

# Newton Citizens Commission on Energy

City of Newton

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



Mayor Ruthanne Fuller

Halina Brown (Chair), Beverly Craig, Michael Gevelber, Stephen Grody, Asa Hopkins,  
Jonathan Kantar, Jon Klein, James Purdy (Vice Chair), Puja Vohra,  
Ann Berwick, William Ferguson (*ex-officio*)  
Advisory Members: Cory Alperstein, Edward Craddock, Ira Krepchin, Philip Hanser

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## Minutes of the Meeting of January 22, 2020

Present: Halina Brown, Beverly Craig, Michael Gevelber, Jon Kantar, Stephen Grody, Asa Hopkins;  
Fred Brustman

The meeting minutes for December 18, 2019 were approved.

### 1. Welcome to Bev Craig, the newest member of NCCE.

Beverly was formally welcomed as a full member of the Commission.

The members present at the meeting talked about their backgrounds. Jon Kantar has been in building construction since the early 1990s, and has been involved with Newton building projects from North High School through the three recent elementary schools, and the High Performance Buildings Council; he talked about the building materials and technologies that have come into use in his career

Stephen has worked as a consultant in high tech and business information systems for large companies and the development of data over cellular communications.

Michael has a PhD in mechanical engineering; he has worked in energy field since the Carter administration. He is a professor at Boston University and does work in building control systems.

Asa is a PhD physicist by training; he has worked in local political efforts and energy policy at Berkeley Energy Lab, developing standards for appliances and carbon pricing; he worked in Washington as a AAAS policy fellow and worked on the quadrennial energy technology review in the Office of the Under Secretary for Science at the U.S. Department of Energy under the Obama administration. He then went to Vermont to run the state energy office and develop a policy framework for transportation and buildings. He now works for Synapse Energy Economics and will be based in the UK next year.

Fred Brustman is a mechanical engineer and was an NCCE member for many years, working on the changeovers of City street lights.

Beverly Craig went to USC and set up their environmental science program; she worked on energy programs under President Clinton. She worked at OMB then went to the Kennedy School and Harvard

Business School. She did brownfields development in Milwaukee, then worked for Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation on affordable housing; she worked on homeowner rehab for lower income residents in Cambridge, plus solar PV. The Finch Project in Cambridge is the first affordable Passive House development in Massachusetts. She then went to Mass CEC and helped create the Passive House design challenge, and got MassSave to offer PH incentives. They also provided solar incentives for over 4000 homes.

**2. Coordination with the City and community organizations on CAP implementation: debriefing on the January 13 meeting; working teams and their mode of operation. See attached Version 1 of the Implementation Working Teams.**

The people at the January 13 meeting were impressive in terms of the City's commitment to a collaborative effort. (The Mayor cited NCCE in her State of the City speech.) Halina asked if we should send a note of appreciation to the Mayor and City Council regarding the hiring of an Energy Coach; all agreed.

Michael asked why the City turned around its earlier non-committal regarding the Energy Coach. Jon noted that the Council is even more committed to climate action. Stephen feels that the ideas in the Climate Action Plan are powerful enough to draw support on the political side and day-to-day participation by the Administration. Asa feels that they hold back until they are sure that an idea is feasible and then come out in support of it; Energy Coach is an example of that.

Halina noted that the Mayor has given several speeches in recent weeks on Newton and Climate Action showing her enthusiasm in being a leader in Massachusetts. Also, the City's green coalition is strong and respected in Newton. Jon noted that we made real progress on getting Passive House into the two biggest developments happening now, as well as the zoning amendments for energy efficiency in special permits. Michael recognized the importance of Halina's role in leading and working with the City.

Halina met with new Councilors Bowman, Ryan, and Humphrey. Councilors Malakie and Wright did not reply to her invitation to meet. Jon thinks there are some subjects on which they may be cooperative; Councilor Baker is an exemplar of coming to agreement with a former skeptic.

The natural gas prohibition passed by Brookline may be a guide to what Newton could do; Bev noted that it has many provisions that make it more acceptable.

Halina identified two topics that are currently orphans:

The Green Ribbon Commission; Devra Bailin is the new Economic Development director and was identified by Jonathan Yeo as potential leader of this effort. Peter Smith is being asked to join, and Puja will play a lead role as NCCE representative. Halina suggests that we call a meeting, including Bill Ferguson, Devra Bailin, and Nicole Freidman. Michael suggested that a high level position is needed to work successfully with these large institutions; Asa thinks Econ Dev Director Bailin satisfies this. Halina will reach out to Devra along with Jon Kantar. Bev suggested that staffing is needed for outreach; a lower level 20-hour position in the Chamber or one of the participating companies is a possibility. Halina reminded that supervision of such a position is necessary.

