

Town of Dublin Energy Committee Meeting
Wednesday, April 27, 2022
7 PM in person and via zoom, Town Hall, 3rd floor

DRAFT

In attendance:

In person: James Finnegan, Allen Hearn, Andy Hungerford, Blake Minckler, Susan Peters (Select Board), and Mari Brunner (Keene City Planner).

Online via zoom: Jack Munn, Rob Segrin, Donna Garner

Susan opened the meeting and explained that the Committee is looking into opportunities for energy projects and solutions that could benefit Dublin.

Mari Brunner, Keene City Planner

Susan introduced Mari Brunner who works on energy-related projects and solutions for the City of Keene. Mari explained that concerns around energy and climate date back to around 2000, with the focus shifting over time toward renewable energy. Community power and energy efficiency are two other big areas of focus. Keene has a website describing the city's Sustainable Energy Plan and other helpful resources: <https://www.keeneenergyplan.com>.

With respect to renewable energy, the U.S. Department of Energy has a program providing technical assistance to help communities become "open for solar business." Communities can apply for 100 hours of free technical assistance, which can include help with the permitting processes, a zoning review and recommendations for a solar ordinance, presentations, workshops, and other services. In recognition of their achievements, SolSmart communities receive designations of Gold, Silver, and Bronze.

The City of Keene has received technical assistance from SolSmart. Keene amended their zoning ordinance to allow solar as a primary use in certain districts. SolSmart can help with examples of zoning language from other communities (the City of Concord's ordinance could be a helpful resource). Property tax exemptions for renewable energy (including solar arrays) offer some support. Keene has looked at leasing out municipal land to a solar company. Based on SolSmart's complicated point system, Keene moved up from Bronze to Gold.

When looking into solar, pricing and policies of solar companies can vary. Tax rebates can help with the cost for those who can benefit from the credit. It is helpful if a community has a checklist for the permitting process. Solar companies often help with the permitting process; this was Allen Hearn's experience with his residential solar array some years ago. For solar projects on municipal land, communities follow the RFP process, and contract terms can be complicated. Clean Energy NH (CENH) is a helpful resource and may be able to help negotiating with a solar company. The City of Keene is a member of CENH, and the \$250 annual fee is well worth it.

Mari recommends looking into community power as a means for residential electrical customers to have more leverage in the market. Deregulation has benefited larger businesses much more than individual customers and small businesses which don't have the leverage to negotiate better

terms. With community power, it is possible to aggregate electricity accounts into a larger buying group - and get more interest and better rates from bidders. A broker like Standard Power can help vet the deals to ensure the best pricing; the broker gets paid out electricity bills (i.e. 1/10 of 1 cent per kilowatt hour). With community power, it is possible to build a higher percentage of renewable energy into the mix. Right now the NH requirement is 22%, but an additional 5-10% renewable energy could be more desirable. Many community power programs are opt-out programs, though Cheshire County has developed an opt-in program.

Keene has been working with Standard Power (and its partner Good Energy), to develop a fully vetted community power program that has City Council approval (adopted after a public hearing) and is waiting for State approval. The NH Public Utility Commission is still making rules to implement the state legislation. Standard Power helped Keene first with surveys and information sessions, then worked on a draft plan, followed by more information sessions. Keene's opt-out plan will offer people options, with the goal of making it attractive to as many people as possible. Before the launch, at least two notices will be sent to residents, who are still able to opt out after the program starts. There are three options: (a) 5 to 10% more renewables at the same or lower cost than Eversource charges; (b) pay more and get more green energy; (c) brown option - cheaper energy with fewer renewables. Instead of having the utility default rate reset every six months or so, the rates with community power will be locked in for at least a year.

At the time Keene started this process, the Community Power Coalition of NH (CPCNH) had not been incorporated. Mari noted that the process with CPCNH is more complicated and requires attendance at their meetings. Standard Power offers a simpler approach which has worked well so far. In their contract with Standard Power, Keene owns the data, and if they're not happy with their consultant in the future, they could choose to go in another direction. Keene is not part of CPCNH but may look into joining in the future. The Monadnock Sustainability Hub is a useful resource. Peterborough resident Dori Drachman is in MSH's Energy Group and part of CPCNH.

Mari recommends promoting energy efficiency as much as possible. Energy audits are helpful to see where improvements can be made. The NH Saves Program encourages holding NH Saves workshops every year. Sharing information and partnering with different groups can be helpful in educating people. Partnering with Eversource, Keene holds an energy week with a concentrated blitz of energy audits with local businesses. The focus is on finding useful energy upgrades. It can be educational to hold a local solar tour featuring community members who have solar. Keene also has a program called Window Dressers for residents who want help with weatherizing their homes (using removable inserts) but are not in a position to put in new windows (targeted toward renters in Keene). Keene has a big drive to go green, and has found that taking on one big goal each year can help the City to set achievable goals.

Blake commented that community power seems to offer benefits for the community as a whole through reducing costs and building in use of renewable energy. For many residents, installing an individual solar array may not be practical given the costs. Susan agreed to look into what the Town of Dublin has done in recent years in terms of energy audits. It was agreed that reducing energy use is an important step, and potentially less costly than putting in individual solar arrays.

If the sense is that the Town should move ahead with community power, the Select Board will need to appoint a Community Aggregation Committee, either as a separate committee or as part of the Energy Committee.

March 23, 2022 minutes

The March 23, 2022 meeting minutes were approved (as amended to correct the April 27 meeting date), after motion by Blake, seconded by Allen.

Action items::

1. Henry Herndon of the Community Power Coalition of NH is scheduled to speak at the next meeting on May 25.
2. Susan will look into inviting Bob Hayden of Standard Power to speak at the June meeting.
3. Energy Committee members plan to visit Dublin's capped landfill at 9 am on Saturday, May 21, with a rain date of 3 pm on Sunday, May 22.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:55 pm. The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 25 at 7 pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Susan W. Peters