

Newton Citizens Commission on Energy

City of Newton

<https://www.newtonma.gov/government/climate-and-sustainability/citizens-commission-on-energy>



Mayor Ruthanne Fuller

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

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Minutes of the Meeting of August 25, 2021

The meeting was held on Zoom.

Attending: Halina Brown, Michael Gevelber, Stephen Grody, Philip Hanser, Jon Kantar, Jim Purdy;
Cory Alperstein, Fred Brustman, Evan Collins, Bill Ferguson, Philip Vergragt

1. Update on BERDO for Newton (Bill Ferguson)
2. Memo on recommendations for action by the City: training of contractors (Jonathan Kantar)
3. GHG emission inventory: major conclusions (Evan Collins)
4. Working with Green Newton, MOF, and 350 Mass to prepare questions for candidates for the City Council (Cory Alperstein)

1. BERDO update

Bill Ferguson reported that he is putting a fair amount of time into this project and has been able to carve out time several days a week. He has drafted a list of questions and some answers for our own use.

There have been two BERDO meetings in Boston (one for public comment, plus a working session last week) There will be a listening session tomorrow evening (August 26) at 5:30. He is using these to learn about how the public is reacting in Boston. Matt O'Malley and other members of the Boston City council have been working on BERDO 2.0 for a couple of years. (Bill noted that in Boston, Councilors are full time and have staff.)

To date there are no studies of Boston with evidence that carbon/energy has been reduced by the disclosure requirements. Halina said that there are some studies of NYC showing some impact.

Michael said BERDO 1.0 is to get people to do assessments and create a database. Back-of-envelope calculations say a very small number of organizations can have a major impact in Newton. It's a first and important step.

Bill added, and learn to use the Portfolio Manager tool.

Michael said that owing to BERDO 1, owners will get the message and start to take action.

Bill said we need to show that BERDO 1 can have an impact. So it is helpful to get evidence from other places. E.g., the study cited in Jon Kantar's article:

https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2021-02/documents/benchmarking_building_performance_standards_section1.pdf

Stephen said that BERDO is following on initiatives by USDOE, so they have some confidence that it is useful. When you focus on large properties, and achieve transparency, the story becomes clearer. In Europe the governments got together and set forth regs that allow countries to set forth their experience (Denmark & UK). Economists there have conducted analyses on the effect on the market – it responds to the information, and the buildings become more efficient as people invest in them.

Halina said, so there is more analysis out there than we have made known.

Philip said we need BERDO 1.0 to get the data needed for 2.0.

Bill is compiling questions for Prof. Alison Briseas, who is working on the Boston BERDO. She may be able to answer some and raise others. Bill is thinking of making the first meeting a small one, perhaps just with Bill and Briseas.

Bill has also exchanged emails with Ann Berwick about BERDO; and she raised the issue of the Air Pollution Commission in Boston (APCC) – it has authority to write regs and enforce the rules. Ann is interested in following this up. There might be state enabling authority for Boston; this may or may not apply as well to Newton, So it is better to get Ann to look at this rather than going to Newton's Law Dept.

Phil said the APCC does permitting on several sources of pollution, e.g., abrasives and chemical cleaning agents. Who does it in Newton? Perhaps the Health Department, but they probably don't get into the area of Greenhouse Gases. And does Cambridge have an APCC?

Stephen asked about the time frame of the Newton BERDO. Bill replied that we just started today, so we'll see where this leads. Bill is also keeping the subject in front of Jonathan Yeo; we want to make a cogent case for BERDO. With City Council support, it seems quite promising.

Halina said that we will need answers to questions that are likely to be asked about a BERDO, such as , will it drive away business? Will it have high administrative costs? What does enforcement look like? etc.

Stephen said that there are the same opportunities for transparency on building performance on the residential side. So need to keep that side in mind.

Michael pointed out that NCCE member Asa Hopkins has worked on the cost analysis for Boston BERDO with his company Synapse. So, we can develop an answer to impact on business.

Bill said, and also how Boston involved building owners.

Jim said we also need to include the Chamber of Commerce.

Halina noted that the home rule petition to limit gas heating has been criticized for inadequate cost/benefit analysis.

Bill added, we need to think about typical property owners and how they would be affected and potential costs for them to comply; and how they would react.

