

Newton Citizen's Commission on Energy

Minutes of Meeting of Wednesday June 27, 2018, 7:30 p.m.

City Hall Room 211

Present: Michael Gevelber, Stephen Grody, Jonathan Kantar, Jon Klein, Ira Krepchin, Jim Purdy; Ed Craddock, Jane Hanser, Phil Hanser.

In the absence of Chairman Eric Olson and Vice Chair Halina Brown, Jim called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. The minutes of the preceding meeting (May 23, 2018) were reviewed and approved with revisions.

Minutes of the April 25 meeting were approved with corrections.

1. Update on filling vacancies on the Commission (Eric Olson)

Jim noted that all vacancies are now filled with the appointments of John Klein and Puja Vohre; Stephen Grody had been appointed by the League of Women Voters in May.

2. Update on Newton Power Choice: Meeting of the Working Group on June 19 2018 (Jim Purdy)

Jim Purdy gave an update on Newton Power Choice and Sustainability Director Ann Berwick's working group, which meets with her monthly to discuss issues and advise on public outreach. Activities are ongoing, including house parties and meetings with community groups (about 30 to date), and a presence at the Farmers Markets at Cold Spring Park and Elm Street. Ann is also looking to find people who would be willing to host a lawn sign in the fall. Jim related the conversations he had at the Elm Street market the previous Saturday.

Ann is currently interviewing consultants to conduct the survey requested by the Mayor. There was a discussion of survey issues, including methodology to provide a valid sample. Phil Hanser, who is a statistician talked about the need to define a survey frame that covers the community and considers key variables, including location (at least zipcode or ward level, and age of respondent. He thinks that there is no chance of doing this with an online survey (apart from the issue of surveying people who do not use the internet.)

Jon Klein reported on the Newton Climate Action work to build support for a 40 percent default level. The letter advocating for this default had been signed by 14 of the 24 City Councilors. 70 signatures came in over the web this past weekend. There are 500 signers so far.

3. Status of hiring intern for Climate Action Plan

A student from Brandeis was hired to assist with the Climate Action Plan. A kickoff meeting was held with her on June 26. She is being managed by Jennifer Steele from the Planning Department.

4. Update on Climate Action Plan for Newton (Halina/Jon Kantar)

Jon Kantar provided an update on the committee's work. They have approached MAPC to help develop the CAP report. Some grants to be used to prepare the Plan have been received via the Planning Department. For assistance in preparing the report the CAP committee expects to contract with Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), which has an experienced staff and is familiar with what cities and towns in Eastern Massachusetts are doing.

Michael asked why MAPC was approached for this work; the City of Cambridge has an energy consultant helping with their plan. Phil suggested that organizations like the Environmental Defense Fund also do this kind of work and should be considered.

There was a discussion of measures that should be addressed in the CAP. Jim commented that many of the needed actions have long time frames and should be started as soon as practicable. For example, transportation requires time to change – transition to EVs by residents and businesses, capital improvements in the MBTA, etc., as well as getting people to change their travel behavior.

Stephen said we should concentrate on generating initiatives for homeowners to take, e.g., the transition to using heat pumps instead of fossil fuels for space heating and cooling. Ed commented that he converted to air source heat pumps some time ago and does not need to use gas in the winter to supplement them. Phil commented that even the most up-to-date air source heat pumps use electrical resistance coils to supplement the thermodynamic heat cycle in cold weather when the delta-T is too great to provide space heating, so there is a question about energy efficiency of 100% use of air source heat pumps. Ed responded that with enough on-site solar generation, this doesn't present a problem.

Michael commented that we should do brainstorming on what incentives will produce the right behavior by residents.

Old business: continuing the discussion of improving performance of public buildings in Newton (Michael Gevelber)

Michael continued his presentation from the May 2018 meeting, showing data that was assembled for Newton North High School from 2011 through 2017 for electric power and natural gas. There was a substantial decrease in energy, particularly electrical, after the first year, then a more or less level profile of use. Stephen commented that at a minimum, the natural gas use should be normalized for the number of heating degree days in each year, which vary widely; this should be straightforward.

There was discussion about how the School Department can better manage the use of energy in the schools. Michael cautioned that, based on his experience with Boston University, outsourcing to outside consultants for recommissioning buildings and managing their energy systems can be very expensive, so the City should try to do as much as possible in-house and put the resources on the specific problems that will be most cost effective. Building operators should be empowered to improve the way energy is used and they should be made responsible to do it.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Jim Purdy