

Newton Citizen's Commission on Energy

Minutes of Meeting of Wednesday April 25, 2018, 7:30 p.m.

City Hall Room 205

Present: Eric Olson, Chairman, Halina Brown, Vice Chair, Fred Brustman, Michael Gevelber, Jonathan Kantar, Ira Krepchin, Jim Purdy; Peter Barrer, Stephen Grody, Asa Hopkins, Jon Klein, Councilor Emily Norton, Nick O'Connor, Puja Vohre

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

1. Changes in the membership of the Commission (Eric Olson)

Eric explained the founding document from 1970 that created the Newton Citizens Commission on Energy. He will send it to everyone by email. He used a projector to display a list of members and their appointing authorities (Three by Newton City Council, Three by the Mayor, and one each from the School Committee, Newton Needham Chamber of Commerce, and League of Women Voters.) Three slots are currently vacant.

Fred is stepping down, and the League of Women Voters has appointed Stephen Grody to fill that slot. The City Council and the Mayor will each appoint a member to fill their slots.

He suggested that people interested in becoming members in the future start attending regularly. Everyone will be heard, but only members can vote on motions.

2. Update on Power Choice: Meeting of the Working Group on April 17 (Jim Purdy)

Jim and Halina are members of this informal group that works with Sustainability Director Ann Berwick on the Newton Power Choice aggregation. Other members are Councilor Deb Crossley, Energy Manager Bill Ferguson, and outreach planner Lily Canaan Reynolds from the Planning Department. Information on the program, which will go into effect in the fall of 2018 can be found at the web link <https://masspowerchoice.com/newton>.

The current work is to provide outreach on the program, through meetings in all parts of Newton. The objective is to reach the Mayor's goal of a hundred outreach meetings. The NPC website lists upcoming meetings. Ann has a \$50,000 direct expense budget for outreach signage, etc.; half was provided by Peregrine Energy, the City's consultant on the aggregation, the rest from the City. The working group brainstormed ways to get information out to the public and the business community.

There is a hearing on Newton's aggregation plan before the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities on May 16 and 2 PM at One South Station. These hearings are generally pro-forma. The aggregation plan is on the website.

Halina provided an "elevator talk" on the aggregation program (i.e., a very short summary for use with interested people.) A key point is that Newton is aiming for a higher percentage of Class 1 Renewables in the default that will be provided to Newton customers unless they opt out; they can also opt down to the state-mandated percentage (currently 13%) or opt up to 100% renewables. The default level will be determined by the Mayor very close to the actual purchase of power when the cost is known.

Jon Kantar said that the Mayor hopes to select a relatively high default value based on the input she receives from the public and groups like Newton Coalition for Climate Action and Green Newton, which are cooperating with Ann in the outreach efforts.

Councilor Norton recommended that talking to individuals outside the library or supermarkets is a better way than house parties or small group meetings. Michael agreed with Councilor Norton that the City needs to take the lead in advocating the highest feasible default; he also recommends that the City website should provide detailed and accurate information about the willingness-to-pay survey that was performed last fall by the Coalition and Green Newton; e.g., that the survey found 86% of those who were asked for their opinion said they would pay more for green power. Eric and Jonathan suggested that more surveying should be done, but Halina pointed out that the survey that was conducted was designed to avoid systematic bias and had a sufficient number of responses for statistical reliability. The Coalition is currently encouraging people to sign a letter to the mayor advocating a 40% default on top of the state requirement.

Eric pointed out that the program will make it easy for people who are not willing to pay more for renewable energy to opt out completely or to opt down to only the state-mandated level of renewables.

3. Improving performance of public buildings in Newton (Michael Gevelber)

[not discussed]

4. Climate Action Plan for Newton (TBA)

Halina introduced Peter Barrer, who is a member of the Mayor's committee to develop a Climate Action Plan (CAP); Eric, Halina, and Jon Kantar are also members of this group.

The CAP group is now in the process of deciding on content, how to use city staff and other resources such as volunteers, Energy Commission members, interns, etc.

Halina said that three pieces of work are now being completed by the committee: the Plan outline, a draft letter on process and timeline for preparing the CAP, and a list of seven early actions that can be taken.

Peter and Eric presented data in a pie chart showing the components of the City's greenhouse gas footprint based on work done earlier by Andy Savitz and Eric; it includes methane leaks expressed as a CO₂ equivalent.

The total of emissions is 982,562 tonnes per year. (A metric tonne is approximately equal to an English ton).

Gas leaks accounted for 8% of CO₂E. Fred thinks that is overstated, but Peter pointed out that methane is much more potent than CO₂ as a greenhouse gas.

There is a very large component that is due to transportation; it is estimated to account for 30% of emissions. Newton's municipal buildings and vehicle fleet account for a very small slice of the total.

Michael feels that the transportation category should exclude thru traffic passing through, since Newton can only address transportation that originates in Newton; Peter noted that there also arguments for including the pass-through traffic. Jim noted that vehicles registered in Newton are responsible for approximately 1 million vehicle miles per day (45 vehicle miles per day by Newton households).

Peter also showed a chart with assumed emissions reductions of 46% overall by 2026.

Newton Power Choice has the potential to cut emissions due to electricity by half if there is a 40% default level of Class 1 renewables on top of state-mandated 13%.

Puja asked what about measures to reduce impacts from new construction going forward.

Halina noted that the mayor suggested also expressing emissions on a per capita basis, since population is expected to continue to increase.

Puja noted that the state requirement under Global Warming Solutions Act is 80% reduction in GHG by 2050.

Emily said that it sounds like the CAP will be addressing more than the city can do on its own. She supports that.

Peter stated that the Mayor is committed to publish the CAP by December 2018. We will need heavy volunteer participation to meet this target.

Each idea in the CAP will flow into an implementation task,

Data must be verified. The committee will engage city staff during the summer to get feedback. They will meet with the Planning Department in early May, then prioritize actions and complete the plan.

Michael noted that they need to act now to hire an intern, as most qualified students are already obtaining summer work.

Peter stated that there are seven early action items being considered:

- Providing electric vehicle (EV) charging stations.
- Using the Energy Stabilization Fund to invest the savings from obtained from energy efficiency projects like school retrofits.
- The greenhouse gas effect of capital projects will be given greater weight in prioritizing them in the Capital Improvement Plan.
- Providing EV priority parking places.
- Increasing the city's Renewable Energy Credits from solar projects.
- Applying funds from the City's share of the Volkswagen settlement to purchase EV's for the City fleet and to repair the worst gas leaks.
- Applying pressure on the utilities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions throughout their service areas. Eversource needs to invest in EV infrastructure. Over the near future, NGrid needs to invest \$25 million for the same purpose (it is the electric utility in parts of Eastern Massachusetts). Both need to work with Newton and other municipalities to reduce methane leaks, which are widespread.

Emily stated that Newton should coordinate and participate with other cities on joint efforts.

Asa said that he assumes the CAP committee will winnow ideas down to pick the best items.

Emily said that the City Council should pass a 100% renewable resolution. The Sierra Club, of which she is chapter president, has a "Ready for 100" team promoting these resolutions.

Michael said that the CAP needs to identify the responsible party and the cost of each item in the CAP.

Emily suggested placing climate warning labels on gas pumps and signage in parking lots.

Jon Kantar advocated providing exclusive EV parking with charging stations.

Asa suggested promoting the use of heat pumps. Jon Kantar suggested the City consider waiving building permit fees for HVAC upgrades using heat pump.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Jim Purdy