

# 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, Fred Brustman, Edward Craddock, Ira Krepchin



Mayor Ruthanne Fuller

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## Minutes of the Meeting of January 27, 2021

The meeting was held on Zoom.

Attending: Halina Brown, Michael Gevelber, Stephen Grody, Philip Hanser, Asa Hopkins, Jon Kantar, Jim Purdy; Cory Alperstein, Karen Shilo, Philip Vergragt

Halina introduced Karen Shilo, a volunteer chosen from 65 applicants. She will work on an update of the GHG inventory for Newton.

### 1. Memorandum of Understanding with the Utilities

Phil Hanser gave an update on the MOU. The City team met with NGrid and Eversource initially, but not much progress resulted from that first meeting. Separate meetings with NGrid and ES followed. NGrid at the second meeting didn't appear ready to do much new work. Newton doesn't have a large budget for public information, so we asked NGrid and Eversource to do mailings and target marketing of customers based on whether they have had home energy audits, or households with above average energy use. The upshot is for the utilities to respond to this request; they say they need to deal with the issue of confidentiality for customers. Eversource said it has data for target marketing, but hasn't been doing much with it. Phil observed that he was surprised by how little NG was prepared for; Eversource seems to be better prepared than NG.

Michael asked, do we have specific objectives to ask their assistance with? Phil replied that the main objective is to get the number of home energy audits (HEA's) up. And if the customer has done a HEA, to proceed with work to increase energy efficiency. Third, help encourage EV purchase.

Neither utility appears to be on top of the issues we need them for.

Cory said that lots of things in the upcoming federal initiatives need to be brought into the discussion..

### 2. Energy Coach Selection

Halina participated in the selection process. She reported that an elaborate search was done with three tiers of interviews and four candidates asked to make presentations. Two went to the final round, and an

offer was made yesterday (26 January) to the preferred candidate Liora Silkes. Halina thinks her well prepared for the job.

### **3. Energy Coach website:**

Halina reported that the City team was concerned that there could be some confusion between the volunteers (us) as “Citizen Energy Advisors” and the person just hired as Energy Coach. The upshot is to call the volunteers “Citizen Coaches.”

### **4. CAP Implementation**

Halina reported that CAP implementation will be on the agenda of the February 17 joint meeting of the Public Facilities Committee and Public Services and Transportation Committee; with Zoning and Planning Committee members have also been invited.

Halina has been asked to participate in the presentation; she showed a draft PowerPoint “Annual Status Report” that she prepared for the meeting.

Other implementation items were reported by Halina:

- Project-based working groups of City staff and partners (Green Newton, etc.)
- Drafting of City zoning ordinance amendments:
- Section 30-1.5 permits use of a lot’s setbacks to extend insulation and vestibules and locate heat pump compressors.
- Sustainable Development Design: amendments developed by the City Council last year requires green building ratings (Passive House or LEED) for new construction over 20 ksf.
- The Zoning and Planning Committee docketed a provision for Special Permit review (30-7.3) that adds a fifth special permit criterion to incorporate efficient use and conservation of natural resources and energy. This can be the basis for energy efficiency requirements that couldn’t be required under the state building code without a special permit. (The idea articulated by Councilor Crossley is that a special permit allows the owner to do things not allowed in the base zoning, so higher performance can be required.)
- Major developments are incorporating LEED and Passive House standards for some of their buildings: Riverside, Northland, Riverdale, Dunstan East. Jon Kantar added that all of them have agreed to all-electric heating/cooling and cooking; some will also have electric hot water heating.
- HERS ratings for new construction are now included the Assessors database. The Mass Energize “Take Action” program reaches out to individuals; it is hosted by Green Newton. Energy improvements are being planned for City buildings. The City is also promoting composting, and tree planting.

### **5. New Metrics Going Forward:**

The average HERS rating in 2020 = 50.4 for new construction and major renovations; (better than the requirement of 55.) This data is compiled by the Inspectional Services Division (ISD).

Halina would like to target contractors to include energy saving options in their proposals, and provide contractor training. Jon Kantar raised some issues in doing these. The City could potential require an all-electric option for heating systems to be included in contractor proposals.

Stephen said we need to do more work on how to word the recommendation on Energy Efficiency Scorecards. A “scorecard” doesn’t need to be on the assessors database.

Jon commented that there is already data in the City that addresses the objective served by a “scorecard.” ISD will be developing improved data management in 2021

Philip Vergragt said that –the Communications Working Group should be included in the presentation to Council committees.

Jim will check with Councilor Crossley regarding to the recently signed law requiring only a simple majority for City Council approvals for multifamily housing within 0.5 miles of public transportation; up until now a 2/3 vote was necessary.

## **6. Greenhouse Gas Inventory**

Karen Shilo reported on the GHG inventory update that she is doing with Michael. (The inventory originally used 2013 data.)

Stephen commented that two sets of numbers need to be included: total energy coming into the city from all sources; and the total GHG impacts including gas leaks, etc.

Asa commented that Newton has actually been becoming less energy intensive since 2013.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:50 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Jim Purdy