

City of Portsmouth



MEMORANDUM

To: Councilor John Tabor

Cc: Peter Rice, DPW Director and Peter Britz Planning Department Sustainability

From: Stephanie Seacord, Public Information Officer

Date: September 14, 2022

Re: **PEAC Community Outreach Plan**

Situational Analysis

At their August 23, 2021 meeting, the City Council voted to approve the creation of the Portsmouth Energy Advisory Committee (PEAC) in the form of a Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee (BRC). PEAC was charged with researching the risks and opportunities of a Community Power program for Portsmouth under RSA 53-E, which allows towns and cities to aggregate their customer demand and purchase electricity in bulk for savings and a more rapid shift to renewables. The objective of RSA 53-E is to “*encourage voluntary, cost effective and innovative solutions to local needs with careful consideration of local conditions and opportunities.*” Eversource will continue to own and operate the distribution grid and be responsible for delivering power to all customers within the City. Customers will continue be charged for utility delivery services at rates set by the Public Utilities Commission

At its formation, PEAC was directed to report back to the City Council with an assessment and recommendations, including whether to join the [Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire \(CPCNH\)](#). With that report and the approval of the City Council, Portsmouth became a member of the CPCNH in April, 2022, joining the neighboring communities of Dover, Durham, Exeter, Newmarket and Rye. The PEAC is now guiding the creation of an Electric Aggregation Plan – the Portsmouth Community Power Plan (PCP), per RSA 53-E.

As of October 20, 2022, the Coalition was made up of twenty-one municipal members and one county member. In July, the City Council authorized the PEAC to begin drafting the PCP. The NH PUC proposed final regulatory rules in August, which were approved by a state legislative committee in September. The first twelve communities are expected to launch their programs in April-May 2023. Portsmouth expects to adopt its Community Power Plan and file it with the

PUC for approval by then with the goal of being among the second wave of communities adopting CPCNH options (and CPCNH Phase One best practices) for its residents in Oct-Nov 2023. In the meantime, Portsmouth is working with all the member communities to design and launch the Coalition.

As part of Portsmouth's efforts to join CPCNH the PEAC is charged with conducting community outreach, including at least two public hearings on the plan before presenting it for consideration and a City Council vote.

The goal of this communications plan is to coordinate messaging across the available communications channels to raise residents' awareness of the City's intention to participate in the Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire and to inform them about what CPCNH is and what its benefits are – to them as individual households and as City residents and taxpayers.

Audience:

This PCP Communications Plan focuses on Portsmouth consumers: residents and businesses. It employs multiple communications channels to reach as broad an audience as possible through, print, digital, community tv and in-person messaging and by leveraging existing City communications channels and robust platforms (e.g., Library, School, Recreation Departments as well as City Hall and DPW.)

Key Messages:

As stated in the PCP Plan, “[When declaring itself an Eco-Municipality] the city also adopted a renewable energy policy in 2018 with a stated goal to be “net zero” in carbon emissions, beginning with municipal consumption and extending to communitywide consumption and transportation. The Renewable Energy Committee report supporting this policy recommended (#26) a Community Aggregation program. Portsmouth Community Power can achieve this objective and will be a beneficial next step in the city's path to Net Zero. Economic growth and stability have long been city goals, and cost-effective, stable electric rates support this objective.

Competitive rates and expanded choices – The PCP program is being designed to deliver stable and competitive rates to consumers. While offering tiered options from “cheapest” to “greenest” the standard default package is expected to be competitive in price with the utility, preferably with more green power in it. It will enable easy opt out so consumers have full choice.

More green power/more resilient power – The PCP program enables consumers to shift away from fossil fuels, and is designed to meet residents' demands for more renewable energy. PCP helps foster local renewable generation projects. The PCP program is expected to advocate with CPCNH to buy local (New Hampshire or New England) wind, hydro and solar, to help create these options, and to advocate for buying this pure green power from the region in addition to Renewable Energy Credits.

