



CITY OF PORTSMOUTH NH
Portsmouth Energy Advisory Committee

Wednesday, October 1, 2025, 6:30 pm

MINUTES

For the video recording of the meeting on Zoom:

<https://youtu.be/icwPaO6wiT8>

1. Roll call

Attending, Councilor Tabor, chair; Councilor Cook, Kevin Charette, Peter Somssich, Tracy Cameron, Ben D'Antonio. Excused: Tom Rooney, Betsy Blaisdell. Staff: Jillian Harris, Stephanie Seacord. Guests from CPCNH: Jackson Kaspari, Andrew Hatch.

2. **Chairman's remarks** – Have received a resignation, effective immediately, from Herb Lloyd but have not been able to reach him yet. His service, especially with seeing the NREL project through is much appreciated and he will be missed. Following up on the committee's request to learn more about how CPCNH is taking measures to correct course, we have invited two representatives.
3. **CPCNH Discussion with Director of Member Services Jackson Kaspari and Engagement Manager Andrew Hatch** who both thanked the committee for the opportunity to interact with PEAC as the Portsmouth Community Power members. Since the start of the year CPCNH has worked to tighten risk management, procedures, cash flow tracking, future risk, renewables projects and legislation. CPCNH has increased focus on engagement and communications, e.g. new Portsmouth Community Power webpage.

Q. Kevin Charette (KTC) – PEAC is interested in hearing more about the background and root causes of the problems.

A. Jackson Kaspari (JK) – last year was one of the coldest winters on record and because of the last minute failure of the biomass contract had to go to market with a larger number of open positions to be filled with expensive rate purchases that then drew down CPCNH reserves. Risk management guidelines were in place but now CPCNH has better data flow to anticipate. Optimistic about finances restoring the reserves from what is now the bottom and setting future rates that cover cost longer term.

Q. Choosing a company in bankruptcy for the first power purchase agreement was not prudent. But didn't CPCNH have legal protection that wasn't pursued.

A. JK -- The facility seemed a good, well-run opportunity with a business that supported the economy of the North Country. But the counterparts were not authorized to sign the contract. We have new leadership in place.

Q. Clr Tabor (JT) – Currently 0.8 cents of the rate goes to replenish the reserves. Not accelerated or enhanced.

Q.KTC -- How did the controls not work?

A. JK -- We have noted 100 pages of policy violations but now have a new era with leadership in appropriate areas with very strict responsibilities and assignment of authority. The risk management procedures are not broken; they needed to be re-evaluated and some controls worked as intended.

Q. Peter Somssich (PS) – We believed and told residents the same thing when Portsmouth Community Power was new but I don't have a lot of confidence in the same responses now. We need details to tell the people of Portsmouth that safeguards are in place. Also we promised that the rates would be lower than Eversource.

A. JK – We have more sophisticated real-time cash flow monitoring. Portsmouth Power customers have saved \$2.5 million since startup through July 2025. New procurement rules will cause a major shift in the rate competition but the change was driven by the former PUC Commissioner so we'll see how a new Commissioner and the utilities shake out.

Q. Ben D'Antonio (BD) – How long do you expect the reconciliation to take?

A. JK -- Hard to say but potentially August 2026. In the meantime Community Power customers have benefited from having choices, the freedom to leave and return without penalty, improved communications including direct email/SMS messaging on rates. Attrition from the higher-than-utility rates is not alarming. Also CPCNH paused the customer-refresh process to capture new residents. Resuming that.

Q. KTC – The business model was tied to being better than the utility but now for two rate periods – a full year – Community Power has been higher than Eversource. The rank and file customer doesn't care about the intangible benefits and they – especially low income customers – will wake up to the fact that they're paying 20% more than they need to. CPCNH should launch a proactive outreach to explain they have a choice and can opt-out – and opt back in. Before you're forced to do so as happened in MA. It would be good form to do so.

A. JK – We're not seeing push back nationally and the concept of community power is a benefit not just to individual customers but to the taxpayer community.

Q. PS – We've been told repeatedly you were advocating to get Solar 2.0 (installations after 2017) net metering advanced. Where does that stand?

