



CITY OF PORTSMOUTH NH
Portsmouth Energy Advisory Committee

MINUTES

Wednesday, June 4, 2025, 6:30 pm

Roll Call: Councilor John Tabor, chair; Ben D’Antonio, Tracey Chapman, Kevin Charette, Herb Lloyd, Tom Rooney, Absent: Councilor Kate Cook, Peter Somssich, Betsy Blaisdell (unable to join zoom). Staff: Jillian Harris, Planning Dept.; Stephanie Seacord, recording secretary.

1. **Minutes from May 7 meeting** approved on a motion by Kevin seconded by Tracey.
2. **Public comment** -- Chair Tabor asked committee to move Public Comment up to hear from Effie Malley from the Sustainability Committee which wanted PEAC to know about their work on solar zoning. The City Council had asked for a report and large scale private solar array zoning, which they sourced with expertise from SolSmart. The City Manager referred the report to the Planning Board to work on zoning amendments with the Planning Department. The Sustainability Committee is seeking clarification on what seemed a disconnect between the SolSmart report and recommendations on amending the code to enable large commercial or residential solar developments such as a solar overlay district -- and what the Planning Department put forward to the Planning Board (which postponed discussion from the 27 Feb meeting). Issues include accessory use with approval, Conditional Use Permit (CUP) and commercial by-right uses by district. Amendments would include definition (accessory use if the array is smaller than the building; principal use if larger than the footprint). SolSmart best practices note that solar-friendly municipalities do not have CUPs. Developers avoid those that do because of the uncertainty. Jillian, who worked on the Planning Department responses will meet with Effie to go through the definitions and other questions. Ben asked for the backup materials and suggested the technical expertise in PEAC might assist.
3. **Jones Ave. Municipal Solar Project** -- Chair Tabor requested a PEAC motion for him to present to City Council at their June 9 meeting in order to include Jones Avenue expert assistance and interconnect study in FY26 budget. Discussion about RFI vs RFP that an RFI consultant can keep the cadence on the project moving, collecting information needed to go to market with a very specific RFP. City staff can write an effective RFP and implement the City’s procurement process but not ready with the necessary technical detail to go to RFP. The consultant will provide that definition. Motion: PEAC recommends that the City Council direct staff to identify funding source and apply those funds to hire an independent consulting firm to advance the interconnection study and RFP process for the Jones Avenue landfill municipal solar array. Motion (amended with specifics) by Ben, seconded by Tom and approved. City Manager has identified funding from EV chargers that are delayed, which keeps the purpose within the goals of the Climate Action Plan to reduce Portsmouth’s carbon footprint.
4. **CPCNH update** – Tom Rooney, PCP representative to CPCNH, reported on the most recent board meeting where new leadership was introduced. An “office hours” zoom was planned for

June 6 and concerns remain about what happened that caused the finances to become so unbalanced.

Coalition Board meeting announcing new rates for Aug-Jan is scheduled for June 26 after the utilities announce their rates (Unitil 6 Jun, Liberty 17 Jun and Eversource 20 Jun). Unknown whether CPCNH base rate will be below the Eversource default and the committee is concerned about the public impact if Portsmouth Community Power rates are higher than Eversource for a second rate period (totaling a full year). PCP customers may switch back to Eversource (or a third party vendor) and PEAC has a responsibility to the community's customers to safeguard the argument for community power. Migration would erode the value of PCP, though some customers will stick with PCP for the mission.

What is the business model for CPCNH if the rate is higher than the default utility (which should have been 40% of the resources) and reserves are not being built (60% of resources) to fund green projects? Where is the portfolio hedging strategy that lets CPCNH manage rates when going to market? What innovative solutions will CPCNH pursue to accomplish both? CPCNH is applying for a \$10 million line of credit from their River City bank partner to pay vendors and is adding more financial expertise to the Board. Tom reported that the chief consideration is building reserves back over the next 12-24 months. CPCNH currently has no reserves after having to apply them to the \$8 million negative balance and stabilizing rates when the woodchip power source contract fell through. PEAC is still concerned that the process, checks and balances and auditing procedures were not followed. Coalition Board meeting 26 Jun will also consider the search committee's recommendation about replacing the CEO or possibly seeking a CFO instead. Kevin commented that the problem with the power supply procurement pales in comparison to the fact that financial guardrails and Ascend/Calpine expertise were apparently not followed, suggesting that forecasts were not reconciled and that left CPCNH undercapitalized. Monthly reports would have shown the compounding problems so where was the oversight? PEAC would like further clarification from Henry, even by zoom, at a future meeting to explain how the problem has been fixed.

PEAC meeting after new rate is set to discuss messaging – explaining the CPCNH is “having to build back reserves.” Portsmouth-specific press release vis a vis Eversource default rate is typically distributed after CPCNH makes its statewide rate announcement. Asked Tom to keep PEAC up to speed in the interim.

5. **NREL update** – Herb Lloyd. No new information. The contractors who worked on Portsmouth study are still waiting for the Federal review and approval to release it publicly.

Adjourned at 7:48 pm.

Next meeting: Wednesday, July 2, 2025 at 6:30 pm