Jon said we should get a profile for each of the major property owners.

Phil suggested we reach out to Boston's Economic Development Officer. And involve Newton's EDO. Jon added – and bring the Chamber into the discussion.

2. Recommendations to the City

Halina noted that the memo is intended to respond to Ann's questions to Halina from several months ago. It has two parts:

1. Training and involvement of contractors.
2. Involvement of homeowners.

Jon has finished the part 1 revisions for discussion tonight. Halina suggested that we dedicate the next NCCE meeting on to how to work with homeowners.

Jon summarized his work on the memo: he cleaned up the previous draft of Part 1 and provided some examples and opportunities, including a list of companies to use as a resource.

Jon proposed that we send the first part to Bill Ferguson, and this would be helpful for the Mayor to know.

Michael said that his neighborhood in Auburndale is an example of peer-to-peer communication; Laya Steinberg is working on how to facilitate this kind of communication by creating a template for people, organizations, and neighborhoods to do this. Is there a role for the City to play?

Jon said yes, but it seems to fit mostly on the residential side.

Halina said that Energy Coach Liora Silkes is working to develop this kind of communication program. But homeowners incentives may not be sufficient. Halina suggested sending the first section of the memo around, with second set forthcoming in a month.

Stephen said we need to set the time frame at the outset and then stick to it.

Cory said, this discussion is very important in the context of the Mayoral and Council elections. So, it would be good to be specific about all aspects. Including new construction vs renovation. So we should have an informal conversation with the Mayor. Jon strongly agrees about getting the information to her and about emphasis on existing homes as well as new construction.

Stephen agreed: stick to the original plan.

Halina said, let's finish the memo in a month; then send it around for member reaction and improvements. Maybe we will be able to send the memo a month from now [i.e., October]. But we should also communicate informally with the City's sustainability team. Cory added, with the Mayor in particular.

Stephen will work with JK to pull it together. Jim and Phil Hanser will be the readers.

Michael said, this brings up the subject of politics. What we come up with should be posted on our website. Let the candidates avail themselves of it and answer questions about their views on it.

*Cory posted: Here is the google doc version of the Memo draft - anyone can comment:
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1xDP-UwHabrIBgg5MZRPTPLbgUOYjZIVR/edit>*

3. GHG inventory

Evan reviewed the findings on a series of slides, with comments on each of them.

1. Recalculated 2013 inventory: Overestimated some sectors in 2013 by large margin, especially residential transport and residential use of gas and oil for heating.
2. The transportation sector was overestimated by 53% based on incorrect VMT (vehicle miles travelled).

We don't have VMT for recent years. Some of the 4% decrease since 2013 was due to EVs (42%) and from fewer total vehicles registered in Newton (58%).

Phil Hanser said he is concerned about the growing share of SUVs with lower mileage per gallon.

3. Natural gas use

This has been more or less flat since 2011 on the Residential side; there is a discontinuity on the commercial side, which is an artifact of the Chestnut Hill definition.

The use of natural gas scales with the increasing average house size.

4. Electricity use

The trend is very flat, with a similar discontinuity due to Chestnut Hill definition

Total GHG due to electricity are

745,300 MT of CO₂e in 2013 and 717,500 MT in 2019.

The changes in electricity are due to Newton Power Choice in Residential use (25%) and 3% from residential rooftop solar). There is a reduction in Commercial electricity, but the increase in commercial natural gas offsets 40% of the electric reductions.

For residential users: 68% of accts is now Newton Power Choice, but only 58% of residential kWh.

Commercial use is 50% for NPC accts, but this amounts to only 18% of commercial kWh

Jon said we should look at the non-NPC sector and see where it is opt out vs competing suppliers like Clean Choice that solicits residential business.

EVs are estimated to be 1.67% of registered vehicles in Newton (including plug-in hybrids.)

Philip Vergragt said it is extremely important to communicate these findings to City Council.

4. Working with Green Newton, MOF, and 350 Mass to prepare questions for candidates for the City Council

Cory said we have an opportunity to influence city council candidates by using a questionnaire to get them to engage. A Google doc has been set up that allows NCCE, Green Newton , et al to participate in drafting the questions for candidates.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00

Respectfully submitted by Jim Purdy