

Newton Citizen's Commission on Energy

Minutes of Meeting of Wednesday February 28, 2018, 7:30 p.m.

City Hall Room 211

Present: Eric Olson, Chairman, Halina Brown, Vice Chair, Fred Brustman, Michael Gevelber, Jonathan Kantar, Ira Krepchin, Jim Purdy; Cory Alperstein, Ed Craddock, Councilor Deborah Crossley, Asa Hopkins, Jon Klein, Councilor Emily Norton, Maureen Reilly-Meigher

Chairman Eric Olson called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. The minutes of the preceding meeting (January 2018) were reviewed and approved with revisions.

Items on the published agenda:

1. Dates for the next 6 meetings of EC

After discussion, it was voted unanimously to hold NCCE meetings on the fourth Wednesday of each month.

2. Update on Newton Power Choice: opt-down, brochure, outreach, other (Jim Purdy)

The City has printed a 3-fold color brochure that explains the program. Sustainability Director Ann Berwick is giving presentations at meetings of local organizations like Area Councils and is distributing the brochure. The Mayor has said publicly that she anticipates “a hundred” such meetings before NPC’s launch in the fall of 2018. Halina noted that Ann is finding it challenging to get on agendas and that most of the available slots are very tight for time.

Ann and Emily spoke at Day Middle School PTO about the program. Deb said she has discussed NPC with the Mayor about challenge of conveying a long complex story;

An internal Working Group meets with Ann to discuss how the community voice can be heard and input incorporated. (The Working Group includes Bill Ferguson, Councilors Deb Crossley and Allison Leary, and NCCE members Jim Purdy and Halina Brown.) Deb wants to use the Working Group meetings to discuss how best to introduce and explain Newton Power Choice to the public.)

Michael commented that it is important to get the citizenry to focus on the issue and engage in this discussion, including what people are willing to pay for sustainability.

Jon Klein commented that Ann’s presentation at Dem City committee was very good, but there was not enough time to explain the willingness to pay survey that was sponsored by Green Newton.

Eric commented that he has found it possible to explain the survey and the willingness to pay concept in three minutes.

Deb commented that we need to follow up with the community organizations after these very constrained events. Emily Norton remarked that the City’s consultant Peregrine is the resource to use in this outreach.

Halina said that the working group will evaluate progress with public outreach so far at its upcoming meeting.

Maureen Reilly-Meigher noted that Eric’s discussion of the program on NewTV is available on the Coalition’s website (newtonclimateaction.org), and she suggested additional videos should be added, with web links sent in advance to interested persons.

It was suggested that the City’s Working Group should develop a follow-up document and message with help from the Energy Commission.

Jim reported current thinking in the Working Group about the structure of NPC options. The Working Group recommended three options: the default level to be determined later, opt up to 100%, and opt down to the state-mandated Renewable Portfolio Standard (zero additional Class 1 Renewables.) There was discussion in the

Working Group about whether the opt down should contain, say, 2 percent above the RPS rather than zero, but in the end the majority felt that for the sake of clarity there should be three simple options: zero for opt down, standard options (the so-called default, still to be determined by the Mayor) and 100% for opt up. At a subsequent meeting between Ann, Bill Ferguson and the Mayor a decision was made that there will be two four options: zero, a hundred, a standard/default and another one in-between. The level for the fourth option this option will depend on what default level is chosen by the Mayor prior to launch.

Fred recommended that what we call zero is in fact the state RPS (in 2018 it is 13% of class one renewables) should be the floor, and we need to start thinking about effective communication of all the options. He believes we need to find the default number with the most acceptance.

Michael pointed out that most people stay at whatever default level is provided, without thinking about it.

Emily said that people just want to know what they have to do: do nothing and get the default, opt up to 100% if they're motivated, or opt down to minimize cost.

3. Memo to the mayor re. Power Choice default level (Halina Brown)

A letter to the Mayor was drafted by Halina. In it she points out that we won't know the cost of Class 1 Renewable energy in advance until a few hours before the purchase. So we need to start now to clarify how much extra cost we are willing to accept, e.g., 3% or 5% or 7 or 10%, etc., increase in customers' monthly electric bills. With that established and discussed in public outreach, the City can determine how much Class 1 Renewable energy to provide in the default, once the bids are offered to the City.

Eric noted that in meetings with the Mayor he has suggested that we look at the range of electric rates in the past to help determine the acceptable range of costs associated with the NPC default.

Cory noted that the survey on the willingness to pay presents that information. The survey results are posted on the Newton Climate Action website.

Asa Hopkins commented that the discussion of cost needs to be carried forward to what it will buy in extra green energy.

