

Minutes of Monthly Meeting
Sustainable Hanover - Energy Initiative
Tuesday, Feb 8, 2022
Via Zoom

Attending: Yolanda Baumgartner, Alex Bramsen, Bill Brown, Barb Callaway, Judi Colla, Sebastian Fernandez, Gannon Forsberg, Maron Greenleaf, Julia Griffin, Andrew Hatch, Rob Houseman, Robin Kaiser, Sarah Kelly, Peter Kulbacki, Tad Montgomery, Dennis Robison, Marjorie Rogalski, April Salas, Ben Steele, Rob Taylor, Ben Traugott, Ethan Weber, Abby Wiseman, Sydney Wu

Minutes

Judi Colla said the January minutes had been distributed, with thanks to Robin Kaiser. Rob Taylor agreed to write February minutes, as planned.

Introductions

Announcements/Events

Julia Griffin: She and Pete Kulbacki are going to talk with the Rocky Mountain Institute, which is interested in Hanover's unusual experience buying electric power from the New England Power Pool.

Presentation & Discussion

Maron Greenleaf and Sarah Kelly introduced the student presentation.

(** for slides see link below)

Ben Traugott scoped the study by 12 students of CPCNH and markets in southern Chile. The goal: research how to engineer a power transition without leaving some people behind.

Sebastian Fernandez said the students will interview stakeholders in NH and CA (for comparison).

Sydney Wu, a California resident, presented a timeline of that state's progress toward setting up and expanding community power markets from 2002 to the present. She said these systems are offering renewable power as part or all of the customers' electricity purchases. The price of renewable energy, she said, is typically less expensive than the renewable power sold by utilities, but more expensive than utilities' "default" power. She said that New Hampshire and Vermont can learn some lessons from California's successful rollout of community power, but noted that expert Don Kreis pointed out that small states will operate differently than CA.

Ethan Weber reviewed a timeline of the steps toward creating a community power coalition in NH that may grow to 50 communities, and looked for the PUC to establish rules for it to follow.

Alex Bramsen noted the bureaucratic delays in NH and concerns about the up-front costs. She said utilities are saying they may not provide "backup" power to residents of CPCNH communities who opt out of CPCNH's power offerings.

She added that there was some opposition from conservative office holders, disagreements among towns on how to build an alternative power purchasing system and too little information on equity justice issues.

Sebastian Fernandez said students would be doing more interviews, submitting research to a review board, and sharing their information more broadly.

Maron Greenleaf said the students would develop final reports in early March. She asked, “what are we missing?”

Marjorie Rogalski, a Santa Barbara resident in winter, said that she had heard many local complaints about billing. She said a local utility may have delayed billing some charges so that the first bill from the alternative purchasing system was much higher than usual.

April Salas noted that some small, remote communities were concerned that they had to travel great distances to participate in CPCNH meetings, which the state requires to be in-person meetings. They worried about being outvoted and ignored.

Julia noted that the PUC has scheduled a hearing on March 7 at 1 p.m. on the operating rules for CPCNH. So far the PUC is considering rules drafted by CPCNH, not the utilities. She added that Actionlab.org is posting a study of Hartford, CT on energy burdens in a variety of communities.

Ben Steele praised the students presentations and made some recommendations for their report format.

Sarah Kelly asked if the committee wants to see some public information from students. Julia responded that CPCNH is seeking to copy info from presentations created by CA models. But she'll need help finding Web design help from Dartmouth students.

Maron offered to help in a variety of ways.

Bill asked for clarification of the “no backup” concern.

Julia explained the utilities are not enthusiastic about the idea that people can opt back to utility power. She described it as something already done elsewhere. It will take building confidence. Utilities are doing this for other 3d party sellers, but CPCNH is potentially a much bigger piece of electrical delivery that may change, which presents concerns that utilities might buy too much or too little power.

Updates & Brief Discussions

Communications

Judi is hoping to create a video on Hanover's progress toward the Ready for 100 goals. She invited volunteers from talented students.

Electricity

Tuck project

Julia said the Tuck Business School has not responded to our application to have first-year Tuck students study ways to fund low-income energy efficiency projects. She talked to Tuck students

about ways for locals to invest in energy efficiency improvements. She said she hoped to connect them with Maron's energy justice students.

Zoning setbacks for solar panels

Rob Houseman said the Zoning Board has scheduled a public hearing March 1, in-person and on Zoom, on this proposal to reduce setbacks for solar gear.

