



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 June 20th meeting.

Present: Halina Brown, Jay Snyder, Asa Hopkins, Jonathan Kantar, Jon Slote, Cory Alperstein, Liora Silkes, Philip Vergragt.

Next Meeting is on July 26, Wednesday.

1. The *ad hoc* gas infrastructure working group. (Halina)

The goal and structure of the working group is presented below. It was unanimously approved by the six members present.

Four leading members of the ad hoc working groups were appointed to Associate Members of NCCE by a unanimous vote of the six members present: Peter Barrer, Ellie Goldberg, Bob Persons and Nathan Phillips.

"The *ad hoc* Working Group on Gas Infrastructure in Newton is a sub-entity of NCCE. Its goal is to develop a plan to incrementally reduce the number of residents on gas. Its members are drawn from Voting Members and Associated Members of NCCE, and from Members of the AFWOG Group. The Working Group sets its own agenda and functions independently of NCCE as a whole. Formal recommendations or requests made by the Working Group to the City or State require an approval from the NCCE as a whole."

2. NCCE residential recommendation #4: Data and database status. (Liora)

Newton Energy Coach Liora Silkes reported on the state of the City's relevant databases. Below is her written summary which was sent to the NCCE in advance:

Understanding the databases

As of late 2021/early 2022, all permits are managed through NewGov. Anyone can explore permits by searching addresses [here](#). The City can create dashboards to share information about permits, such as this [overview of all building permits pulled each month](#). I will be getting a login to be able to create these dashboards shortly, and then can create one or multiple for energy-related permits.

*The Assessor's database (and map) is **separate** from the ISD permit database. Some information from the Assessor's database automatically informs the ISD database (such as parcel numbers), but **no information from NewGov automatically goes into the Assessor's database.***

Understanding the energy data currently collected

- ***HERS Ratings:*** *The HERS ratings from projects completed in the old permitting system did not get transferred in a manner that allows them to be neatly pulled from the new system. So, ISD is doing one final pull of all the HERS ratings in the old system. These can then be added to the Assessor’s database. HERS ratings entered since moving to NewGov are easy to extract – still a manual process, but not too intensive.* ***Solar:*** *All solar installations require a solar-specific Building Permit and a solar-specific Electrical Permit.* ***Heat Pumps:*** *As of the move to NewGov, electrical permits now include the question “Is your permit for electric heat pumps?” and, if the electrician answers yes, a follow-up question “is this a whole home heat pump” is asked. There is also a check box for heat pumps installed.*
- ***Insulation:*** *On the building permit, there is a list of check boxes for all types of work included in the permit, one of which is insulation.*
- ***Electric Vehicles:*** *There is a check box on the electrical permit application for electric vehicle chargers.*

These are the permits that can be shared on a dashboard. That said, most of the data that we report in annual CAP updates does not come from NewGov. Instead, we are reporting.

- ***Solar:*** *From the DOER data on registering for SMART incentives. This statewide spreadsheet is updated every few months. Information on each install is available, but addresses are not included.*
- ***Heat Pumps:*** *The total number of Mass Save rebates issued each year. Eversource shares this number with us annually – just an aggregated total, not information about each install.*
- ***Insulation:*** *National Grid shares totals (home energy audits as well as weatherization jobs) monthly.*
- ***Electric Vehicles:*** *The DOER is about to release a Massachusetts Vehicle Census, with information on the number of EVs in the City. The data will be aggregated at the City level.*

Next Steps

Immediate next steps/projects already in process are to update the HERS ratings on the Assessor’s database and to create a dashboard(s) with information about energy-related permits.

A larger, ongoing task is to improve the reliability of the data: this involves working with ISD to ensure the questions we want the answers to are asked in a way that the contractors answer them consistently and correctly;

Our next focus within the 4 Our Future campaign for targeted outreach is to use data to find more residents who have already taken action to be part of our outreach efforts to reach new community members. We are currently working on two projects:

- 1. Identifying blocks with a concentration of 4 Our Future actions to host sustainable streets events. This is part of the main 4 Our Future focus of finding leaders to engage their communities in home energy projects.*
- 2. Inviting residents across the City who have taken action to put up a yard sign, likely by sending a postcard with sign up information.*

There is much more to explore about how best to use data to encourage action.

