

Newton Citizens Commission on Energy

City of Newton

<http://www.newtonma.gov/gov/building/projects/energycomm/default.asp>

Halina Brown (Chair), Beverly Craig, Michael Gevelber, Stephen Grody, Asa Hopkins,
Jonathan Kantar, Jon Klein, James Purdy (Vice Chair), Puja Vohra,
Ann Berwick (*ex-officio*)

Advisory Members: Cory Alperstein, Edward Craddock, Ira Krepchin, Philip Hanser



Mayor Ruthanne Fuller

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Minutes of the Meeting of October 30, 2019

Present: Halina Brown, Michael Gevelber, Stephen Grody, Asa Hopkins, Jon Kantar (JK), Jon Y Klein (JYK), Jim Purdy; Cory Alperstein, Ed Craddock, Phil Hanser; Marcia Cooper

The meeting minutes for September 25, 2019 were approved.

It was agreed to hold the next meeting on November 20, 2019.

1. Continuation of Michael's presentation on suggestions for creating a web page where residents can figure out what they can do to reduce their carbon footprint Michael Gevelber

Michael described his conversation with Meghan Shaw, whose position with the City of Cambridge is similar to the Energy Coach position which we've recommended for Newton. Cambridge has an outreach program called "Getting to Net Zero", which is very extensive. Meghan is willing to discuss it us. Perhaps MAPC could help facilitate that discussion.

Phil noted that there are now Climate Action Plans in Brookline, Cambridge, Arlington (in progress), Waltham (in progress,) Somerville, Lexington (in progress).

Cambridge also has a position for an Energy Planner, currently Nikhil Nadkarni.

Cambridge salaries for these positions start at \$80k and go up to \$100k or more.

Cambridge's goal is 70% reduction in GHG footprint, mostly through energy efficiency. (For comparison, MIT has an internal goal of net zero by 2050.) The Cambridge Energy Alliance is now part of the city and on the city budget

There is a solar program (Sunny Cambridge) – Zapotek is their consultant; it receives \$40k from the city plus \$20k from state. Their front end is *EnergySage*; any installer can participate. We could compare Newton quotes with theirs. They do "Market Matchmaking", probably based on the MassCEC database.

A heat pump program was recently launched.

Meghan leads on Cambridge's single family market segment. *All-In Energy* allied with *NEECO Energy* is their vendor of home energy audits. They also participate in the MassCEC *Clean Heating and Cooling program*, which is different from *HeatSmart*, the program Newton is applying for.

Michael posed the question: is independent advisor need? Asa responded that residents need assistance in comparing and evaluating quotes.

Phil pointed out that no one at MassSave takes a whole house perspective on equipment and efficiency measures but an ombudsman is also needed; Newton's Energy Coach could serve this function as well.

Jon Kantar and Paul Eldringkamp provide this kind of consulting/contracting with perspective on whole house and whole family needs.

Phil added that Santa Monica has an on-staff engineer who advises on the whole range of energy efficiency issues, (a position that probably pays a salary of \$140k+)

Michael believes that we an independent third party. Best if it's local.

Phil suggested that we need a referral service to help residents find contractors, and we could join with Cambridge and Brookline to form a bigger entity to do this. The question of scale is essential – we need broader perspective in advising residents.

Halina commented that we should propose a kickoff meeting for the implementation of the CAP, perhaps with Cambridge, MAPC, and others, and talk about how to organize implementation.

Asa pointed out that Cambridge is working through existing state programs; Newtons CAP goes beyond that. To meet targets in our CAP, we need to do more.

Phil stated that MassSave's "btu neutrality" (i.e., can't promote electric versus gas heating) is a limitation to one-time installation cost analysis, as well as the net present value calculation on operating cost of the heating and cooling equipment choices.

Michael pointed out that Meghan in Cambridge and Ann Berwick in Newton disagree on what the aggregation funds are used for – in Cambridge they use the money saved to support solar programs. Michael believes we need to think about what could be done in next aggregation contract. Jon Klein pointed out that our Aggregation Plan is DPU approved; a different structure would require approval of new plan. Halina proposed that we should study this question.

Phil stated that we need to know the rate at which weatherizations result from home energy audits – in a chain from each contact.

