

Newton Citizen's Commission on Energy

Minutes of Meeting of Wednesday August 29, 2018, 7:30 p.m.

City Hall Room 211

Present: Eric Olson, Chair, Halina Brown, Vice Chair, Stephen Grody, Jonathan Kantar, Jim Purdy, Puja Vohraz; Ed Craddock, Jane Hanser, Phil Hanser.

Chairman Eric Olson called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. The minutes of the preceding meeting (June 27, 2018) were approved.

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

Halina provided four documents prior to the meeting:

- a summary of the CAP that have taken place under Mayor Fuller's leadership
- a list of nine items for early action with comments on them from Sustainability Director Ann Berwick and Energy Manager Bill Ferguson
- comments on the CAP by NCCE member Puja Vohraz with suggestions for content that should be included.
- the contract between the City and Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) which will provide services to prepare the CAP

The City is providing \$36,000 for preparation of the CAP; \$6,000 is going to an intern who has been hired to do research on what other cities are doing; the intern is a graduate student at Brandeis. The CAP includes the inventory of Newton's carbon footprint by source, which was developed three years ago by then- Sustainability Director Andy Savitz; CAP committee member Peter Barrer prepared a pie chart to display this data. Halina said that more data is needed to provide detail in the transportation sector, which is the largest portion of the total.

The contract with MAPC was put in place quickly. Part of their scope is to provide two public workshops, which will take place during the fall. The first workshop will probably be concerned with input to the list of actions in the plan; brainstorming in small breakout groups will probably be a feature.

The committee is aiming at a completed product by the end of 2018 or early 2019.

Jennifer Steele of the Newton Planning Department is the staff project manager.

Puja commented that the current list of potential actions is a valuable start. Jim commented that it is important for Jennifer to pin down the agenda and presentation material that MAPC will provide for the first workshop.

Jonathan Kantar, who is on the CA committee with Halina, reported that the intern is working but the committee has not met since August 2, 2018, and the Planning Department needs more direction on where its work should be aimed. Jim commented that the intern should be tasked to provide weekly reports on progress.

Ed commented that he worries about the Climate Action Plan being separate from the city's Climate Vulnerability Plan, which was also produced by MAPC. Climate mitigation and adaptation are parts of the same subject.

Halina reviewed the list of early action items.

Committee members commented as follows:

Stephen: are the early actions everything that should be done now?

Ed: there should be standards for how EV charging stations should look.

Phil: not sure how low hanging fruit is defined. E.g., the source of the energy for EV charging needs to be defined. Eric noted that the climate impact of EV charging has been well-studied and it is in fact beneficial.

Jonathan: the CAP will be the guide to individual actions.

Puja: the CAP should quantify its effects on meeting the state's climate goals for 2050.

Jonathan has made a Gantt chart informed by members Eric, Halina, and Michael Gevelber as to magnitudes of potential actions.

Jim: this is a valuable tool; the Gantt chart should include detail for the early action items.

Jonathan emphasized that we already know that green aggregation with a high default is the most effective single thing Newton can do, which makes it important to have as high a default as possible.

Ed is disappointed that only four EV charging locations were proposed.

Halina is not sure how to quantify the effectiveness of providing preferential parking and more charging stations. We should get stats from Mass Energy Consumers Alliance if available. Phil cautioned that most penetration rate studies (e.g., for appliances) are not very good. Ed suggested that MAPC may have some of this information

Jim advocated for making increased transit use a major goal of the CAP (since transportation is by far the largest sector. This includes improving the frequency of cross-town bus service that connects to the radial lines into Boston (Green Line, commuter rail, express bus) and extends the walkable distance to transit service (i.e., ½ mile from the bus lines) to a large proportion of Newton residents.

Jane: promotion of transit usage should include a web page that explains how to use the transit system, as many people are probably uncertain about this.

Halina suggested that Jim should write a memo to Ann Berwick regarding transit; he agreed to do this.

Eric: we should also pick out a piece of the CAP for the NCCE to focus our efforts.

There was a discussion of addressing residential energy efficiency by including HERS rating in real estate listings, which would provide an incentive for upgrading efficiency in older construction. Jonathan noted that new construction is required to have a HERS rating, but much of it is larger than older units, so the total energy consumption may be higher than an old unit that hadn't received improvements.

Stephen and Eric proposed that the City could address residential sector by requiring older units to have an acceptable HERS rating before sale to a new owner.

Stephen proposed that the CAP should contain an objective to have \$100mil of private investment in Newton houses to increase energy efficiency. The City should consider taxing homes at rates based on energy efficiency.

Eric noted that we would need data on energy consumption of each house in order to apply this suggestion. Stephen said that this assessment based on energy would be an incentive - a carrot, not a stick.

Jim commented that we need to consult with someone who understands the law on tax assessments and rates to determine if this kind of incentive is consistent with state law.

Halina recommended that the City should just go ahead with publishing HERS ratings for residences listed on the real estate multiple listing service (MLS). Jon noted that Realtor Craig Foley (whom he used as broker for his net positive townhouses in Boston) would likely support this idea. Foley attended a NCCE meeting on this subject a few years ago and was generally supportive of including HERS in the listings.

Puja suggested that National Grid has the data for every property in the City; they have been unwilling to provide this data for specific properties in the past, but she thinks NGrid could be persuaded to do so in the future.

Jon noted that the City has HERS data for all new construction. He thinks this situation is analogous to Same the DEP Title 9 regulations of on-site sewage disposal, which was resisted by owners but has come to be accepted as necessary to avoid water quality impacts.

Eric summarized that we've identified two major areas of energy use that need more info: transportation and residential energy efficiency. The NCCE should work toward providing the information that is needed by individuals to make the CAP work.

Phil suggested that the City website can be an information hub for these issues.

Halina proposed that we should work with the Planning Department to get zoning provisions that will save energy incorporated in the big re-write of zoning that is currently underway. She also suggested that the CAP intern should find examples of how other cities provide this kind of energy information and keep it current.

Stephen imagines a City of Newton energy game that people can play online to compare how Newton fares against other cities.

Jon suggested that we should estimate what it would cost for the City to match the default aggregation goal in the electric power it buys for municipal purposes (i.e., buildings and streetlights).

2. Brief update on Newton Power Choice

Outreach meetings are ongoing and signs and banners are being produced to publicize the program. The Newton Coalition for Climate Action is continuing to advocate for the default option selected by the Mayor to contain 40% Class 1 Renewables on top of the state requirement (which will be 15% next year and will go up by 2% per year under the recent legislation approved by the Massachusetts House and Senate. Approximately 800 signatures have been collected urging the 40% default, including 18 City Councilors and Newton's three state legislators.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Jim Purdy