

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), Cory Alperstein, Michael Gevelber, Stephen Grody, Philip Hanser, Asa Hopkins, Jonathan Kantar, James Purdy (Vice Chair), Jay Snyder, Ann Berwick, William Ferguson (*ex-officio*)
Advisory Members: Fred Brustman, Beverly Craig, Philip Vergragt

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Minutes of the Meeting of October 27, 2022

The meeting was held on Zoom.

Attending: Halina Brown, Cory Alperstein, Michael Gevelber, Stephen Grody, Asa Hopkins, Jon Kantar, Jim Purdy, Jay Snyder; Chris Alt, Councilor Deb Crossley, Marcia Cooper, Ellie Goldberg, Stacy Humphrey, Scott Rodman, Liora Silkes, Jon Slote, Demie Stathoplos, Philip Vergragt, Leslie Zebrowitz.

1. Discussion with Endless Energy: Matt Kidd, Rick Conaughton, and John Shulda

Endless Energy is a home performance contractor, allowed by MassSave to do both the audit and the home energy upgrade. They are based in Marlboro, with 75 staff

The City selected them to received referrals. Their appointment runs through 2025

CEO Matt Kidd introduced the company.

They've been associated with MassSave since 2015. They perform MassSave energy assessment, weatherization, and air source heat pump installations, as the homeowner wishes. About 30% of energy assessments become weatherizations. Endless Energy's appointment is a year-long contract with two options to renew for an additional year. The first one-year campaign is in progress, with the goal to increase the number of assessments, weatherization installs, and HP installs which will continue to increase and hit the yearly goals by 2025. They have already sent 40K direct mailers, and are in discussion with the City to sending more.

A one-year campaign is in progress. Their goals are to do 4000 assessments, 800 weatherizations, and 450 HP installations.

For a MassSave heat pump rebate, the owner must first have an assessment and weatherization.

Marketing: They plan to send 40k direct mail pieces.

They are working on commercials for Newton residents; MassSave approved the scripting

They plan to do a canvassing campaign in the spring with Newton high school students.

All told, they expect to do 2.8 million “impressions”, a marketing term that counts each exposure to the program, e.g., direct mail, door knock, and other contacts.

Jay asked, does Endless have preferred vendor status in Newton only? A: yes.

Cory asked about necessary electrical upgrades. A: There is support through the MassSave Heat Loan (which may possibly be expanded next year.) Endless says a few hundred dollars, but the cost can range into a few thousand dollars.

Q: Where did Newton get the 450 goal for installations?

A: Energy Commission performed a sophisticated analysis and published it in the 2019 Newton Citizens Climate Action Plan. Q: What is their marketing approach? A: Direct mail is targeted, by type of house and household.

Rick said, the challenge is target the most likely households.

John Shulda added that some homes have barriers, e.g., knob and tube wiring.

A typical older home has 60-70 Amp service; so a service upgrade to 200 Amp is generally needed to electrify. Costs range from a few hundred to Shortages are frequently cropping up for electric meter sockets, which are sometimes backlogged.

Philip asked how Endless increases electrical capacity from current level? Rick responded that they meet with the customer in two phases – they can start at either end of the process from insulation to ASHP and EV chargers, or back again. Batteries are expensive for homeowners, so about half of Endless’s account reps are cross trained so they can talk about solar, batteries, HVAC. He added that batteries need to be located in conditioned spaces.

Jon asked what is the philosophy for an initial visit, i.e., how holistic in terms of the scope of improvements considered.

Rick said MassSave limits the scope of certain insulation work eligible for Heat Loans, but they can work beyond the limits of MassSave. Endless is not in the spray foam business, but they can explain all the MassSave incentives.

Jon added that there are limits in terms of conditioned space where HVAC equipment can be located.

Asa asked two questions. 1. Are Tax credits integrated with the rest of the work? A: Two systems qualify for credit; reconvening to consider this challenge, e.g. systems that are efficient at 5 degrees F. vs systems that are good down to -13 degrees.

2. HP water heaters? - Matt – typically 5 customers per month (10%) feedback is mixed. A heat pump makes the space around it colder; they are also louder than gas water heaters. They present it as an option)

Matt – moving toward load management plus (smaller) upgrade.

Leslie- the easiest houses to upgrade are forced hot air

Rick – best candidates have not upgraded to current standards for insulation (pre-2000); can help those the most. Hot water or steam are ideal systems to insulate the attic and basement. The biggest challenge

in older homes is the wiring (knob/tube) The ideal candidate is a home that has not been treated, but they try to capture as many of these as possible. Can target mailings based on home age.

Matt – ductwork that was designed improperly is a problem; may require more alterations to ducting.

ASHPs are expensive if it requires new duct work.

Halina asked, how do you monitor success? Will we be able to tell whether there has been progress.