Regional collaboration -- Portsmouth Community Power collaborates with regional community power programs, municipalities, utilities and government agencies to jointly develop cost effective renewable energy generation and storage projects, and support electric energy transit

fleets and charging corridors, as well as enhancing the reliability of electric supply through development of community microgrids to support critical infrastructure

Rate stability/fiscal stability and financial reserves – Through CPCNH, the PCP plan assures consumer protection by adopting a Risk Management Policy to ensure competitive rates as market prices fluctuate, as well as a plan to deposit a portion of revenues into a rate reserve fund.

Strategies

Successful implementation of Portsmouth Community Power will require a strong partnership with Eversource as the investor-owned transmission, delivery and billing entity. Eversource resources, especially its NHSaves public outreach and educational initiatives, can supplement this plan.

The strategies this communications plan include:

- Develop and disseminate key messages in a logical, educational order
- Leverage existing communications channels (including City platforms, media, CPCNH initiatives and partner channels) and coordinate messaging for clarity and consistency
- Enlist support and advocacy from other City committees/boards/commissions and initiatives
- Earn citizen support for and participation in Portsmouth's CPCNH membership
- Measure and analyze the effectiveness of this plan's and PEAC's strategies and tactics in achieving the goals

The following details the communications channels and processes currently in place and additional opportunities. The appended Action Plan maps out the timetable for implementing this Plan.

Tactics

A. Existing Communications Channels

The City engages residents in person, across City-managed communications platforms and public media, and through surveys and other interactive initiatives.

Direct resident feedback:

- Public meetings on Portsmouth Community Power (e.g. SmartGrowth Workshop on June 29, 2022) offer hybrid options, the opportunity to reach different neighborhoods by varying locations and instant polling capability (e.g. the use of Slido at the June event)

- General “Public Comment” and specific Public Hearing sessions provide opportunities to build education and awareness if City Council agenda items and Work Sessions on Portsmouth Community Power are planned strategically (note: CPCNH has template public hearing presentations that can be customized for Portsmouth’s use)
- Portsmouth Community Power agenda items for public dialogues at various locations around the city (e.g. quarterly Citywide Neighborhood Committee Ward Forums and monthly CNC meetings) bring the concept to the different neighborhoods – and benefit from the frequency with which residents hear about Portsmouth Community Power.
- City Manager/Departmental presence at Farmers’ Market and Market Square Day afford Portsmouth Community Power opportunities for leafletting, Q&A and dialogue. The City Manager participates monthly.
- Special Topic information meetings e.g., the NHSaves Workshop Nov 3, will be scheduled strategically to provide foundational information and presence. The Portsmouth Public Library is an excellent focus for PCP due to its ongoing and well-promoted schedule (Library newsletter and social media channels) of educational programs
- By promoting public comment at PEAC (and other Board, Commission and Committee meetings if/when PCP is on the agenda), PEAC expands its support base
- Email sign-up and comment forms on the PEAC City website page. Councilor Tabor and other City Council members might also underscore their availability via the email form on the City website (and the opportunity to email questions to hotline@cityofportsmouth.com which is monitored/answered by the PIO)

The appended Action Plan details how City channels for informing residents will be used to raise awareness and education residents:

- **City website** provides current information (notably on the Homepage banners, news items and calendar features) and full PEAC details on the PEAC webpage as well as archives of their proceedings. <https://www.cityofportsmouth.com/citycouncil/mayors-blue-ribbon-portsmouth-energy-advisory-committee>
- **Channel 22** is a vital communications channel for Portsmouth residents without Internet access. Bulletins are posted there regularly e.g., street closure notices, snow parking bans, vaccination clinics, cooling centers, etc. Public events in City buildings can now be broadcast on Ch. 22. The PIO will investigate whether it is possible to schedule broadcasts of informational videos the CPCNH might offer. PCP can also create and distribute original video content through the City’s YouTube channel.
- **City e-Newsletter** (distributed electronically Mondays and Wednesdays) reaches 3,873 subscribers alerts residents to key meetings, events, surveys, etc. Also converted to PDF format and posted to website and social media, emailed directly to media distribution

