

# 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

Telephone 617-796-1019  
c/o Office of the Sustainability Director  
Newton City Hall, 1000 Commonwealth Avenue  
Newton Centre, MA 02459

## Minutes of the Meeting of March 25, 2020

The meeting was held on Zoom.

Attending: Halina Brown, Beverly Craig, Michael Gevelber, Stephen Grody, Asa Hopkins, Jon Kantar, Jon Klein, Jim Purdy, Puja Vohra; Cory Alperstein, Ed Craddock, Deb Crossley, Lucia Dolan, Jane Hanser, Karen Sloat, Demie Stathoplos; Bill Ferguson

The meeting minutes for February, 2020 were approved.

### 1. Database of HERS Ratings

Stephen presented on his work to develop a database for HERS data. (Item E.3.2 in the CAP.) He looked in the assessors' database for a sample of properties that had building permits found that their data is incomplete – missing construction updates for 170 records in the Assessors' database. Newton needs a real database – sortable, searchable, etc. – rather than paper based files. Stephen used available Inspectional Services Department (ISD) data and created a url for user interface. JYK asked if it will be added to the City GIS? SG – yes

Jon Kantar said that inspectors from ISD make entries at the construction site on iPads. So they could easily add the HERS score when they get the result.

Halina suggested that next, the HERS ratings from the early years should be added. Based on her previous research, it will total around 1000 records. Stephen proposed that we get Ann Berwick or other staff that we work with to authorize this and request that the database is given official status.

Halina noted that, ideally, recent home energy assessments created a scorecard for each property: it is a resource awaiting a City policy that utilizes it.

Bill Ferguson asked Stephen to summarize his proposal. How is the database maintained? Stephen replied that it could connect directly to ISD input on each property. Bill/Ann B can help move this project along – get the url onto the <https://newtonma.mapgeo.io/> site. Is there risk from hacking into City's

data? Stephen said none at all, it's a separate thing. Jim Shaughnessy has all of the files that Stephen has pulled together.

Halina said that a meeting is scheduled with Deb Crossley and Ann Berwick on April 1; she will introduce them to this topic.

## **2. Analysis of the Power Choice experience**

Michael Gevelber gave a presentation on the aggregation program and CAP scorecards. He got the info from Paul Gromer, the City's consultant for Newton Power Choice. He addressed costs, impacts, and future options.

The RECs that Newton bought total \$1.067 million – they secured a very favorable cost of \$10.00 per REC under the aggregation contract, but today, the RECs would cost \$30.

Statewide there are 23 aggregation programs totaling 460,000 RECs. Newton is 24% of the state total.

Cambridge invests the cost of the RECs in the City. E.g., Energy Coach, communications of CAP, etc.

Newton is the leader in the state in terms of default percentage of renewables. Michael asks: Is there a better use of \$1 million than buying RECs? Gromer believes the PUC regs allow this kind of use of the REC money.

JYK asked, is it valid to claim that the use of the money for another program would actually make things greener, e.g., reducing energy consumption. Jon Kantar suggested that we could capture the same amount of money that RECs would cost in the next aggregation contract, say \$2 million, and leverage half of it through investment in a partnership or revenue stream on a larger project. . Cory noted that Cambridge's use for the money is community solar.

Deb Crossley suggested that we need to discuss this quietly and with the Administration. Ann Berwick needs to be in the loop

Halina pointed out that the time to the end of the current contract is relatively short. Need a much longer discussion of this issue, e.g. how much do we burden Newton citizens? Who volunteers to initiate this conversation? Asa said we need to talk big picture about the next aggregation contract period.

Jon Klein disagreed; he recommends that we table this issue forever – there's other more important stuff to get done.

Bill Ferguson noted that we need to go out to bid for the next aggregation contract next fall, maybe late October 2020. So there's not much time. The expected cost to consumers of \$30 RECs is about 1 cent per kwh.

The members decided to defer the discussion and whether to table the issue or move forward at a future meeting.

## **3. Working Group on CAP Communication/Outreach**

This group comprises Demie, Karen Sloat, Halina, Philip Vergragt, and Cory.

A brainstorming session had to be rescheduled.

Demie gave a status report. They started by meeting with Ellen Myers and Dana Hanson from the Mayor's office. They need content team – Ann Berwick, Bill Ferguson, and Nicole Friedman. They are planning a 1-hour meeting with those people to develop a framework for the communication plan. Issues include how do you get people to identify with the communication process. We need to develop content and strategy, consistent with the Administration's plans for Newton. We need to use positive emotional language and other best practices in climate communication.

Green Newton has been working with MassEnergize on the communication platform. It is currently in a beta version. It is to be populated with the communication plan that we're working on. GN is asking for comments.

Bev presented the beta version. It includes a "Green Navigation" box on what Newton is doing to implement the CAP.

The goal is for ½ of households to participate. Charts show the participation percent and the impact in terms of actions completed, e.g., solar, home energy improvements, etc. The point is motivation.

All of the actions described have a climate impact. They can be searched by level of cost, level of impact, etc.

There is a place on the site for testimonials, for a deep dive for more information. The user creates her own to do list. The site uses the UC Berkeley calculator to estimate the CO2 impact of each action.

The site can also support the creation of teams that can compete.

HB – seems to be designed to mobilize citizens. It doesn't (at present, anyway) report on progress in implementing the CAP. Could navigate between websites. such as "What is the City of Newton doing?"

They are meeting on April 3 (unless rescheduled)

Halina is going to delay the meeting with the City CAP team which is backed up owing to the epidemic.

#### **4. Energy Coach platform**

Jon Klein reviewed the site: its purpose is to be clearinghouse for information, and a place to schedule a conversation with an Energy Coach, including experts who are not City employees.

The site will provides a basic knowledge base. This requires a database full of questions and answers, which NCCE members and others will provide.

Demie asked if engineers from her church community participate? JYK – absolutely.

Everyone can do whatever they please, and we can consolidate entries if more than one has been entered on a topic.

Jon will send a weekly update. He added that no other cities have done something quite like this.

Cory proposed that the HeatSmart program should be coordinated with this. Jon said they have a whole list of FAQs from Arlington and other towns in the HeatSmart program.

Laya Steinberg is doing the graphics.

Cory pointed out that this endeavor is more than just the website – it's all the people who will help answer the public's inquiries.

Demie said she would like to train some people from her church to serve in that capacity.

NCCE will ask Green Newton for a grant to cover costs. Jon said that until the site goes live, it's \$50/month. Then \$8.00/month/participating energy coach. Want to ask for \$1000. Jim will discuss with Marcia Cooper and get this on the agenda of Green Newton's March 31 Board meeting.

## **5. City Staffing**

The City Controller's office had issues with the Energy Coach position, according to Jonathan Yeo. Deb Crossley will ask about this when she meets with the Administration tomorrow.

Bill Ferguson reported that the EC job description has been approved by HR – but they asked if there is a FTE position in the staff template for the upcoming fiscal year. Deb said that this needs to come from the Mayor's office in her budget proposal; it is not unheard of creating a position during the year. Bill agreed that it shouldn't be a big problem to get the position into the staffing template, but Jonathan Yeo is currently tied up with the City's response to Covid19, so it won't happen right away.

A new sustainability position has been proposed for the school system. The members decided to table discussion of the School Department position. Bev suggested that Halina should talk with Joanna Canedo, who leads Green Newton's School Connections group.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Purdy