Matt replied, we're a metrics heavy organization, but we also look at qualitative feedback scores.

Batteries, can be explored when costs come down, and Endless goes back to these customers in 3-4 years.

Matt said to reach out with questions.

2. Climate Action Plan Next Steps

Halina listed three topics for NCCE to work on:

- BERDO
- Councilor Bowman's request for tracking of progress.
- Strategy for the residential sector

There are two approaches to emission targets in BERDO: Boston vs Cambridge approach to BERDO targets. The biggest part is the outreach by the City; Newton is following the Boston approach. It is moving very smoothly

Progress tracking info comes to inspectional services department. However, it is common for houses not to be updated in the assessors' database.

Councilor Bowman would like a small subgroup to propose ways to increase the efficiency of the process. We need to involve the Mayor's office. Jon K volunteers; also Christopher Alt, and Jay Snyder.

The residential sector is challenging because of the complexity of the problem.

Solutions to consider: full service contractors; demonstration projects.

Leading organizations to work with: Green Energy Consumers Alliance, the Clean Energy Center at CEC, Northeast Energy Efficiency Project.\

Inertia needs to be overcome. The "4 Our Future" campaign is a non-differentiated message: it goes to everyone regardless of specific circumstances, age of house, old heating system, new owners, sellers, etc.

Mandates are needed. E.g., EUI ratings for all homes (a draft ordinance has been docketed.)

Pilots on the street/neighborhood scale. An example is towel re-use in hotels has been successful by establishing a social norm, i.e., 'We take care of everything.'

There are helpful winds blowing: rising fuel cost, growing number of experienced contractors.

Halina asked, What is our role?

We need to understand the residential sector: micro-segmenting Newton homes; Jon Klein did work on this in the CCAP.

There have been successes and failures elsewhere; We should engage with other Newton organizations and other towns. Learn how to use the Building Efficiency Accelerator.

In sum, we need to brainstorm these approaches.

Philip V said, many people in the state are aware and committed.

Jay Snyder likes those ideas.

Our research shows that trust in contractors is an important barrier. They need to be vetted.

Pilots are important, but not concentrated in one neighborhood. Pilots are microsegments that can spur others to action.

Deb Crossley said, building “trust” is the key. MassSave is way behind in this respect, partly because the utilities run the program. They often get in the way. We need concerted lobbying. The science is already there today: we need to simplify it into best practices that lay persons can understand.

Jon echoed the importance of building trust: he still hasn’t found one contractor with the bandwidth to do it on a regular basis. And there is a lot of ignorance among the available contractors. He was disappointed in the presentation by Endless, because they are limited to the MassSave practices.

Halina asked, are they better than five years ago? I.e., trustworthy and competent.

Jon said it’s hard to see improvement, though manufacturers have requirements. The need for refilling refrigerant in Air Source Heat Pumps is a sign of trouble. The contractor Bygmeister identified pinhole leaks in some of their clients’ heat pump refrigerant lines.

Asa asked, how do we assemble a list of people who have done successful upgrades. We should organize tours of these homes.

Philip suggested we do a quick questionnaire of people who have done upgrades.

Liora said she has been collecting people who have had a successful practice. Canvassing and organizing block groups is a way to do this. We need to identify barriers – e.g., for renters vs owners.

Halina said it might be more effective to post signs while the work is going on so people can see what is being done and by what contractor. We need big signs; highlight the key words.

Stephen said that the analysis performed in 2019 for NCCAP compared Census data with assessors data in terms of tenancy and duration. The numbers exist. Use these as “negative space” – i.e., identify the

houses not to approach. Liora said such people come to her with this situation.

Jon said we need to be careful about jumping to negative conclusions, but with the basic MassSave actions, the homeowner will have huge savings in one year.

Cory said she appreciates Stephen’s point, but we need to shift the focus to the community level and how best to reduce emissions. Cost is a big factor that we can approach from a community perspective, e.g., bulk buying. Simplifying the process is needed, but we also need to list the problems that need to be overcome and how we can help people. We need to set up a community program.

Halina asked, is there any interest among us to do more detailed analysis of microsegments. E.g., like Jon Klein's analysis of older newton housing.

Stephen compared Census data with assessors data in terms of tenancy and duration. The numbers exist. Use these as "negative space" – i.e., identify the houses not to approach.

Jon K volunteered to be Stephen's assistant on this. Jon Slote is also interested in helping. Stephen invited Cory to join this working group.

Halina summarized: it's about collecting data and finding the best way to involve people.

Jay would like to work on Councilor Bowman's task: how best to track progress.

Halina proposed we meet as two sub-groups to do the work and there was general agreement to do this.

Group 1 will focus on data and quantitative analysis; Group 2 will work on ways to overcome homeowner inertia.

Based on the discussion, Halina will send out the membership of each group and its charge.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Jim Purdy