Julia said someone from our committee should speak.

The agenda had not yet been posted.

Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire

Julia said work on CPCNH continues and conversations are planned with California pathbreakers like Marin County. Due to PUC delays, it will have to wait until fall 2022, and most likely until spring of 2023, to launch purchases.

Utilities and REC Sweeping

Yolanda summarized: Hanover has more than 200 residential solar systems. Only 14 are certified to claim Renewable Energy Credits (RECs) for the electricity they produce, which utilities are supposed to buy to meet the state renewable energy goals. People don't know about the certification and sale of RECs, installers are not telling them, and utilities are allowed to "sweep up" unclaimed RECs for free.

Rob Taylor added that this takes money out of the pockets of residents that install solar generation and reduces the price that utilities pay for solar power. It's a statewide problem, he added.

Julia called for a one-page explainer of how to get credit for RECs that could be distributed to solar panel buyers and could be a model for the state.

Barb said REC earnings could be donated to energy justice projects.

Judi called for bringing it up in our next meeting.

Yolanda said she read that NH is the only state that allows utilities to "sweep" up unclaimed RECs.

Marjorie noted that Massachusetts solar residences sell their RECs for much more than solarizers can get for them in NH.

Transportation

Yolanda said the annual EV bike demonstration/loaner program will resume at the Howe Library June 8.

Ben Steele referred to an Irving Energy study about locating new EV chargers.

Pete Kulbacki said he will meet the next day with Tad Montgomery to discuss this and information from Dartmouth about the college's plans, which are proprietary and not for public release. Lebanon and Hanover will consider how they can work together to plan regionally. He said Dartmouth has already started purchasing and installing ten chargers on campus locations. They also are planning how to develop an EV vehicle fleet.

Julia said town officials have made plans to devote \$50,000 from the parking budget to fund chargers in the parking garage or a surface lot. They are working to avoid double-charging, one expense for parking and another for charging the vehicle.

Tad Montgomery said Lebanon city manager Shaun Mulholland is unsure whether local city governments should be involved in financing EV chargers. He said he'll need good arguments to show benefits for the cities to bring Mulholland along.

Ben Steele said one benefit is that more people will shop in a city if they can charge their EV there.

Rob Houseman said that legally, Hanover needs to categorize EV charger spaces as allocated to parking or charging (they cannot be both).

Julia said if we cannibalize parking spaces for charging we have a zoning issue to resolve. She also looked ahead to an end of the pandemic, which will expose a shortage of parking downtown.

Julia added that we don't have this all figured out yet, but we will.

Tad said there are huge pots of money that will be earmarked for charging stations on a regional scale.

That's why we need a regional plan, said Julia.

Yolanda added that we'll need to consider planning for alternative vehicles in parking plans.

Bikes can replace some car parking, she suggested.

Building Codes and Chargers

Ben noted this issue is complicated, and since the meeting was running overtime, urged we bump this to the next meeting. As for numbers, he said EVs registered in Hanover have reached 96, up 60 percent from last year.

Bill Brown worried that building codes should call for equipping homes with EV charging equipment, otherwise we're delaying the inevitable.

Rob Taylor said the architects and builder advisory committee prefers doing this voluntarily, with some encouragement from the town to meet high standards.

Rob Houseman said the advisory panel is concerned that setting different local standards from state standards would create more work and might discourage builders from doing projects here.

He added that the panel worries that a mandate would have little effect because homes built in Hanover already tend to substantially exceed the state standards. He said the legislature, pushed by builders, is considering banning cities from setting tougher standards than the state's.

Julia said Hanover is against that legislation, but "we're sledding uphill."

Energy Efficiency

Andrew Hatch said he's taking applications for energy efficiency grants in the expectation that the PUC will eventually approve them again. Sometime in May the PUC is scheduled to approve new rules, he said. He announced good news: Despite PUC obstacles to the program in 2021, his projects achieved 82 percent of the annual goal and matched the total number of kilowatt hours saved in 2020.

Prodded by Julia, Andrew added that he has made some progress planning at Kendal for new lighting for the health center and a "chiller."

The next meeting is scheduled for March 8.

**Deck of Dartmouth student slides is at:

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1luySXeWCLpe3ZnYfegje2qujjAjvCqLzN8ozq46IhGI/edit#slide=id.g10dff27f237_3_64

--Rob Taylor