Freestanding EV chargers need more thought in terms of cost. Jon suggested that the spread in price of power is a potential source of revenue to the City. Ann Berwick has a role in this.

the Energy Coach position was discussed. It is likened to an hourglass that concentrates questions from the public and also advice from knowledgeable citizens on how the Coach should handle them. Bev said that it is important to standardize responses, and have written answers.

Doug Stewart at Eliot Church is enthusiastic big-picture thinker with experience in convincing people to implement energy efficiency in their homes. Halina suggested that someone like this should be enlisted as a standby advisor on specific issues. Can we set up a network of such people?

Stephen likened the question to Fashion Forward in the apparel industry, where there are people at the leading edge of fashion trends who become social leaders through emulation. So in addition to people who can answer questions, we should identify some people who can play this role in energy in Newton. We might create a label and recruit local "Energy Forward" examples/celebrities (e.g., Asa Hopkins) that people can emulate. "Be more like Asa..." (These people are not the ones who answer questions like the network that funnels through the Energy Coach; however, they might do public speaking about doing it.) Assemble is set of examples about how they addressed particular energy situations.

Jon Kantar suggested that this is in line with what Jon Klein is doing to provide access to the answers to, say, 75 questions.

Halina sees two separate teams, one led by Jon Klein, the other assembling people who are energy resources; starting with around a dozen. Bev suggested we start a list of such people, e.g., from the Green Newton Building Standards Committee. Green Newton's energy savers campaign used weekly examples in the TAB of homeowners who took action. But we need to go beyond MassSave.

Halina feels that Bev is a good connector between the top of this hourglass and the citizens who have questions. Bev should present this idea to the group led by Jon Klein. Stephen suggested that we shouldn't be asking people to provide their expertise as individuals, but rather to be part of an organization. Bev added that there needs to be training on these questions. Halina said that Energy Coach could assemble this group of people with expertise and train then trainers. Bev said there will be differences in approach among different people, but Jon said that is OK: just note that people disagree on the exact approach and offer information for customers to use to make their own decision about what is best for them.

Michel sees a discontinuity between the Coach and the volunteers who provide information. Halina said that the Coach is the first to respond to questions and does outreach, but can draw on experts in the community. Bev and Asa think the outreach role for the Coach is a big improvement in itself.

[Dan Ruben joined the meeting, coming from a hearing about the Dunstan East 40B project on Washington Street. Betsy Harper spoke about the incentives for doing Passive House analysis.]

Halina mentioned two "orphans" in the climate action effort under new construction. (1) Requiring that all new construction is required to analyze alternatives regarding energy. But what about requiring that a new house doesn't generate more GHG than the house it is replacing. Jon thinks this gets very complicated and a better approach is to restrict the use of gas. Asa noted that a new house built to code will be suitable for a heat pump energy system, and more so in new editions of the code. So the point of intervention should be to discourage the use of gas. Bev suggested that more smaller units on a site would be better from the energy point of view. But others feel that this issue will come up on its own; just let the economics work.

Fred suggested that the power footprint of the former house could be used as a limit to the new house on the site. But Jon thinks this runs afoul of the building code; addressing gas is an easier path to take. Asa

thinks that Newton Inspectional Services may not be giving the energy issues the attention they deserve. Bev pointed out that additions to a house don't trigger a HERS evaluation, even though Inspectional Services should flag this.

**Other business:**

Bev asked about scorecards. Halina said we're working on this with the utilities under the MOU. Municipal Light Plant communities are working on this.

Halina noted that a referendum will be held on March 3 on whether to uphold the City Council approval of the Northland project, which the NCCE endorsed.

Members agreed to change the calendar to put the December 2020 meeting on 12/16.

**3. Analysis of what the aggregation fees have done and prospects for the future.**

Michael would prefer to defer this to next meeting when more members will be attending and there is more adequate time.

**4. How to facilitate a shift toward the Passive House standard and electrification for teardown construction.**

[Not discussed]

**5. Heat island effect: a topic raised by Alicia Bowman, newly elected Ward 8 Councilor.**

[Not discussed.]

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 pm.

Notes transcribed from audio recording.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Purdy