

Newton Citizens Commission on Energy

City of Newton

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

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,



Mayor Ruthanne Fuller

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Minutes of the Meeting of October 28, 2020

The meeting was held on Zoom.

Attending: Halina Brown, Michael Gevelber, Stephen Grody, Phil Hanser, Asa Hopkins, Jon Kantar, Jon Klein, Jim Purdy, Puja Vohra; Fred Brustman, Karen Shilo

1. Status of Climate Action Plan implementation

Halina provided an update on the CAP – this is the first anniversary of the City’s adoption of the CAP; Nicole Friedman, Jennifer Steel, Dana Hanson, and Ann Berwick are to give a progress report to City Council.

They should address HERS reporting, hiring an Energy Coach, and communication work by Demi Stathoplos’s group.

Halina talked with Susan Albright about scorecards for Newton households; the Council will probably be open to a proposal that households doing more than some threshold amount of renovation should get a scorecard. In Portland OR, they have a system like this, and it costs around \$300 to get the scorecard. So is \$500 a reasonable number to propose?

Phil suggested that they consider the type of construction, e.g. shell, A/C system, etc., as opposed to small renovations such as kitchen cabinets, etc.

Asa pointed out that by the time a building permit is requested, most of the decisions have already been made. However, many contractors engage with the City on permit questions before actually pulling the permit. He suggested a scorecard fee of maybe \$400 on \$20-25k worth of work, e.g., HVAC work.

Stephen made the following suggestions: (1) We should clarify the objective of a scorecard, who the user is, etc. before deciding how to do this. (2) There’s a public interest in getting a broad set of information. So rather than supply side we should look at demand side: Who is going to consume the information collected? Will it be public data? What about downloadable data on energy consumption for

anyone who wants to use it – prospective buyers, developers, planners, etc. In summary, what purpose is served?

Philip suggested that the Energy Coach would be one of the first to know about what people are planning to do with their homes. So we should hold back until we know more. Stephen added: and whether it should be tied to the Energy Coach work.

Halina agreed, but said in the meantime, we can do useful research. Who would do the scorecard? Is it for public posting? Who are the potential users of the data?

Michael said it's great if one or two people want to take this on, but not off-the-cuff; it needs some research. EnergySafe, which was doing home assessment work, also channeled customers to contractors providing this type of services.

Philip said that a bigger question, from the standpoint of evaluating the housing stock, is whether it is worth the investment? Would a scorecard affect the decision of a potential buyer of the home?

Asa said he would like to get a sense of the distribution across the city's housing stock. It might relate to the coming MOU with the utilities. If efficiency is related to overall property value, you need it before sale. If you want aggregate data that isn't building specific, then individual scorecards prior to a sale are not necessary.

Halina said the scorecard would change the way the homeowner thinks about energy, which should motivate action. Public listing of this data is a basic type of description of the property in Newton. Stephen asked, but how do you justify the cost to the homeowner. (The Mayor seemed to think that the price point of a HERS rating was too high to be required.) What's the value? What's the use?

Phil said that if you could make the case that an energy efficient home sells better and/or for a higher price, that would be enough to get people to do it.

Michael noted that if we're successful in getting people to buy EVs and heat pumps, it puts some burden on the house's electrical system. There should be a framework to evaluate how the CAP is being implemented.

Stephen said Michael's point is serving the need for a scorecard. It would inform Year 2 of CAP implementation.

Jon Klein said we have specific metrics in the CAP, and we should determine whether we have the data to track them.

Halina said that so far, the CAP status update is primarily a list of things accomplished. She told the City that we need to evaluate whether we are on the right trajectory, and the idea was well-received in general. Philip said he's requested some data, but it hasn't been forthcoming, e.g. tracking electric car ownership.

Michael requested that Halina should set up a CAP "scorecard" and members should choose categories to fill in. Philip and Asa noted that we need to identify things that didn't happen and get the City to determine how to rectify this. There could be 5 or 6 metrics.

Philip added that we should hold the City's feet to the fire on CAP implementation.

Halina said what is needed is not simply more effort, but we also need a plan for how to accomplish these things.

Puja said that the utilities are going forward with the MOU, with some data at a high level.

Halina said an example of what we need is the number of heat pumps installed per year, with the target escalating each year.

Michael said there's more than just the MOU and CAP, e.g. HeatSmart. Our objective is to get a picture of Newton as a community overall.

Asa said what counts is what is happening in the world, regardless of what program it relates to. Jon said the data we listed ties back to a source, e.g. EVs and heat pumps.

Halina asked where we can we get the number of heat pumps installed? From MassSave for example?

Puja noted that the MOU is based on the number installed in previous years.

Halina said the City's goals should require a stretch. Karen Shilo volunteered to go to MassSave for the data on heat pumps.

Jon Kantar pointed out that the permits aren't very specific about things like heat pumps. Bev Craig would know who to go to for data.

Michael will get the EV data. Halina will send out the whole list of data to be tracked.

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Halina raised a related topic: where does NCCE want to go next?

Philip said there's ongoing things, like hiring an Energy Coach. Puja added, and Green Leadership Collaborative; we can start that if Ann Berwick OKs it. Halina thinks Green Leadership Collaborative is probably not going to be active for a few more months.

Halina noted that we expect an opportunity to present to ZAP on the zoning redesign. Green Newton's Building Standards Committee is involved with in this.

Philip suggested some EV activities and other things with NCCE participation.

Jim said there's a lot on our plate already – perhaps we need to digest for a while before adding more.

Phil said we also need to consider what are the consequences of ongoing Covid pandemic, e.g., for transportation and commercial real estate.

Jim will try to get more recent vmt data.

There was discussion of how to relate to the City – we should demand what they will do with the data before we provide input.

Halina said she will make it her job to work with the City on how best to get these things done.

2. Energy Coach website

Jon Klein provided an update on the EC website:

- It is now fully operational. We have received a couple of questions (about bicycling).
- We're working to port the EC site into the City's overall website. We need to wait and see.
- The EC website has four reciprocal buttons with four other websites: EV, Heat Smart, Take Action, etc.
- When the EC website is announced by the Mayor's newsletter, we can get our intern to spread it to social media.

3. New Newton Power Choice contract

Michael presented a PowerPoint on aggregation, using data he received from the City's consultant Peregrin Energy Group. Newton leads all other Massachusetts municipalities by far in the previous contract, both as to the default percentage (60% including the state mandated amount); with the new contract, which has an 80% mandate, Newton will be even farther ahead. Newton also led all other municipalities in the percentage of customers (7 percent) who opted up to 100% renewable.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:50 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Jim Purdy