- **Project e-blasts** make it possible to email those who sign up on the PEAC webpage to receive information e.g., event notices, information links, CPCNH updates
- **City Department e-newsletters** for the Library, School Department, etc. provide additional ways to distribute information and event invitations
- **Media relations** – the PIO maintains the City’s relationship with local/regional media, providing press releases, media/photo opp advisories and op-eds, fielding inquiries and providing follow-up materials.
- **Direct mail** – water bill inserts, e.g., PEAC flyer on Community power forum
- **Social media** – the City maintains a number of accounts on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram, all of which can be used to reinforce PCP messages. In particular, the [CityHallPortsmouthNH](#) Facebook page (19,807 reach) posts are shared with the UnOfficial Portsmouth group (18.4 k) and PortsmouthNH group (30k).

Polls and Surveys:

- Focus Groups – The City uses formal focus groups directed by communications facilitators for major projects such as the McIntyre Project (Portsmouth Listens and the Principle Group), the Recreational Needs Study (Placework/Horsley Witten Group, Inc.) and the ADU zoning reconsideration.
- Mailchimp/Survey Monkey – The City uses both survey platforms to solicit feedback on specific projects and issues (e.g. Neighborhood Parking Program, ADUs, Middle Street Bike Lanes and the Recreational Needs Study).
- QR codes – With the renaissance of QR code use since the pandemic, City staff have found these to be an effective and easy way for residents to participate in surveys.
- Instant polling – The City is now using Sli.do for instant polling (in-person and Zoom audience) at public meetings (e.g., Community Power Information Event)
- Portsmouth Public Library interest groups – Convened on topics such as Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.
- PCP can also collaborate with Sustainability Committee and Climate Action Plan when messaging aligns.

B. New Technologies

There are numerous ways social media and other electronic communications channels can be leveraged for local government, and Portsmouth has already found innovative, intriguing and safe ways to deploy these technologies. A few examples are as follows:

- **Miro.com Virtual Whiteboard** -- Principle Group used this dynamic whiteboard technology during online public meetings on the McIntyre Project (example posted on the McIntyre Project page: <https://www.cityofportsmouth.com/mcintyre-project>)
- **Government Delivery listserv** <https://granicus.com/solution/govdelivery/>– The City is exploring this platform to allow residents to subscribe to topics that are that most interesting to them. The potential is to replace the MailChimp opt-in subscriber lists with a centralized list that would offer Portsmouth Community Power as an interest area.
- **Consider.it** – Recommended by a resident as a platform for public dialogue on the Climate Action Plan

C. Performance Metrics, Best Practices and Recommendations

- **Performance Metrics**

Each of these communications channels allows PCP to measure the impact of messaging on its audiences. These measures provide a quantitative assessment of awareness but can also afford qualitative insights for shaping future messages: What topics receive the most feedback? What channels are essential? Should timing of messaging be adjusted? (Note: Sli.do polls can be useful for this, as well as in-person feedback in settings where appropriate.)

Key Components of the Plan:

Initiative	Media/Marketing Partner	Resource	Next step
Media Relations: Press release and targeted pitches	Individual pitches to community power media eg Sam Evans Brown Per Action Plan	Clean Energy NH CPCNH	Create, distribute and pitch press release and key messages
City Council process	Residents CNC Sustainability Committee	City channels	Create calendar of meeting and e-news communications via City channels and committees
Events and Partner collaborations –at least quarterly	CPCNH/Smart Growth -- Jun Rye Community Power / NH Saves -- Nov PCP Plan Public Information Meetings – Jan and March Clean Energy NH PHS Eco-Club	Direct mail (Water bill insert), flyers, social media event	Distribute press release, post and share in social media and supply flyers at City Hall, Library and community events

