



CITY OF PORTSMOUTH NH
Portsmouth Energy Advisory Committee

Wednesday, May 7, 2025

MINUTES

For the Zoom recording:

<https://youtu.be/e-3kfYvrG7Q>

1. **Roll Call:** Councilor John Tabor, chair; Councilor Kate Cook, Ben D'Antonio, Betsy Blaisdell, Tracey Cameron, Kevin Charette, Herb Lloyd, Peter Somssich. Staff: Peter Britz, DPW Director Peter Rice, Stephanie Seacord, recording secretary. Excused: Tom Rooney
2. **Chairman's remarks** – As City Council directed staff to explore the idea of a solar array at the Jones Ave. capped landfill site for some time and PEAC has heard from other neighboring towns about their projects, the Committee asked for an update from DPW Director Peter Rice, guest for this meeting.
3. **Approval of minutes** for April 2, 2025, voted on a motion by Peter, seconded by Kate for comment. Kevin recommended amendments to the minutes in the bullets for item 5, CPCNH statements and Action Plan. On a motion by Ben, seconded by Peter the amended minutes were approved. [[PEAC Meeting Minutes Apr 2, 2025 FINAL.pdf](#)]
4. **Discussion of solar array feasibility work on Jones Ave, Peter Rice DPW Director**

Following a site walk with Chair Tabor and City Manager Conard, DPW conducted some site work to clear overgrowth along the fence line, repair the fence and remove large items of debris projecting from the side slope of the landfill.

DPW then hired consultant Pynchon (formerly Ransom Engineering) and their solar partner Revision to evaluate the site for its solar potential. Determined there is potential for a 1.7 MW AC array. Not a slam dunk but encouraging and need to explore the costs as funding sources may be drying up.

Ben explained that the interconnection study must be “extremely specific” to the site, to anticipate any overload safety issues, and is then the basis for considering appropriate options. Staff would then develop an RFP soliciting solar vendors. The intention is to identify options for the City to develop a solar project at Jones Ave in the manner that is best and most cost-effective for the City. For now, Director Rice is managing the project but would assign a staff DPW project manager when the project is bigger.

PEAC offered expertise in developing the RFP. Betsy commented on ensuring the RFP is written so that the City can compare the responses ‘apples-to-apples’ and that a consultant might help with that. Noted that the Exeter Planning Director offered his experience/insights from their solar project. Director Rice said the City regularly reaches out to neighboring towns for that type of expertise. The City will also apply its knowledge gained from the Madbury and Portsmouth High School solar projects.

Options to evaluate include a public-private microgrid at Tidewatch and a virtual net metering scenario where all municipal facilities are included under a 5 MW project developed elsewhere, even by CPCNH, which would offset City electric bills. Kevin asked if a prospective 1.7 MW array at Jones Ave. serving a Tidewatch microgrid would need to be deducted from the 5 MW virtual option. Probably yes. Also the Madbury + PHS arrays.

There is no budget allocated for the estimated \$125,000 for the interconnection study (\$50-75k) and feasibility based on what the interconnection study reveals. Any FY26 budget for this must be addressed at the June 9 Budget Work Session to reprogram what is included in the FY26 budget as currently proposed.

The consensus of PEAC is to ask the City Manager for a report on the costs to advance the project.

- **EEI Energy Audit** – Director Rice has received the initial report but needs to vet it with the City Manager and Finance to determine what actions could be cost-effective. PEAC will be given the opportunity to review and comment after that.
- **Municipal Electric Bills** -- PEAC asked to see energy use as well as expenditures to discover where energy efficiency actions can be encouraged.

5. **NREL update**, Herb reported:

- NREL has completed its report but has not completed the peer review necessary before making it public. Only the working group has reviewed but impressed with the scope addressed, including the more recent request to look at both wind and solar at the three sites (Peirce Island and Pease Wastewater Treatment Facilities and the Madbury Water Treatment Facility) and developer-financed prospects for each option. The peer review by Federal Department of Energy seems to be the bottleneck as the project has now taken a year.
- The goal is to have the data needed to make decisions about installations.
- Madbury seems the best candidate for wind + solar as there are bigger challenges to the Peirce Island and Pease sites.
- NREL has offered to do additional projects. Betsy asked if the City might get an assessment of other solar opportunities so that there is a pipeline of understood engineering scenarios. Clr Cook asked, for example, might DPW be an opportunity for a solar array to support charging for an EV fleet?
- Also wondered if NREL might assist with some of the engineering required for the Jones Ave. project, to reduce staff time demand.

6. **CPCNH Update** – Chair Tabor announced that Tom was voted as a Director on the CPCNH Board, at the April 24, 2025 CPCNH Annual Meeting.

- Ben noted that in the Acting General Manager's Report to the Annual Meeting [[Agenda Document](#)], Henry Herndon commented,
 - “As of Monday 4/21, CPCNH has ~\$4.6 million in overdue power supply invoices. As shown in the graph, CPCNH's debt (overdue invoices) will increase through the summer to ensure cash availability to make REC purchases for 2024 RPS compliance and to satisfy voluntary product obligations. Under this scenario, CPCNH anticipates catching up on late payments in Q4 2025. In Summer 2026, CPCNH anticipates drawing on reserve funds to cover RPS and voluntary product renewables purchases before regaining a longer-term healthy financial position and achieving minimum reserve targets in Q4 2027 or Q1 2028.”

- Discussion ensued regarding the responsibility of PEAC on behalf of residents to be assured of the solid operations and success of CPCNH/Portsmouth Community Power and asked to dedicate time at the June meeting for a briefing from Tom to get a better understanding of what's happening: known issues, controls, and what corrections have been made to prevent future occurrences of what CPCNH reported.
 - Ben also expressed concern that CPCNH is able to beat the default service rate in the next, Aug 2025-Jan 2026 rate period.
7. **Button Up Workshop** – Tracey reported good turnout, always a few new attendees. Also Eversource rep who helped answer questions. Biggest issue is that people are not aware of the program.
 8. **Public comment** – None.

Meeting adjourned at 8:28 pm.

Next meeting Wed Jun 4 at 6:30 pm. City Hall Conference Room A.