



CITY OF PORTSMOUTH NH
Portsmouth Energy Advisory Committee

MINUTES

Wednesday, January 8, 2025

Video recording:

<https://youtu.be/QB22iMm7kVw>

Present: Chair Councilor John Tabor, Councilor Kate Cook, Kevin Charette, Tom Rooney, Herb Lloyd, Tracey Camerson, Peter Somssich. Excused: Betsy Blaisdell, Ben D'Antonio. Staff: Jillian Harris (Planning & Sustainability Department), Stephanie Seacord (PIO and recording secretary)

AGENDA

Councilor Tabor called the meeting to order at 6:30.

1. Roll Call
2. On a motion by Councilor Cook, seconded by Kevin Charette, voted to approve minutes from December 5, 2024.
3. Chairman's remarks – Reviewed some of the 2024 Portsmouth Energy Advisory Committee's programs of work:
 - Residential Solar information night (Betsy Blaisdell)
 - Button Up seminar at Community Campus (Tracey Cameron)
 - Engage the National Research Energy Lab to study feasibility of wind power for the city's two wastewater treatment plants (Herb Lloyd)
 - Researching and publicizing exemption that allows Community Power users with early stage solar panels to net meter (Peter Somssich)
 - Research solar array on Jones Ave and obtain council vote for feasibility analysis in 2025 (all)
 - Research IRA grants for transportation and building efficiency (Tracey Cameron)
 - Green Energy Challenge with Durham, Exeter, Newmarket, Durham and Dover to spur opt-ups to Green 50 and Green 100 Community Power options.
 - CPCNH Member representation (Tom Rooney)

And Council Actions connected to PEAC initiatives:

- Nov 18, 2024: Feasibility of a 1-2 megawatt Municipal Solar Array on Jones Avenue Landfill - that the city explore the feasibility, built through contractors, of a large-scale solar array at the Jones Avenue Landfill to offset municipal utility costs and substantially reduce carbon emission - Voted that the city explore the feasibility, built through contractors, of a large-scale solar array at the Jones Avenue Landfill to offset municipal utility costs and substantially reduce carbon emissions. Discussion: Councilor Tabor reported meeting with City Manager, Peter Rice and Peter Britz to discuss next steps. DPW will work with the City's consultant and NH DES on the regulatory aspects.

- Dec 2, 2024: Voted to include the Shuttle Loop/Micro-transit Study recommended by the Sustainability Committee and included as part of the Climate Action Plan in the CIP budget for funding in FY2026 with \$100,000.00 under Federal/State funding in FY26. Discussion: Study will investigate possible routes, challenges eg lack of charging capacity. As PEAC has discussed, Bill Lyons is a local expert on the topic.
- Dec 16, 2024: Report Back on Solar Overlay District – Voted to refer the zoning review and drafting of Solar Zoning Amendments to the Planning Board for its recommendation in a report back to the City Council. The Planning & Sustainability Department announced the City has won a Bronze award from SolSmart and is working on additional zoning work to earn the Silver level and additional free technical assistance.

4. Projects currently underway

- Announcement of Feb 1 – July 31, 2025 CPCNH rates and review of draft press release. The CPCNH basic rate will be 8.9 cents/kWh; the Eversource rate will be 8.929 cents/kWh so the press release will be adjusted to say PCP is slightly lower than the Eversource default. The press release will also include a link to the full Annual Report:
- Portsmouth Community Power Annual Report received from CPCNH was modified slightly to City of Portsmouth formatting and to include the Seacoast Energy Challenge.
- Seacoast Energy Challenge December results should be reported shortly, leaving a few more weeks to encourage opt-ups. There was a brief discussion about the wrap-up of the Challenge, recognition of the winner and whether a ‘perpetual trophy’ might be presented and the Challenge continued for the next rate period. Stephanie to research trophy options (a “gold” windmill?) to present to the February meeting.

Because the rates are so close and both Until, Liberty and the NH Coop will offer rates below the CPCNH basic in February, Kevin inquired if CPCNH had difficulty setting the Feb rate. Tom reported that it was a matter of timing in the market. To meet the other rates would put too much pressure on CPCNH financials.

Tracey asked if the growing demand on the national grid from data centers would begin to favor local power generation projects. Kevin noted the WSJ report on the growing gap between demand and generating capacity. Councilor Cook commented, “the more we can do to self-generate, the better off we are.”

5. Areas of work 2025

- **NREL** expects to wrap up the technical assessment by the end of February and the project, by the end of March. Herb is working to schedule a check-in phone call this week to confirm expectations on the deliverables. NREL also has information on PFAS sludge destruction technology – one of the side benefits to “opening discussions with a great research lab.” (Councilor Tabor)
- **EI energy audit of municipal buildings.** Staff managing assessment of City Hall. Work was done by the same firm on the elementary schools. Peter Somssich recommended the City also audit Spinnaker Point for the potential of energy efficiencies over the next 8 years of the lease, noting that the savings realized at the Indoor Pool were significant enough to fund additional facility improvements. Councilor Tabor noted the meeting Betsy organized with the Energy Manager in Lebanon.
- **Discussion on proposing the creation of an Energy Manager position for the City,** funded on the basis of 10 percent of the total energy expenditures by the City (currently managed by DPW).
- **Communications such as “Energy Efficiency Corner” in the City newsletter.** Kevin noted that residents are generally not aware of the opportunities available such as the NH Saves energy audits. Regular news like the Energy Challenge note, on a consistent basis,

could do much to help residents realize energy efficiencies to reduce the city's carbon footprint. Tracy continues to identify NH Saves education opportunities including another ButtonUp Workshop in 2025. Discussion of additional communications channels such as Water Department bill inserts.

- **Permitting fee adjustments.** Councilor Cook reported on continuing efforts to help residents who can't afford them fund energy efficiency improvements. CPCNH not yet in a position to fund projects from reserves and the option of raising the PCP rate by a half-cent/cent has challenges. Most potential in allowing credits for energy improvements in the permitting fee but challenging to vet contractors. Discussion on piggybacking on a recognized certification: CPCNH? NH Saves? An assignment for the Energy Manager? City cannot require building codes more stringent than the State but workarounds possible such as applying last year's fee instead of this year's for energy improvement permits.
- **Collaboration with Clean Energy NH on grant opportunities.** Herb to follow-up. Councilor Tabor noted these examples:
 - Bow and Exeter are commissioning large (1-2MW) solar arrays on municipal land with power purchase agreements benefitting the town financially
 - Rye is installing small-scale solar on town buildings at no cost to taxpayers through grants, and won an Eversource grant for battery backup power at the town's designated Emergency Center. There were sixteen small solar grants like this in towns around the state.
 - Durham has received a grant to research hydrogen vehicles
 - Lee has received grants for two high-efficiency diesel dump trucks, saving 80% of their cost
 - Several cities have finally received electric school buses
 - Work continues throughout the state on EV chargers. (The new Common Man restaurant on Lafayette boasts Portsmouth's first Tesla supercharger.)

6. No public comment

Meeting adjourned at 7:45 pm.

Next meeting: Wednesday, February 5 at 6:30 pm