

# 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 October 27, 2021

The meeting was held on Zoom.

Attending: Halina Brown, Michael Gevelber, Stephen Grody, Philip Hanser, Jon Kantar, Jim Purdy;  
Cory Alperstein, Fred Brustman, Councilor Deb Crossley, Philip Vergragt

Agenda:

### 1. Debriefing on Climate Summit meeting of October 27, 2021

Phil Hanser said he was disappointed with the meeting – there was no discussion of alternatives, and he had understood that it was to be about the residential sector, but spent a lot of time on BERDO and other issues.. So how can we move forward?

Halina said she asked Jonathan Yeo to invite Inspectional Services, Economic Development but only the sustainability team attended. She said that in her presentation she tried to make residential buildings the central emphasis. She added that we need both top-down and bottom up action at the same time.

Deb Crossley, who attended the summit, said that she got Halina's message advocating for mandates as well as incentives. Deb said her experience is that City Council needs a clear proposal to be set before them. There needs to be a plan of action that a lay person can understand. Deb is on the working group on electrification; she and Ann are working with Newton Wellesley Hospital (NWH), which is wary of the electrification ordinance. (NWH is active in the Boston BERDO.)

So to make progress, first the concept needs to be made clear. And there needs to be a plan for a process to go forward

Halina said NCCE is working equally on BERDO and residential. And we are working with Demie, Pete Smith and Greg Reibman to have a meeting with the Chamber subcommittee on real estate. She doesn't fully understand what Pete Smith (head of the Chamber Environmental Committee) is doing and how it fits with the rest of what NCCE is doing.

Michael disagreed that we should work exclusively on things other than BERDO; we've done a ton of work in the residential sector. We should have a seat at the table about BERDO discussions.

Deb said, we're at the very beginning on BERDO.

Jon said that it was good at the summit meeting to hear that Bill Ferguson is working with the Professor Alison Briseas who is working on the Boston on BERDO.

Phil Hanser said, for now we should concentrate on addressing the residential sector.

Deb hopes NCCE will speak to the council at the appropriate time about the importance of BERDO. In the meantime, it is important to educate the Councilors as to NCCE's proposed actions.

Halina agreed that we should work to bring the Council up to date on our proposals, which are in the memo that we have been working on. It concerns the residential sector from both the demand side (residents) and supply side (contractors doing the home energy work).

Stephen said he opposes speaking to council until the Council does its work by hearing testimony from the head of the City's legal department to clear off their legal questions about what there might be that makes the City of Newton unauthorized to do what it is that the City of Cambridge and the City of Boston have already done, as has been claimed on multiple occasions on multiple initiatives by multiple people who are and are not lawyers. Doing that work up front is needed so to not waste people's time on an effort that could otherwise be ended for lack of homework. And if it is concluded to be illegal, we should author an Op-Ed piece telling the public that the NCCE and Newton has failed at implementing the Climate Action Plan.

Halina said the NCCE hasn't been part of setting electrification as a city priority, but Deb said that one of the CAP actions was to work with the state.

Halina has been calling for a session to develop a strategy.

Philip Vergragt said he understood that the morning's summit meeting was for developing a strategy, but that's not what happened.

Halina said Demie and Jonathan Yeo went back and forth on the agenda for the summit.

Deb said the council is distracted by a large number of issues, despite many people wanting to move the CAP implementation forward.

Cory said she was struck by how much knowledge and commitment there is among all the people concerned with climate action. But she sees a sizeable amount of frustration in trying to convince people what needs to be done. Cory is concerned about how to get Newton's large and capable community focused on the top problem, which is climate action.

Philip V said the push needs to come from the top, and the mayor needs to be more involved. And that includes speaking to the big institutions like NWH to participate meaningfully with the City.

## **2. Memo to the City on CAP Implementation**

Halina said she wants to focus for the rest of the meeting on the document draft she sent yesterday: proposals for the residential sector. The key part is to develop an ordinance that requires every homeowner to have an energy audit. This is referred to in the memo as EUTP (energy use transparency program) (there is both a commercial - and a residential EUTP).

The residential part is a development of the CAP recommendation E.3.2 – “explore opportunities for an energy scorecard”.

In the memo we have eliminated the focus on buyer/seller transactions as the point of action; instead we just want every homeowner to be required to do it.

This raises the key questions: What kind of assessment? How are the results presented? Stephen Grody’s proposal [entitled “before 2050”] answers these questions.

Stephen reviewed the key points: Building on the existing assessor database, this program will come up with the key answers to the homeowner’s questions: “your energy intensity index; and what you can do to improve it.”

This does not propose penalties like Boston’s BERDO 2.0, but the Council could later consider that.

The proposal is to nudge people toward getting an energy assessment - when construction occurs, when a new owner acquires it, etc. It remains to be determined exactly how, what incentives are provided, etc.

The problem is that follow-up of energy assessments is very weak: the past data shows that on an annual basis, 1000 assessments leads to 200 jobs. So the strategy is to increase to 4000 assessments per year, which will presumably lead to 800 home energy improvement projects.

Philip V asked, how does disclosure speed up the home energy improvement process? Halina replied, because published assessments will draw people’s attention. To be effective, the mayor needs to engage with the process.

Cory said she understands the idea of pushing forward with more assessments, but she doesn’t see the connection to efficiency construction and getting off of fossil fuels.

