

Newton Citizens Commission on Energy

City of Newton

<http://www.newtonma.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



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 June 30, 2021

The meeting was held on Zoom.

Attending: Halina Brown, Stephen Grody, Philip Hanser, Jon Kantar, Jim Purdy; Cory Alperstein, Evan Collins, Jane Hanser, Councilor Julia Malakie, Demie Stathoplos

1. Status of electrification ordinance and home rule petition in Public Facilities Committee

Halina reported that the proposed draft electrification ordinance and draft Home Rule Petition were discussed at the Public Facilities Committee on 6/23. There was a disappointingly low response rate to the invitations that PFC sent out to the public (building professionals, etc.) There was some disagreement in the discussion about including an exemption – which is favored by the mayor - for cooking with gas. However, Ann Berwick thinks it is unlikely that anyone would want to include a gas stove in an otherwise all electric house. Jim said he expects expect more opposition in the future based on the operating cost differential in operating cost of a heat pump vs a gas furnace.

The draft ordinance and petition were held for further discussion by the committee in coming weeks.

2. Update on GHG emissions inventory

Evan Collins, the intern from Boston University who is working with Michael Gevelber to update the greenhouse gas inventory that is in the Climate Action Plans (both the NCCE's 30-year plan and the City's 5-year plan). After some fumbling by Jim in trying to let Evan share his screen, Evan presented the current state of the GHG inventory data update.

3. Letter to the Sustainability Team on Priority actions for implementing CAP

(A discussion draft was distributed to NCCE members in advance of the meeting.)

Halina discussed the City's CAP implementation strategy with Ann Berwick, who had asked for a list of what the City should /should not be doing. Demie has had similar conversations with Ann, Liora Silkes, Bill Ferguson, and others. One conclusion is agreement that Newton needs substantial resources to make energy retrofitting happen, and that would need to come from the state. Ann asked about specifics being done my other cities/towns and about barriers (legal, resource, etc.) and how others have dealt with these constraints.

Demie posed the question of how would we spend money if it were available from the federal government, and what amount of CO2 emissions would be saved per dollar.

Jon is shocked that the City's sustainability directors are not familiar with BERDO. Demie commented that their focus is implementation rather than developing concepts, which is the role that NCCE plays. Bill and Ann are totally immersed in the details of doing what they have been tasked to do.

Jim commented that it is Ann and Bill whom the City will seek advice from when we propose a concept, so they need to be up to date on our thinking.

Cory commented that financial considerations are given very much weight by the City administration. So more resources are needed to carry out the implementation process; strategic planning is needed to address this.

Halina noted that the other aspect is the capacity of staff to do the work.

Halina's discussed her proposed list of priorities. Her premise – because other volunteer groups s are dedicated to promoting EVs, we – NCCE – should focus on commercial buildings.

Stephen asked, "So, do we agree with the premise? Yes, he agrees that we should focus our work on what hasn't been addressed by others, e.g., existing buildings. In looking for tactical things to do, it is better to pursue the team approach with collaboration with others, such as Mothers Out Front, etc. And we should fill in the gaps in Halina's table. Stephen would invest more in information systems, such as including permits in the assessors database. We should get unnecessary labor out of handling information and do that by investing in information systems.

Jon said Stephen put his hand on the problem, but we just don't have the infrastructure in place to deal with it. The City's permitting system is being redone, but we don't know yet exactly how that affects our objectives. We're the only group that has a chance to offer the technical guidance needed.

Jon stated that a Newton BERDO should be implemented as soon as possible. Also, we need to get contractors and suppliers involved, e.g., at City events. Jim agrees with Jon.

Halina asked, so how shall we translate this all into action?

Stephen recommend that Ann and Bill dedicate say 20% of their time to the business model.

Jon said we need to identify half a dozen questions that need to be answered, but which we can't answer now, so as to demonstrate what resources should be assigned to getting those answers.

Halina asked Stephen and Jon to come up with the list of questions that need to be answered.

Halina summarized her proposed priorities and related assignments:

1 - A top priority is a functioning data management system. Demie volunteered to help with this. Jon and Stephen will work with her.

#2 – Get Liora Silkes to devote a chunk of her time to working with contractors. Jon will approach her about this.

#3 – The City’s legal department says we can’t use the term “energy scorecard” in connection with home energy assessments, but we need to develop something with that function. Essentially requiring owners to get a score, which is publicly posted. There should be further discussion with Ian Finlayson at the Mass. Department of Energy Resources about this.

Jon noted that Special Permit language is being developed to require electrification, but we lack the information to quantify its potential impact.

Halina commented, “Again, where should we put our resources?” Stephen said: In 2019 we proposed the requirement for a HERS rating, and the Mayor opposed that then, but said she might support getting people to disclose their energy use. She might be willing to do this now, as a thought leader. So this might be a good thing to ask.

Jon said, it certainly is an interesting question to pose.

Councilor Malakie said she can foresee opposition to sharing private information with the public.

Jon said requiring a blower door test (for other than new construction) would cost a fair amount, but the data is already there in the utility bills. So we would need to demonstrate how it will have an effect toward meeting our carbon goals.

Cory commented, this is not about saving money on your utility bill – which has always been the stated objective of these programs in the past – but rather about reducing GHG emissions.

Jon suggested the wording – “to better understand your energy use” - rather than “disclosure.”

Demie agreed with Cory that messaging is key. Demie had suggested earlier today to enlist a PR person to help in finding the best way to present this.

Halina asked, shall we continue this discussion in a month? Or sooner? There was agreement to do both.

Halina said she will nudge Stephen, Jon, and Demie to take the another steps discussed above.

The meeting was adjourned at 9 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Jim Purdy