A. JK – We are not pursuing that aggressively right now. But we want to mobilize all of our 68 communities to push the NH Legislature for that approval.

A. KTC – When you secure the agreement for all solar to be Community Power customers with their net metering credits it will be a good opportunity to proactive outreach.

Q. PS – A year ago, the Basic Community Power rate included a mandated 23.4% renewables. My latest Eversource bill says the mandate is now 13.4% is that what CPCNH Basic is too?

A. JK – Yes. It has to be the same. The renewable portfolio was reduced by the unavailability of resources. CPCNH tries to source local, New England resources.

Q. PS – With Federal funding drying up, is there an opportunity for CPCNH to get more involved in funding local member community projects, eg. Exeter solar with discretionary reserve funding?

A. JK – Yes, we have the annual solicitation program for new projects and have 4 development applications in.

Q. PS – Member communities and our customers need to know this. Can you send email communications.

A. JK – Privacy restrictions don't allow us to communicate directly but customers can sign up for our email and use the website to be informed. We rely on our members to communicate to their customers. We have a new dynamic workbook that breaks out costs and benefits by town as well as for CPCNH overall.

Q. Clr Cook (KC) – How can we build the reserves for renewable energy projects?

A. JK – Have to use add-ers to the discretionary reserve side of the rate. Joint reserves are kept to build to a 60-120 day coverage (enough to be bankable for financing) and don't spill over to the communities (we'd be charging too much.) Joint reserves do not cover localized projects.

Q. KTC – The original model was that discretionary could be used locally – it takes a long time to build the joint reserves when lines of credit are needed to purchase power for new members. And that when CPCNH reached the 120-day reserve the excess would go to discretionary projects.

A. Andrew Hatch – We are now more cautious about the timing in bringing new member communities on – not at the high energy rates winter period.

Q. KTC – Why did you decide not to make filling the financial executive position a priority? Who will be responsible for the financial side going forward?

A. JK – The Board decided to prioritize the power operations side because 90 percent of our costs are on the energy procurement side. We have the outside accounting team and acting general manager on the financials.

Q. BD – I'd like to know more about the strategy for active management moving forward. We want you to be successful but also need to be persuaded that adequate changes have been made because this Portsmouth Community Power committee has a fiduciary responsibility to Portsmouth customers.

A. JK – The Oct 2, 2025 Board meeting, which is open to the public, will go into that in more detail. There's also a member meeting on Oct 24 – which is open, not just to your member representative. I'm happy to schedule a meeting to answer your questions in more detail so Ben can report to PEAC.

Q. JT – We will continue to watch the recovery of the reserves with the good plan you have mapped out.

4. Future status of PEAC – review of draft language from Councilor Tabor, with committee comments in red.

Energy Advisor Committee to be made permanent. Current committee: seven community members and two councilors, exists as a Blue Ribbon Committee. Ordinance similar to enabling language to make Sustainability Committee permanent. Composition:

- All seven existing members are grandfathered/will serve
- One to two councilors appointed by the mayor for two year terms they serve
- Community members serve three year terms
- One member appointed from Sustainability Committee
- After attrition causes the number of community members to drop below seven, the mayor will appoint, with council approval, new members to three year staggered terms

- Afterwards, the committee will have 5-7 community members. Members will have demonstrated knowledge of electricity markets and regulation, and renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies that can benefit Portsmouth

Mission: *The mission of the Energy Advisory Committee is to give a lower cost, lower carbon energy future to our residents.*

Powers and duties

- Oversee **the ongoing operations** of ~~continue to implement~~ Portsmouth Community Power, including recommending local projects supported by Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire Joint Powers Agreement to benefit residents
- Advise City Council on Community Power-related decisions
- Advise City Council on ways to reduce municipal energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Act as a resource to the City, providing technical expertise and advice on City procurement,** choices and energy efficiency strategies and options
- Educate the community on energy efficiency and carbon reduction strategies

Ordinance effective Jan 1, 2026

5. Approval of minutes for September 3, 2025 – on a motion by Councilor Cook, seconded by Peter Somssich the minutes as amended (CPCNH Below and Sweet objected to timing on hiring an executive director) were accepted unanimously.
6. New Business
 - a. PS – Have received 75 percent of the components for the balcony solar system and will let PEAC know when it's installed to schedule a field trip.
 - b. PS – Would like to see what steps can be taken to protect solar arrays from overshadowing new construction – a viewshed approach.
 - c. CK – CleanEnergyNH has announced that there is extra Federal funding available for Sol Smart feasibility assessments by October 31. Perhaps an Island Institute opportunity for the Jones Ave. solar project? Jillian Harris to followup.
7. Public comment – none.

