

Newton Citizens Commission on Energy

City of Newton

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



Mayor Ruthanne Fuller

Halina Brown (Chair), Michael Gevelber, Stephen Grody, Philip Hanser, 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,

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Newton Centre, MA 02459

Minutes of the Meeting of July 29, 2020

The meeting was held on Zoom.

Attending: Michael Gevelber, Stephen Grody, Asa Hopkins, Jon Kantar, Jon Klein, Jim Purdy; Cory Alperstein, Fred Brustman, Phil Hanser, Demie Stathoplos, Philip Vergragt

The meeting minutes for July 2020 were accepted as corrected.

1. Progress on Energy Coach site

Jon Klein reported on the status of the Energy Coach website. There is a new home page design, and improved navigation to route people to the expert coach based on their question. The user can type in a question and the site will suggest some existing Q&A. The user can submit their question, and a coach will answer them directly.

The site will say that your question will be answered in 24-48 hours.

Jon estimates that we will need 6 coaches to start with, a minimum of 2 for each area. The coaches input their available hours. Jon will set up office hours for each coach, starting with about one hour per week.

Ann Berwick and Bill Ferguson saw the site this week. They were extremely supportive, and they said having the website might even affect the job description of the person to be hired by the City – e.g., more management vs technical experience. They are comfortable with the NCCE members as expert coaches; they said that additional coaches should be vetted and tracked.

Michael applauded the work Jon has done, and he asks how we will make it known to the public.

Demie said other websites oriented to climate action should have the same four navigation buttons linking to subject areas as well as the Energy Coach site. How do we drive traffic? She suggested that Green Newton, HeatSmart, churches, school groups, Parent Teacher Organization, and other organizations are

community influencers that can help to build audience. The Mayor and City Council are open to using their newsletters to publicize the Energy Coach website.

Demie recommended that we should get Craig Forman involved (he runs Newton's Heat Smart program.) Demie will be doing church presentations, and can start sending people from those to the EC site.

Philip V. asked how to link to the right resources, which are often embedded within the answers to questions. Jon said that the EC site design will make that possible.

Stephen said that we need to maintain brand integrity.

Stephen said he has a method to block trolls and spam. He and Jon will confer.

Jon Klein will send email to each of us to establish our areas of expertise. The site will round robin around the list of expert coaches to distribute the load.

2. Brief update on zoning redesign.

Jim led a discussion about the City's ongoing work to redesign the Zoning Ordinance. It is led by the Zoning and Planning Committee with major input from the Planning Department; Zachery LeMel is the lead technical staff person. He has bi-weekly remote office hours.

ZAP's schedule is to finish Article 3 Single Family zoning districts by early fall and go on to commercial and mixed use zones, which is where large multifamily buildings would be located. The proposal being discussed by ZAP addresses 2-3 unit buildings, including conversion of single family houses. In July LeMel showed an analysis of the walking distances to transit, rail, and express bus stops and stations, as well as local bus routes. These transit-accessible locations have potential for multi-family approvals by right instead of through special permit.

The impact of the zoning proposals on the Climate Action Plan was discussed. Increased density in proximity to public transportation is one key factor that influences Newton's GHG footprint.

Asa pointed out that the effect of more housing in Newton is important in terms of per capita emissions. Regional impacts need to be considered, because of the regional housing market: units not built in Newton will be built elsewhere (Westborough for example) that entire much greater transportation-related emissions through automobile commuting that could be done by transit from houses in Newton.

Asa agreed to help Halina develop a conceptual estimate of the magnitude of emissions saving through greater density in Newton

Stephen commented that the City should consider air rights development linked to commuter rail stations with high speed outbound as well as inbound service.

Remote telecommuting may greatly increase in the future owing to the behavior patterns developed during the Covid-19 pandemic. Phil Hanser noted that Palo Alto has zoning provisions that require telecommunications capabilities adequate to promote telecommuting. He also pointed other cities that have innovative zoning provisions aimed at reducing emissions.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Jim Purdy