

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, Beverly Craig, Philip Vergragt

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 May 25, 2022

The meeting was held on Zoom.

Attending: Halina Brown, Michael Gevelber, Stephen Grody, Philip Hanser, Jon Kantar, Jim Purdy, Cory Alperstein, Philip Vergragt; Julia LeGuette, Bob Persons, Scott Rodman, Amy Mah Sangiolo, Jon Slote, Jay Snyder,

1. Recap of discussion on meeting with Josh Morse regarding replacement of boilers at NSHS. Stephen said he doubts that it was really an emergency situation, and that the public should have had an opportunity to influence the decision that was made to replace the boilers in kind rather than with heat pumps. Jon echoed Stephen's point, but he added that Jon has never seen anyone more prepared than Josh Morse, who has already been planning how to reach net zero in City buildings. The Design Review Commission has worked with Josh to move in the right direction regarding energy, though the City could do more on air sealing and insulation. Jon is surprised that an alternative is even available for NSHS. We can't wait for those solutions. They're not emergencies but we do need to focus, and there will be situations where the money needs to be spent to address the problem.

Philip Vergragt said that Josh Morse was very convincing, but the communication process was very flawed. They should say: yes we have a plan, but emergencies do arise.

Halina said the key question was how NCCE can be helpful. We need to come back to the communication issue. Does Jon think we should be involved in making these decisions?

Bob P: Steam heating systems converted to hydronic could be served by GSHPs, but cost-effective heat pump generation of steam is unlikely.

Jon said, but there are some options to consider, e.g., changing window R-values, etc.

Halina likes Stephen's idea of providing a sort of brain trust for the City on this matters.

Stephen said he supports what Jon just said. The replacement of boilers and improving the envelope, have to compete in the CIP with all other projects. It's a decision that is made in the budgeting process but

doesn't rest with the Public Buildings Dept. So, other than trying to find a heat pump solution, there might be another technology available that should be considered, e.g., from outside the U.S. Such as a "buyers' collaborative" to reach minimum efficient scale for that kind of a deal.

Halina asked, would you like to develop this idea further? Stephen replied that it seems like it ought to be doable, though difficult. Need to get our ducks in order first, and get the Mayor's ok to pursue the conversation with producers. Halina said, the first step would be to get Josh Morse on board. Jon added that Boston and Cambridge might be interested in this idea.

Halina suggested that Josh should reach out to NCCE to engage in conversations about this; she will write a thank you to Josh and include these ideas.

Cory said she really want us to discuss geogrids - networked geothermal - this is going to happen and we can start it. HEET.org

Cory in chat:

Jonathan, please look at HEET.org. It lays out how things would work, why it is a real solution for MA transitioning off of gas (estimate is 80% could be covered with geogrids) and how this is moving forward with Gas Leaks Allies - a great group of energy experts who have been working to develop this and have the attention finally of the utilities - Eversource and National Grid are doing a total of 6 pilot projects.

Amy in chat

You could group South, Brown and Oak Hill. JK commented that there's not really any system that can reach the temperatures needed for a steam system

2 Update on survey listening sessions.

Philip Vergragt gave a presentation on the listening sessions that followed the survey discussed at the previous NCCE meetings. He thanked Julia LeGuette for helping at the sessions.

Key points

- People need info on Newton Power Choice, heat pumps, and induction cookers
 - Costs and where to begin are key obstacles
 - Climate related websites and Mayor's updates are leading sources of how people get their info. Energy Coaches rank quite low.
- Moved discussions to what people would like the City to do.
- Bold, proactive role, long term view
 - Make CAP more accessible
 - Guide residents to trusted sources.
 - Leverage City economies of scale: bulk purchases
 - Communicate relentlessly. Mayor's newsletters have particular impact.

-Stay close to residents' needs and interests. A "Citizens' Council" might help; follow up from listening sessions?