Asa responded that the MassSave website has data showing 106 audits in Newton, and 34 insulation installations. Jim said that Next Step Energy kept this data, and their successor, Able Home Energy, presumably does as well; it's part of a marketing strategy that any contractor would use. Next Step reported their data to the City, not sure if Able does this.

Cory noted that the HeatSmart program is about air source heat pumps and water heaters. If the HeatSmart grant comes through, they will communicate with MassSave, and get a list of vetted installers, bulk prices, etc. We shouldn't do it piecemeal: we need a market strategy and coordination. Halina added that she hopes the Energy Coach position turns into an office of energy services.

Jon Kantar commented that the HeatSmart program should be vetting the contractors.

Halina noted that we need a map of what needs to be done in implementation of the CAP.

Cory stated that the City is too involved in thinking about the funding possibilities, but not what needs to be done.

Jon Kantar suggested that the Energy Coach could be the leader of the implementation program. Jim stated that the Energy Coach should be able to answer a list of commonly asked questions. The City will make the hiring decision, and they should hire someone with these capabilities.

Halina proposed that we should create a map of implementation process, and get input from Cambridge and other places that are doing this.

Jon Klein disagrees: implementation needs to start on a small scale, so the best bet is to get one person on board at a time.

Asa outlined the next steps: CAP adopted. Then identify things that need to be done, e.g., get MOU in place, hold events, etc. etc.

Halina said we will talk about this topic at our November meeting.

Asa continued: then expand beyond NCCE in December – public meeting, discussion with other communities, etc. We need a work plan for the next 9-12 months. There are many items in addition to the Energy Coach.

2. Status of City Council deliberations on Newton Climate Action Plan and climate related zoning proposed to the City Council

Halina provided a report on the status of the Climate Action Plan. There will be a public hearing in the City Council's Zoning and Planning Committee on Nov 14. The subject of the hearing is the plan that the City's administration prepared, incorporating some but far from all of the NCCE Citizens Climate Action Plan.

Halina recommends that we support its adoption. It now has metrics and numerical goals, stronger language, etc. Jon Klein feels we should get it adopted, then we can stand up in six or twelve months and say if we haven't made progress. We should take the victory, start measuring and implementing.

Jon Kantar recommended that we support adoption, but with caveat that it would be much better if they commit to getting an Energy Coach on board, and incorporate disclosure of home energy evaluation at the time of listing.

Halina said she felt blindsided at the Committee meeting on October 23rd by the statement from the City's legal dept. that disclosure is not permitted under Massachusetts law.

Jon Kantar said he spoke with Ian at Mass. DOER, and he said there's no law that directly addresses this issue. DOER hasn't taken a position on who owns the scorecard once it's been created. Stephen stated that DOER says it is not public information, and will not disclose it to others, except if homeowner waives the right to confidentiality.

Is it a big thing to add this? Phil stated that it is, because it opens the door to every piece of utility information. But he added that the DOER Commissioner has the ability to change this regulation.

EC – when you buy a house, the seller is asked by the buyer to provide the utility information. They were already in beta test of listing HERS ratings in the MLS. (Helix project)

JYK – we’ve heard that we can’t force disclosure of energy bills. So we must decide whether to support the CAP without this. If not, we should just let it go.

CA – there should be a “proof is in the pudding” statement in our letter of approval. And statement about partnership and goodwill, and the urgency of the situation.

JYK we have a set of metrics, and we think this plan can help to meet those metrics, and we need to evaluate progress at the end of the year. Reinforce the importance of the number, e.g., the number of EVs registered in Newton, the number of MassSave audits, etc. The City should provide those baseline numbers as of Jan 1, 2020. Phil added that we should post a quarterly update on the NCCE web page.

There was general agreement to this plan; Halina will draft the statement and circulate it.

Halina called for a vote on whether the NCCE supports the City’s CAP in its current state. The vote was unanimous. Halina will announce it at the ZAP Committee hearing on November 14.

3. Update on MOU with the utilities.....Puja Vohra

not discussed

4. Changes in personnel on the state’s Board of Building Standards and Regulations (BBRS) jeopardize next edition of the MA Stretch Code.

not discussed

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Purdy