Discussion following Liora's presentation:

- **Action Point 1:** Liora will update the HERS ratings shown on MapGeo with the last of the ratings entered into the old permit system, and continue to update HERS ratings on the MapGeo site every few months.
- **Action Point 2:** Liora will create dashboard(s) sharing real-time information about energy-related permits, linked on the City climate webpages.
- **Action Point 3:** Liora will work with ISD to improve data collection via permits, including requirements that must be met before the permit is issued or completed and with the Assessor to explore options for sharing data with the public.
- MapGeo is not synonymous with the full Assessor's Database (in reality, what the public and NCCE refers to as "Assessor's Database" is only a sliver of the full database in the Assessor's office). An attribute of a property can be displayed on the MapGeo interface and not be included in the back-end database. That means that a data set from ISD can be exported to the IT team and then to the map, without necessarily including it in the back-end Assessor's database.
- HERS data populates the Assessor's database as follows: in 2020 upon the NCCE request, the assessor created a new field (theme), and the ISD Office downloaded a spreadsheet of all HERS ratings in Newton (a little over a thousand). Stephen Grody, and to a small degree Jonathan Kantar and Halina Brown, manually cleaned that data set and forwarded it to IT. HERS ratings were then added to the MapGeo interface, both in the Assessor's information for each home and as a separate map layer.
- How could this be done automatically in the future? What other data might we want to automatically send to the Assessor's database? **Action Point 4.** Liora will investigate after she updates the last three years' worth of HERS ratings.
- Also, a larger question: how can relevant data in the NewGov system be retrieved that requires minimal or no specialized reporting or system expertise?
- Given that ISD's data will be a source for much reporting, how can the NCCE help ISD ensure the quality of the data they get? **Action Point 5.** To answer the above two questions a small working group might be created. The best timing will be after the new ISD commissioner settles in his new job.
- **Action Point 6 (Cory):** The NCCE recommends to the ad hoc gas infrastructure working group take as one of their first actions, the task of compiling and reviewing with

the NCCE an exhaustive request of the data needed from the City to assist their mission. We will then collectively approach the City with the data needs for mapping house attributes and gas infrastructure.

3. NCCE residential recommendation #1: Targeted outreach. (Liora)

See above written summary from Liora for other targeted outreach efforts.

Halina reminded the group of an experiment that was done to pull from the City's data:

- Homes purchased in the last 3 year, and
- Have oil heat, and
- Have central A/C

With Green Newton's help, flyers (created by Jon Slote and Liora) were delivered to 179 homes promoting the purchase of heat pumps by volunteers.

Liora and Jon

Follow up to recommendation #1:

- Pull heat pump permit data, likely on a rolling basis, to see how many of these 179 homes have installed heat pumps. Follow up (potentially using volunteers) with those who installed to ask if the flyer contributed to motivating them.
- Enquire residents who've recently installed heat pumps what motivated them in an open-ended fashion. **Action Point 7.** Liora and Jon will continue exploring and testing these and other options for engaging homeowners.

4. Announcement of the Green Newton Board's vote on engaging in retrofitting homes. (Cory)

- Green Newton has voted to make residential retrofits a major focus of the organization.
- They've committed up to \$50K to support this initiative.
- There will be a launch of this campaign in November along with an announcement about a new Green Newton Executive Director (candidate interviews are currently ongoing).

Follow up:

- Green Newton is hiring a consultant who will reach out to Liora and various NCCE contacts. (Cory)

5. Update on BERDO (Halina)

The process is going very well albeit slower than anticipated. Probably will go before the City Council in September. The material part of the ordinance is largely completed, with two decisions still to be finalized: the rate/shape of declining annual emission targets; 2) the administrative structure for the implementation stage. The major reason for the slow pace is that the Legal Department, the Sustainability Office and the City Council have given priority to other projects: the Ten Communities, The zoning reform, and the Specialized building code.

Synapse, the consultant for the BERDO project, is currently focusing on outreach, education and training of building owners. Money has been allocated in the FY24 to continue the services of the consultant.

Update on the residential EUI will be made next time. The meeting ended at 9PM.

Summary of Action Points

Action Point 1: Liora will update the HERS ratings shown on MapGeo with the last of the ratings entered into the old permit system, and continue to update HERS ratings on the MapGeo site every few months.

Action Point 2: Liora will create dashboard(s) sharing real-time information about energy-related permits, linked on the City climate webpages.

Action Point 3: Liora will work with ISD to improve data collection via permits, including requirements that must be met before the permit is issued or completed, and with the Assessor to explore options for sharing data with the public.

Action Point 4: Liora will investigate automating data exports from NewGov to MapGeo.

Action Point 5: A small working group might be created to investigate how can the NCCE help ISD ensure the quality of the data they get? The best timing will be after the new ISD commissioner settles in his new job.

Action Point 6 (Cory): The NCCE recommends to the ad hoc gas infrastructure working group, as one of their first actions, to compile and review with the NCCE an exhaustive request of the data needed from the City to assist their mission. We will then collectively approach the City with the data needs for mapping house attributes and gas infrastructure.

Action Point 7: Liora and Jon will continue exploring and testing various options for engaging homeowners.

Next meeting: July 26, Wednesday.

Prepared by Jon Slote and Halina Brown