Adjourned at 8:14 pm.

Next meeting, November 5, 2025 at 6:30 pm.

PEAC 2023-2026

Partial work history

- December 2023 – review other towns and cities energy committees
- Feb 2024 – Reinstated by mayor; set priorities and mission through group voting exercise
- Feb 2024 - Draft mission *“to give a lower cost, lower carbon energy future to our residents”*
- Feb-Apr 2024 – working groups formed (see council update)
- May 6, 2024 – Council update
- April 2024 - Research Hanover solar array and municipal energy savings (Betsy Blaisdell)
- May 2024 – Green energy for wastewater plants discussions and proposals (Herb Lloyd)
- July 10 – Solar Conversations – community “how to” session by Betsy Blaisdell
- July 24 – Green Energy Challenge – contest between Community Power towns to stimulate opt ups to green power
- Sep 2024 – National Renewable Energy Lab contract to explore wind power for WWT plants (Herb Lloyd)

- Oct 24 – Button up workshop – residential energy reduction seminar (Tracey Cameron)
- Nov 24 – review of large solar array projects in other towns and cities
 - David Sharples, Exeter, overview of Exeter project
 - Council motion to explore feasibility of solar at Jones Ave (Councilors Cook, Tabor, Denton)
- Feb 25 – discussions with city’s energy efficiency contractor on energy savings program
- June 2025 – Jones Ave solar update to council and motion for funding voted
- July 2025 – Communication plan for August CPCNH rates higher than Eversource
- Sep 2025 – NREL report on WWT plants, vote to put on file but recommend Pease WWT solar
- Oct 2025 – CPCNH oversight Q&A with Coalition representatives

Priorities

PEAC Group Exercise ranking action areas	
Votes	
5	Community-scale solar projects (ideally that benefit residents directly)
4	Collaborate with neighboring towns and cities on priorities and accomplishments, best practices
3	Oversight of Portsmouth Community Power
3	Lower municipal carbon footprint (behind the meter solar, EVs, resiliency through battery storage)
2	Maximize Opt Ups to Green 50, Green 100
2	Community solar projects that benefit renters through RSA 363 A-9 and Inflation Reduction Act
2	Involve high school students
2	Incentives for multi-family and commercial buildings that are efficient and fossil-fuel free
2	Energy performance standards for buildings
2	Micro grids
1	Advocate with CPCNH for renewable energy projects in state/region
1	Amend zoning to remove barriers to solar
1	Advocate in Concord for energy legislation

Membership

- Ben D'Antonio – VP, transmission strategy for Eversource; formerly energy analyst for ISO New England
- Kevin Charette – former Customer Service Director, Eversource
- Peter Somssich – physicist, former member of NH House committee on Technology and Energy
- Betsy Blaisdell – Manager, Environmental Stewardship for Timberland
- Tom Rooney – VP for TRC Energy Engineering, specialist in energy conservation
- Tracey Cameron – consultant with Ceres, a non-profit working on sustainability in the oil and gas industry, previously at Fidelity where she helped launch their ESG office
- Open (Herb Lloyd resigned due to relocation)

Energy Advisory Committee Update

The Mayor's Blue Ribbon Energy Advisory Committee meets the first Wednesday of the month. In addition to overseeing Portsmouth Community Power, the committee works to create a lower cost, lower carbon energy future for Portsmouth.

In February, the committee set priorities using a group voting exercise. The top five priorities were (in rank order): Community solar projects (ideally that benefit residents directly), reducing the municipal government's carbon footprint, maximizing opt-ups to Green 50 and Green 100 in Portsmouth Community Power, energy efficiency standards and incentives for buildings, learning and collaborations from/with other communities, and micro grids.

