for a Future Without Gas and with Clean Heat](#)

*Jon Slote and Halina Brown*