Advertising?	Seacoast Media Group campaign?	Paid media?	
Collateral: Rack card Poster NHSaves resources Clean Energy NH resources CPCNH resources	Portsmouth Community Power CPCN logo to adapt?	Rack cards Poster to partners	
Website copy and program promotion	PEAC webpage		
Social media	#PortsmouthCommunityPower	Calendar of posts	Links with other CPCNH communities

ACTION PLAN CITY OF PORTSMOUTH FY23

Month	Message (Special Events in bold.)	Deliverables
May 2022	“What is Community Power?”	Citywide water bill insert
June	PEAC/SmartGrowth Community Power Workshop with CPCNH and Clean Energy NH at 3S	City channels: Website, newsletter, Ch 22, social media Press release and calendar listings Partner promotion Slido survey results
July-August	Energy Aggregation Plan (EAP) for PCP	PEAC Work Sessions City channels: Website, newsletter, Ch 22, social media
September	PCP Plan Rye Community Power event	PEAC Work Session Flyer distributed at community events 9/17 in Portsmouth, 9/18 in Rye City channels: Website, newsletter, Ch 22, social media
October	Press release/interview on the importance of PCP John Tabor op-ed PHS Eco-Club briefing (new advisor) PCPNH Portsmouth logo in every issue of City Newsletter, website and on social media City Council PCP update – John Tabor agenda item 10/23	PEAC Work Session 10/13 and revision to water bill insert for distribution at Library, City Hall, Senior Center and Farmers Market City channels: Website, newsletter, Ch 22, social media Press release and calendar listings Rye and New Castle promotion
November	NHSaves Button Up event 11/3 – distribute revised PCP flyers Joint op-ed with Exeter?	Rye and New Castle promotion Media advisory on 11/3 event WCSA interview and other media relations outreach SMG climate change series story? City channels: Website, newsletter, Ch 22, social media

		PEAC Work Session 11/10 to discuss Allison’s revisions to community survey
December	Community survey 12/4 PCP float in the holiday parade? PCP Plan public hearing in Jan 2023	PSA, print, digital and Ch 22 notices with QR code link to online survey Press release and calendar listings PEAC Work Session 12/8 City channels: Website, newsletter, Ch 22, social media
January 2023	Community Forum on PCP CPCNH slides PCP Plan public hearing at City Council Meeting	PSA, print, digital and Ch 22 notices Media advisory PEAC Work Session TBD City channels: Website, newsletter, Ch 22, social media
February	PCP Plan public hearing in March	PSA, print, digital and Ch 22 notices Press release and calendar listings PEAC Work Session TBD City channels: Website, newsletter, Ch 22, social media
March	Community Forum on PCP PCP Plan public hearing at City Council Meeting PCP submitted to City Council for approval and adoption; submitted to PUC	Media advisory PSA, print, digital and Ch 22 notices PEAC Work Session TBD City channels: Website, newsletter, Ch 22, social media Press release
April	Earth Day 4/22 event with PHS Eco-Club, students and families	Media advisory City channels: Website, newsletter, Ch 22, social media PSA, print, digital and Ch 22 notices PEAC Work Session TBD City channels: Website, newsletter, Ch 22, social media

May	City Council update on CPCNH Phase One and PCP	PEAC Work Session TBD City channels: Website, newsletter, Ch 22, social media
June	Market Square Day 6/10	PCP presence, information and interactives PEAC Work Session TBD City channels: Website, newsletter, Ch 22, social media
July	Customer notification and enrollment	Specific information, forms and instructions delivered across all communications channels including a QR code.
Summer	Go-live window for opt-out communications to residents	City channels: Website, newsletter, Ch 22, social media PSA, print, digital and Ch 22 notices PEAC Work Session TBD City channels: Website, newsletter, Ch 22, social media