

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

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 September 29, 2021

The meeting was held on Zoom.

Attending: Michael Gevelber, Stephen Grody, Philip Hanser, Jon Kantar, Jim Purdy

Agenda:

1. Memo on recommendations for action by the City (Stephen Grody, Philip Hanser, Jonathan Kantar)
2. GHG inventory update – comments on Powerpoint (not discussed)
3. Request to COO Jonathan Yeo for a climate action summit (not discussed because the summit meeting is already in the works)
4. Update on home rule petition to encourage electrification (not discussed)

1. There was a discussion of how to give credit for rooftop solar, even if the host sells the RECs (e.g., through a power purchase agreement in which the installer keeps the RECs.) Michael suggested a special solar producer credit of some kind.

Stephen pointed out the difference in a town like Wellesley that has its own electric utility.

Philip suggested that a carbon offset is different than reducing actual net consumption. He will write up his conclusions on this subject.

2. Memo to City:

This memo, which the Commission has been working on might be titled “CCAP Implementation 1.5: Building Our Climate-Aware Economy”

Stephen suggested, that the document should respond to the issues in colloquial language while retaining some precision. It shouldn't sound like a complaint without specifics on what should be done by the City. Second, the scope shouldn't be too narrow. And third, it should be understandable by the average person.

The memo has not been changed since the previous version.

Michael asked, isn't this to explain how to implement the CAP? Then we need to include the dates by which these things are to be accomplished.

Stephen said that this document is intended to address the question "Now what do you want me to do?"

Philip said we need to identify the subject areas that need to be worked on, and provide an idea on how to accomplish that. He is concerned about being too prescriptive about what needs to be done.

Stephen asked what language would be "less prescriptive?" For example: "Here's our suggestion as to how to do it." If contractors neglect using the best technology there should be a sort of "contractor university" explaining how to do it right.

Jon agrees with these concerns. The short answer should be something like: "we're not getting enough electrification done, and the easiest ways to accomplish this are x,y,z ...etc."

We have taken a stab at the issue "how to reach out to stakeholders" and offer to help.

Phil said that except regarding the "Before 2050" app, the Energy Commission shouldn't take away the initiative from the City staff. It's not a one-sided exercise.

Jon said the tone needs to be collegial, and offer to work with the City sustainability staff.

Michael said that in his experience the executive in charge has to ask the staff to do it.

Jon said the short answer has to be specific "do a, b, and c." And explain what those are.

Jon added that the inventory update tells the story that what we've been doing so far hasn't had much effect. Frame it as "We make these suggestions because we believe the staff is capable of making it happen."

Michael added that we should write it to be the City's document – not NCCE's.

Phil noted that the cover letter should set the tone.

Stephen said we need to have a due date. Better if it is before election day.

Jon agreed that we should finish it in time for the Mayor to have it in her pocket.

Phil wondered if the letter could be completed first, with the report to follow.

Stephen pointed out that as written the letter represents NCCE's perspective.

Phil said the report should make concrete the things in the letter. E.g., "These are approaches to meet the goals set forth in the letter, but not necessary the only things, just a good start."

Jon said that Stephen's rendition puts it in a larger framework so the person in charge can see how they all relate – e.g., heat pump combined with a financing mechanism" - which creates a useful synergy.

Phil agreed, with regard to financing mechanisms.

Jon said reaching out has to be a well-thought-out process. He envisions a one-page informal letter to Ann – sharing our thoughts and asking how best to present it.

Michael said the document should be a set of ideas for carbon reduction within the built environment. It needs to be focused, and it should explain what is most important, what the barriers are, and how to overcome them.

He added that the built environment is most troublesome because it lasts so long. So we need emphasis on transportation, which has a shorter time frame for change.

Stephen asked if the memo should include transportation, or set that subject aside in another document.

Michael said that an example of overlap is ensuring that new construction has enough electrical service to power the requisite number of EV chargers.

Phil commented that he is not sure who owns the transformer for a big apartment building.

Michael said that transportation has to be a partnership with Eversource.

It was agreed that everyone will read through the letter and report in the coming week. Jim will look at how best to do transportation recommendations. We should be ready to share the results in a week (i.e., Weds Oct 6)

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00

Respectfully submitted by Jim Purdy