The committee has been researching the work of other energy committees around the state and their success stories (Exeter and Lebanon for municipally owned solar, Exeter for energy efficiency grants, etc.), and teaming up with Clean Energy NH to develop recommendations to the City Council.

The committee formed two working groups:

- Solar workgroup (Betsy Blaisdell, Herb Lloyd, Peter Sommsich). It is focused on three work areas:
 1. Education and networking: educating the community about benefits of residential solar and learning from those who've succeeded.
 2. Identify barriers and disincentives and make recommendations to the City Council to remove them.
 3. Build a pipeline of municipal solar or other renewable projects to reduce carbon and cost for taxpayers.
- Emission Reduction Funding Opportunities (Tracey Cameron, Tom Rooney, Councilor Kate Cook)
 1. Weatherization
 2. Public Transportation
 3. Other (see below)

The second group has been researching federal "Energy Efficiency Block Grants" which flow from the Biden administration's Inflation Reduction Act. The state will distribute \$49,999,999 for weatherization, public transportation, improving energy efficiency at water treatment plants, waste reduction, diversion and recycling and other measures. Exeter received \$250,000 to weatherize mobile homes, for example.

The solar workgroup and PEAC hope to present a proposal to the City Council for a **no cost** feasibility study of wind, solar and other "behind the meter" renewable energy solutions for Pease and Peirce Island wastewater treatment plants. The proposed study would be done by the National Renewable Energy Lab as part of the DOE Clean Energy to Communities program. Staff review should happen this month.

Finally, a future opportunity: The Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire has hired a full-time local projects director and is negotiating Power Purchase Agreements with local solar and hydro generators. The committee will be watching local projects through CPCNH with interest. 5/6/24

ORDINANCE

THE CITY OF PORTSMOUTH ORDAINS

That Chapter 1, ADMINISTRATIVE CODE, Article IV – COMMISSIONS AND AUTHORITIES, Section 1.414, be added to establish a permanent Energy Advisory Committee, of the Ordinances of the City of Portsmouth, as follows (deletions from existing language **stricken**; additions to existing language **bolded**; remaining language unchanged from existing):

A. Mission: The mission of the Energy Advisory Committee is to give a lower cost, lower carbon energy future to our residents.

B. Membership and Term: The Energy Advisory Committee will consist of one City Councilor to be designated by the Mayor to serve for the two year term they serve on the Council, and seven community members to each serve three year terms, and one member of the Sustainability Committee. The seven community members who are current members of the existing Blue Ribbon Energy Advisory Committee shall continue as members, if willing, for three year terms. As attrition causes the number of community members to drop below seven, the Mayor will appoint, with Council approval, new members to three year staggered terms. Thereafter, the committee will have 5-7 community members.

C. Qualifications: Members will have demonstrated knowledge of electricity markets and regulation, and renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies that can benefit Portsmouth.

D. Powers and Duties: The Energy Advisory Committee shall provide advice and guidance to the City Council, the City Manager, and City Boards with respect to:

1. The operations of Portsmouth Community Power, to include the recommendations for local projects supported by The Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire Joint Powers Agreement to benefit residents.
2. Community Power related issues.
3. Ways to reduce municipal energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions.
4. Technical advice on city energy efficiency strategies and options.
5. City energy procurement
6. Education of the community on energy efficiency and carbon reduction strategies.
7. Technical advice on energy strategies, electrification, and local resource development.

E. Limitations: Nothing herein shall limit the power of the City Council or City Manager to take immediate action in the event of exigent circumstances. Nor shall anything herein limit the ability of the Energy Advisory Committee Chair or Co-Chairs to appoint subcommittees or determine the format of how to best structure meetings.

The City Clerk shall properly alphabetize and/or re-number the ordinances as necessary in accordance with this amendment.

All ordinances or parts of ordinances inconsistent herewith are hereby deleted.

This ordinance shall take effect on January 1, 2026.

APPROVED:

Deaglan McEachern, Mayor

ADOPTED BY COUNCIL:

Kelli L. Barnaby, City Clerk