Deb noted that the Mayor was very enthusiastic and eager to accept input on this matter. She's counting on Ann to lead her to a solution. How NCCE talks to the Mayor about the size of the default is very important.

Halina introduced the recent ongoing effort to develop Newton Climate Action Plan (CAP). It is carried out by a small ad hoc group comprising: Jonathan Kantar, Halina Brown, Eric Olson, Peter Barrer and Deb Crossley. The first three on this list are members of the NCCE. The Climate Action Plan will recommend specific targets for emissions from individual sectors and will recommend a mix of policies that will help to reach these targets. Newton Power Choice and the associated default level will be among the recommended actions.

Jon Klein commented that a high default level is the easiest and fastest way toward that overarching goal.

Jon Kantar noted that the current outreach needs to provide an introduction with the question "Why are we doing this?"

Cory commented that it is the Mayor's decision, but the Mayor looks to Ann for advice. But Cory feels there also needs to be input from the Newton community, as policy making process requires, and that the City needs to be open to advocating and taking leadership in this matter to a greater extent than has been done so far.

Jim commented that we should expect some pushback from some part of the public over the issue of cost. Deb commented that she doesn't expect resistance coming from City Councilors. Cory commented that we need to prepare for the eventuality of pushback, so we can deal with it in the future.

Deb urged that we shouldn't be too critical of the City at this early point in the outreach process.

Michael said that he has some misgivings about the letter, but supports sending it.

4. Update on GHG emission inventory (from Eric Olson)

Eric reported that he looked at the inventory done in 2005 by the Energy Commission and compared it to the inventory that was done in 2015 with data for 2013. The bottom line was that the City's total greenhouse gas emissions declined slightly from 1.1 million tons to 1.073 million in 2013. The target that the Commission set in 2005 was to decrease energy use decrease by 7% (from 13 tons CO2 equivalent to 11 tons).

Jon Kantar commented that overall energy use is the important statistic to watch.

Deb said that we should we get a consultant to update the data set. Ann Berwick has said she favors doing it ourselves and getting Peregrine to review it. We should ask Peregrine's principal Paul Gromer for his thoughts about the data.

Ira noted that energy efficiency has improved since 2005, but the City's population has grown since then.

Eric highlighted the fact that getting to 50% renewable electricity lowers electric sector from 22% to 11% of the City's total footprint; nothing else we can do would have an impact that large.

Asa suggested that we should compare our energy use with statewide statistics to evaluate Newton.

Emily pointed out that lots of communities look to Newton for leadership.

Eric said that he expects to make progress with the analysis by the end of March.

5. Energy Committee vs. Newton Climate Action (formerly known as Coalition for Climate Change) (Jim Purdy)

Jim proposed that while we all support the work being done by the Newton Coalition for Climate Action, including advocacy for a high default level of renewables. But since the Newton Citizens' Commission on Energy is part of the City government, it is inappropriate for the Commission to be a member of the Newton Climate Action, NCA. Jim made a motion to respectfully ask the NCA to remove our name from the list of Coalition members. The motion was seconded and adopted unanimously. Cory Alperstein from the Coalition indicated that she would get the change made on the NCA website and materials.

A related but different question also came up: whether it is appropriate for the Commission to be a signatory supporting the Resolution for carbon-free Newton, sponsored by NCA. The general feeling was that it is appropriate. No motion was made and no vote taken. For now, the Commission's name remains in the Resolution.

6. March 7th Facilities Committee meeting re: energy update for the municipal operations (Deb Crossley)

Deb announced that the Public Facilities Committee meeting on March 7 will include a presentation by the City's energy manager Bill Ferguson on Newton's action to reduce energy use in its own buildings and operations, and the next phase of rooftop solar on City property.

She noted that there are 78 city buildings, and there is \$3.5 million in deferred maintenance, much of which would save energy, e.g., replace steam traps periodically.

7. Newton Vulnerability Plan and Climate Action Plan (Deb Crossley)

Deb reported that a very positive meeting was held by the Mayor on preparing a Climate Action Plan, and another meeting will be held in a month (i.e., March.)

Other Business:

Deb noted that Mayor Fuller is taking a strong lead to ensure that commissions are at full membership; the NCCE has nine member slots, but only six members are active, so three new members are needed. Councilor Norton added that a number of people have come to her attention who are interested in becoming members of NCCE. Eric said that he will work to get members appointed to vacant slots. (Note: different slots are filled by

appointment from several entities: the Mayor, the City Council, the School Committee, the League of Women Voters, and the Newton-Needham Chamber of Commerce.)

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Jim Purdy