Scott asked, how did reactions compare with you anticipations? Philip said they expected more skepticism. He was surprised by how low the City's communications ranked.

Scott said Bill F needs help with the communications he sends out.

Jon Slote said many people are stopped by not knowing whom to trust.

Scott said he didn't understand many things that he had to learn in doing his solar arrays.

Jon Slote said there is very low awareness about energy coaches: one of the lowest hanging fruit items.

Amy in chat: NewtonDems are planning to host a webinar with Liora

Jon Slote said we weren't able to present the six point scale tonight, but the Mayor should know she'd have a receptive audience; there's a monster opportunity here.

Cory said this work is great. There might be a plan of action attached to the results that are given to the Mayor. We need a major campaign. Philip said they didn't lead the participants, and just reported what they said; they didn't want to put their own ideas in with the results.

Jon Kantar said he wouldn't bring it to the Mayor in a confrontational way; she will be able to draw conclusions. But provide her with your qualifications as experts.

Stephen added his compliments on how well this was all done. He agrees with Jon K's advice, but would add that it's worth briefing Ann and the Mayor's communications person first. Also, there are two different things here: what was said, and operational recs on how best to proceed; the Mayor's newsletter is event driven, but could also use a calendar of some periodicity reminding people of the Energy Coach, providing news about City building plans, etc. Need to repeat to drive home the message, and a schedule is the way to do that.

Philip noted that Ann Berwick was informed from the beginning; there is a meeting with her on Tuesday.

Update on BERDO

Halina reported that BERDO is progressing as well as can be expected. Next, it needs to go to public presentations, City Council, etc.

-A timeline was provisionally accepted by Bill F

-They are tentatively accepting VPPA and Class 1 RECS

-Web page will be newtonma.gov/berdo

-2023 will be the base year for energy use, to be reported in 2024

-Ann is working on Admin Structure and Enforcement sections of the ordinance

-Need to decide about the energy investment fund allocations, and fees/fines – one possibility is to help affordable housing. Bev Craig is working on this after consulting with Cambridge and Boston.

Reached out to EDC. They just created a sustainability subgroup - Jack Leader and Lisa Adams

-Bill is working on info sessions on June 15,22,and29th. Mayor is reviewing.

-The Sustainability staff is going to report to ZAP and also Land Use, probably in June.

-Ann is exploring a Help Desk that includes Newton, Cambridge, Boston, Watertown.

Cory asked Halina how she feels about progress? Halina said she is hopeful, but it's not certain that things will progress fast enough.

Jon K asked, has Bill reached out to any businesses? Halina said no, not yet. Jon said we should perhaps line up some friendly partners to present to first. E.g., Peter Merrigan of Taurus. Then some major players in Boston's BERDO who have Newton properties.

Someone needs to make an introduction for Bill – the Mayor or someone like that.

HB will speak to Michael Gevelber about playing a role; bring it to Bill and Ann at their regular weekly meeting

Municipal Climate Action Panel

Organized by Amy Sangiolo.

About 40 attended.

Halina and Ann B talked informally about what they are doing.

Amy said we need to get more Newton Dems engaged to learn more about what regular Dems know and what they need to work on their own. The program will go to YouTube, Newton Dems website. She hopes to get Liora to speak to them. Get more stories out there. How you do it. Where do you start. The small steps they can take

Other Matters

Scott said, you all did great with the HERS process, but the data is not being kept up by the City, even though it was supposed to be automatic. Jon said they recently changed to a new reporting system and he hoped that it would be incorporated. Scott checked the permit system newtonma.viewpointcloud.com and found a home verification summary document HERS rater file.

<https://newtonma.viewpointcloud.com/records/700935>

Need to find permit files that have actually closed. Scott volunteered to do it.

He's working with the Build Show Network - Matt Reisinger on a televised 24-part Passive House program using a house in Lincoln.

Scott wants to build a Passive House as a demo (like the GE house in Pittsfield)

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Jim Purdy