

# 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 April 28, 2021

The meeting was held on Zoom.

Attending: Halina Brown, Michael Gevelber, Stephen Grody, Philip Hanser, Asa Hopkins, Jon Kantar, Jim Purdy, Puja Vohra; Councilor Alison Leary; Cory Alperstein, Fred Brustman, Demie Stathoplos.

### **1. Discussion of potential ordinance for energy use benchmarking and disclosure for non-residential uses. A modification of the Green Leadership Collaborative proposal in the CAP.**

Halina led a discussion of a draft document Modified Plan for Commercial Building Decarbonization circulated before the meeting. The process was put on hold in 2020 when Covid struck. Michael had brought to our attention some of the difficulties in this process, compared to the processes in Cambridge and Boston regarding benchmarking and disclosure of non-residential energy use in buildings of 20,000 sf or more.

Halina's idea is to bring these businesses into the CAP process through a Green Leadership Collaborative (GLC), which has not been formally started yet.

Asa's company Synapse has considered several options for doing this, and concluded in classifying buildings by their use and typology, especially number of stories.

Halina proposes that we bring a proposal to City Council for official action.

Stephen asked Asa if Boston had a set of data to classify buildings into clusters by type. Asa replied that Boston has had a good set of data on buildings classified by various attributes such as size and use. Their data have been analyzed into 14 different clusters by building type and equivalent GHG emissions intensity. (GHG emissions in kg/sf/year.) Boston also considered issues such as district heating, etc.

Michael said that there are approaches that can be thought of as hard and soft – one is legislative, the other is to get organizations to propose their own standards. The key is having leaders who want to take action getting the others to join. Boston's Building Energy Reporting and Disclosure Ordinance (BERDO) has an explicit purpose of achieving GHG reductions, not energy efficiency per se.

Alison said she and other Councilors are anticipating hearing feedback about future milestone proposals, specifically, how effective have they been. We need to direct City resources where they will do the most good.

Phil raised a question: should we start with assembling building energy information and later go to performance standards?

Alison said that Newton's Law Department has reminded her that mandates for building systems are not possible outside a home rule petition.

Asa said that what Cambridge and Boston have done is similar to a number of cities across the U.S.

Jim pointed out that Boston has a history of negotiated development rather than explicit standards, which puts the issue of enforceable standards in a different context than in Newton.

Halina said that here in Newton, the question is how to require non-residential properties to report their energy use. Newton's Law Department tends to be very conservative in their advice about these questions.

Puja suggested going back to the framework from the Climate Action Plan – i.e., take a stepped approach, get a Green Leadership Collaborative of property owners going, and walk with them step by step and assist them in getting to a benchmarking stage like BERDO. The 2021-2024 time frame provides a frame for this information assembly.

Jon wonders if many of the big properties in Newton are already doing benchmarking for their own purposes. And how many owners also have property in Cambridge and/or Boston, where disclosure is required.

Puja said a first action item is to take the information that we have in hand, combine, and identify the specific users. Working with NGrid in Rhode Island, she needed several meetings with each major customer to determine what data they have and how it can be made available.

Phil said that any large corporation probably has an energy management system. He is a strong believer in mandating the reporting, possibly with a cutoff in size to avoid an undue burden on smaller owners. His vision is to collect data and then based on that, create a benchmark.

Asa said that many buildings across the country are reporting into the Energy Star database. Using this data to require companies to do things would come a few years downstream. He proposes to start by beginning reporting on an entry basis for two years, then by 2023 or 24 after handholding with owners, you can move to mandate reporting and standards. (Cambridge has hired ICF to be their help desk on this.) Cambridge is requiring this data disclosure, so it is clearly acceptable under state law. Enforceable standards for performance are a different matter.

Phil said that if the utilities are facilitating part of this in parts of their service areas, we should talk with them about how they are doing it.

Puja said the utilities were pretty clear that they would support and assist in working with building owners convened by the City.

Phil said we would like to know how it works, how burdensome on the businesses, how much assistance needed, etc.

Michael said it's not a slam dunk as to what info it is possible to get from each business. Lots of commercial entities don't have experience doing this, and may find it a burden, so the quality of the data may be suspect.

Puja said that Boston has Peregrine (Newton's consultant on Newton Power Choice) to mine the data and produce conclusions such as EUIs (EUI = Energy Use Index).

Asa said the reporting obligation is on the building owner; the utilities just provide a portal for the owners to report. Can the utilities do this for Newton businesses? No one cleans the Boston data, but they do get help in their analysis. In Newton there are only a hundred or so data points – so it's not so hard to see if any is outside the range. If the utilities make the data infrastructure available, then reporting will not be too big of a problem. In Boston, the reporting is on energy use, and conversion factors are applied to get to GHG emissions .

Stephen said that there is subclassification behind the utility's meter – e.g., what types of space are responsible for energy use – parking facilities vs office space, etc.

Jon said that USDOE's EnergyStar portfolio manager has been around for quite a while; he can't imagine any big user not familiar with this. The City of Newton does it with Mass Energy Insight. It's all doable. We just need a law like Boston's to require the businesses to report.

Asa said the Cambridge ordinance is close to the USDOE model ordinance; it requires annual reporting by May 1; Cambridge adopted their ordinance in July 2014 and required reporting the following spring. Smaller buildings got an extra year. They set up a system to allow all owners to report, but not subject to the penalties for the first year.

Halina said if we turn to the City Council with this request we should bring in a person from Cambridge or Boston – e.g. John Dalzell of Boston Planning and Development who lives in Newton.

There was unanimous support of NCCE member for this proposal:

“NCCE is asking Newton City Council to adopt one or more ordinances applicable to large Newton buildings which require measurement and reporting and public disclosure of energy use and GHG emissions.

Halina would like to see more than one ordinance on this subject.

Alison said we need to be specific about which large buildings at this point. Asa said Cambridge's ordinance includes a definition of covered property.

Jon suggested we draft a proposal based on the Cambridge ordinance, modified as necessary.

Alison said it is good to know that these ordinances have been in place for several years: so what have they accomplished?

Phil said that as soon as you expose people's energy use, it has an effect on their behavior.

Halina said we definitely should invite Boston and Cambridge people to come and testify to City Council.

Michael pointed out that 30% of a city's GHG are commercial sector, and large properties are more than half of that. The important thing is to follow disclosure with standards as Boston did.

Stephen suggested that, as in doing the CCAP, we can make process and systems innovations that will reduce labor, simplify procedures, and lower costs, etc.

Jon said Mass Energy Insight automatically takes the utility data and populates the energy database

Halina, Asa, and Puja will work together to draft the proposal, then send it to Councilor Leary for feedback.

Alison suggested that if we want Newton Legal Department's opinion, we should give them Cambridge's ordinance to consider for applicability in Newton.

Other agenda items:

2. Before 2050 pilot  
Not discussed.
3. Training of Contractors-Initial discussion, time permitting  
Not discussed.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:47 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Jim Purdy