Jon replied that we also need to talk about the supply side as well as the demand side. Need to demystify home energy improvements. The second part of the memo does this. We propose creating a team that is familiar with home retrofits and create a standard product. (Checklists for each home improvement would be an important tool – as demonstrated by Atul Gawande’s checklists in the medical field.)

Jon added that both the demand side and the supply side have short term and long term aspects.

Phil Hanser said he had hoped that the summit meeting would discuss these ideas, but it didn’t happen.

Jon said the Greenhouse Gas Inventory discussion sets up the issues nicely for presentation to the city council – it demonstrates the importance of residential buildings and the relatively small improvements in this sector to date.

Jon proposes that we hold a symposium for the City Council to bring them up to speed on these issues.

Philip V said we’ve been more influential with the Council than with the administration. He feels uncomfortable that we are the initiators of this discussion in the Council rather than the administration.

Jon replied that the administration wrote a CAP that contains much of the NCCE’s document. Her sees the NCCE as the strategy group – it’s our mission to get the administration to do the right thing.

Deb said, both the administration and the Council have been persuaded and give NCCE a lot of support. So we need to continue to work together.

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Stephen said docket item 181-21 is what Deb docketed which addresses commercial uses; now Halina has proposed taking action on both parts. So, generalize the docketed item to include residential. Deb explained that the docket item's purpose is to start a discussion in the Council committees. But before going ahead with the Council, we need to develop a pilot program on the residential side to see how it works.

Halina suggested that if 24 Councilors participate in the pilot program, the discussion will be better.

Jon said, we need say 50 people to do the energy assessment we've been discussing. Then present the program and its results at a symposium, which will get a larger group to do it.

Philip V said, he agrees with Cory that the climate action groups could have more effect in getting more people to participate.

Stephen said Deb should do a docket item that captures the full proposal.

Jon said, so let's get 50 people to use the app and have the results we need to present to the council.

Halina said, so that's a plan of action. Jon will work with Philip V for 350 , Cory will help; plus, Green Newton.

Halina asked Deb to enlist the city councilors. Deb said she would – but first she needs a description to present to the council.

Jon and Phil Hanser will draft the necessary description of what needs to be discussed with the Council.

Deb said, there will be lots of questions, especially procedural ones. So we need to create a model for the residential piece, because there is no other community that has done it.

HB Halina will work with Deb on this, potentially also with Alison Leary and Emily Norton if that's the best way.

Deb reiterated that first we need to get an understanding of what this proposal is.

Halina asked, who is going to explain this exercise we want people to undertake with their home.

Deb said a symposium needs some planning – it could be a Zoom co-sponsored by the library? LWV? Other co-sponsors?

Stephen said first we need to get enough of a commitment from the Council that “there’s a there there”.

Jon said he takes some exception with Stephen. First we need some outreach to others, e.g., the Green Newton Building Standards Committee, and 350 MA. Then hold a symposium. If we’re educating the City Council, we should do it with the others on our side.

Stephen said his commitment to NCCE is to make this work, and so he will appreciate not be put in a position of being openly accused by elected officials of having a conflict of interest.

Deb said, we all put in a lot of volunteer work, and you always face criticism and negative feedback despite your work.

Halina said, recognizing Stephen’s concern, let’s try to move in the best way.

Phil H summarized:

1. Get some number of people to create a sample using the app, and give it to Stephen to process
2. Have a zoom meeting of some sort to give it public exposure, hopefully with co-sponsors like Green Newton.
3. Deb will go back to the original docketed discussion item and broaden it to include the residential sector, and get councilors to be participants.

Halina added:

4. with Phil Hanser and Cory, create a description that Deb can use to explain this all to the Council members. It should include the instructions for users who are participating.

Cory suggested that we should also do a little video demonstrating what we want participants to do and how to do it.

Halina said, going back to the memo, we need someone to do a light edit of the document. Phil H volunteered.

Michael said, at some point he would like us to discuss what this information program will do. A company called O-Power did something like this. Phil H is familiar with that; he said they got something like a 10% response.

Michael said, second, we want people to take action, which could be like the front end for a business. It needs to connect with some business, because we need a company to be involved in this. Maybe it’s MassSave (hard to work with), or Energy Sage, or some other. But it’s not enough for us to collect data.

Phil H said he’s not sure about Michael’s proposition; maybe the infrastructure exists in Newton.

Cory said, looking at the larger picture, a public-private partnership with resources from both sides, can provide what is needed, looking strategically. Ann Arbor is an example. We shouldn’t need to rely on one or two individuals.

Phil said, let’s hold this discussion at another time.

Deb said Michael’s point really resonates with her. A similar type of thing came out of the Carter administration in the 70s: you get a computer doing analysis, but then you need to know what do you do

with it. There was once a state energy office that did the kind of thing that Cory was talking about. Deb is not sure the City of Newton can do it on its own.

Phil H said, we need a fuller discussion about this.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00

Item in the meeting chat:

Stephen Grody to Everyone (8:25 PM)

*<https://www.newtonma.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/69909/637568684759330000>*

#181-21 Request for Discussion and Ordinance to require energy use reporting.

COUNCILORS CROSSLEY, LEARY AND NORTON on behalf of the Newton Citizens Commission on Energy (NCCE),

requesting discussion and an ordinance that would require large property owners (campuses and large commercial buildings) to report energy use and associated greenhouse gas emissions annually to the city of Newton, to be used to encourage reductions in said energy use and greenhouse gas emissions in accordance and support of the goals set forth in the Newton Climate Action Plan.

Respectfully submitted by Jim Purdy