

Newton Citizen's Commission on Energy

Minutes of Meeting of Wednesday November, 29, 2017, 7:30 p.m.

City Hall Cafeteria

Present: Eric Olson, Chairman, Fred Brustman, Michael Gevelber, Jonathan Kantar, Ira Krepchin, Jim Purdy; Cory Alperstein, Ed Craddock, Brant Davis, Paul Gromer, Marlana Patton, Jon Klein

Chairman Eric Olson called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. Members and other attendees introduced themselves. The minutes of the October 2017 meeting were reviewed and approved with revisions.

1. COMMUNITY CHOICE AGGREGATION (CCA)

a) The Commission welcomed Paul Gromer and Marlana Patton, representatives of Peregrine Energy Group of Boston, MA. Peregrine is the Community Choice Aggregation consultant contracted by the City of Newton to prepare the submissions required by the state of Massachusetts, conduct outreach, and provide critical advice to the City of Newton on the timing and details of the electricity contract to be sought under a CCA program.

b) Michael Gevelber and Halina Brown presented the "Willingness to Pay" survey on green community choice aggregation. (Reminder: Green Newton panel discussion on community choice aggregation is Monday Nov 27 at the Library.) [The panel discussion is available through NewTV and can be viewed online.]

Highlights:

Willingness to pay by respondents to the survey generally ranged from \$6 -\$12 per month with the mode at \$8 and some outliers willing to pay more than \$12.

9% would opt out (these are termed "No-sayers"); the other 91% are called "yes-sayers".)

42% of yes-sayers said they would opt up to 100% Class 1 renewables.

The other yes-sayers cluster in the 30-50% range

Willingness to pay responses are clustered around \$8, which would translate to the 30%-50% total green share, depending on their power consumption. The average of all responses is approximately \$10, with a long tail in the distribution of responses.

Per Halina, 50% total green (= state mandated 13% in 2018, plus a 37% default) looks like the best balance between providing more green power while maintaining widespread public support and a reasonable price.

Eric suggested that Cory, Halina, and Michael write up the survey and the Monday presentations for GN newsletter, GN special issue, and TAB.

We need to brainstorm how to recognize people who opt up

c) Peregrine representatives discussion, including topics such as role of Willingness to Pay surveys in shaping details of a "green" CCA. How Peregrine experience advising sixteen cities and towns on CCA informs their current view of Newton, the role of DPU in the process, etc.

Paul Gromer talked about Peregrine's experience in other Massachusetts cities and towns. He emphasized that predicting the percentage of opt-outs as a function of price is complicated; the political makeup of the town is key – conservative politics – higher opt out, liberal politics fewer opt outs.

Paul stated that Peregrine can incorporate whatever default level of green that the city asks. An issue he's aware of is how to address people of limited means; (this category includes more than just customers with lower cost Eversource R2 accounts).

Eric noted that we should anticipate a range of views on Newton's program, including various possible objections based on political views, income issues, etc. We need to anticipate these, especially from people who don't opt out and later discover that they're enrolled.

Jim suggested that we can enlist the City's Council on Aging and social workers to reach seniors and lower income residents.

_____ suggested that we estimate how many wind turbines can be built as a result of Newton Power Choice, which might help to make the environmental benefits clearer and thus build support.

Jon Klein suggested that we describe the program in terms of how many cars taken off the road is this equivalent to.

Cory noted that the Newton Coalition for Climate Action, which prepared a letter to the City proposing a default of 50% green, will collect signatures in support of a higher default. She added that we need to stress the need for a high level of green: "unprecedented climate threat, needs unprecedented response."

Paul Gromer was asked if the launch materials could allow residents to indicate opt-out, opt down, and opt up choices on a postcard to be mailed back, (or on the Newton Power Choice website). No one has done this yet. There needs to be specific evidence of the resident's choice. State of Massachusetts rules about websites would need to be observed. Newton will need to consult with the state about this.

Jon Klein suggested that residents could request opt up or opt down online and then get a return phone call to confirm their choice, as is done with credit checks.

Jim noted that including a low-cost option within the aggregation could address some of these problems of building public support and serving the needs of lower income households.

_____ suggested that the opt-down could even include a little more green than the state mandate if it doesn't cost more than the Eversource rate. (That decision would need to be made when the actual price of the green component is known; also, the Eversource rate changes every 6 months.)

Paul stated that the City submitted its aggregation plan to DOER this month (11/2017), but the plan is mostly boilerplate and does not address default level or other options; the City is free to structure these as it sees fit.

In response to a question about the transition from a first aggregation contract with an energy supplier at the end of the term, Paul noted that the City can sign a subsequent contract before the end of the first contract, even a long time in advance if market is favorable. So there is some flexibility in the time to pin down the best rate without waiting until the first contract has expired.

Paul was asked if Peregrine has any interest in discouraging opt outs. He stated that it doesn't matter to Peregrine, but the electricity supplier might be concerned if there were to be a very high opt out rate (e.g., in response to a very high default level), but he doesn't anticipate opt outs at that high a magnitude.

2. Update on Rumford Solar and related projects, including the addition of a high fence to address neighbors' concerns that solar panels, racks, ballasts, etc., are unsightly.

Briefly discussed.

3. PV Net Metering Issues.

Eric provided an update on Eversource's proposals affecting large solar PV arrays and potential impacts on Newton's existing solar projects. For some of the largest projects recently erected on Newton property, the proposal would drop the net-metering price from 24 to 13 cents per kWh, a loss of revenue for projects financed under the existing rate structure. With Newton's leadership, other municipalities hosting large solar arrays have formed a consortium of sorts, to protest the change before the DPU. DOER, Northeast Clean Energy Council, UMASS, the Attorney General's office, the Mass Energy Council and a number of State Senators and Reps have all supported the municipalities' challenge to the proposed rate change. A decision is expected in late December.

Eric suggested that the NCCE should write a letter for the TAB recognizing and thanking the City for its leadership on this issue.

Brant noted that Eversource is also asking for a standby demand charge for residential installations based on monthly peak usage.

4. The Commission agreed to Eric's suggestion to hold the next meeting on January 10, 2018

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 PM/

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Purdy