



CITY OF PORTSMOUTH NH
Portsmouth Energy Advisory Committee

Wednesday, January 7, 2026

MINUTES

For the video recording of the meeting on Zoom:

<https://youtu.be/bh9DqnFIPQQ>

1. Roll call

Meeting called to order at 6:31 pm. Attending, Councilor Tabor, chair; Peter Somssich, Tom Rooney, Tracy Cameron, Kevin Charette, Ben D'Antonio, Sustainability Committee: Fred Calciniari. Excused: Betsy Blaisdell. Staff: Jillian Harris. Stephanie Seacord.

- Chairman's remarks** – Chair Tabor reported that the City Council approved the ordinance to make PEAC a permanent committee. He noted the Mayor thanked the committee members for their work. The Chair submitted **the year-end** report approved by the Committee at the December 22, 2025 City Council meeting.

The Chair invited Tracey Cameron to report on **NH Saves Button Up workshop**: while funding is not certain, they are accepting requests for programs. The Committee agreed that an April date (following winter season bills and with seasonal opportunities to make improvements before the next winter) would be ideal. PEAC will partner with Portsmouth Public Library (the session location) and publicize the event widely. PEAC recommended that Eversource be invited to participate again to speak to Portsmouth-specific programs. Peter Somssich noted that with Federal dollars and programs for greener energy and efficiencies disappearing, steps to increase energy efficiency are something we can each do ourselves. Tracey is also planning to participate in the **Window Dressers workshop** in Exeter and will report if that's a program PEAC should host in Portsmouth. Peter suggested looking at **energy programs being offered in York ME** to see if there are ideas for Portsmouth.

The Chair also invited Planner Jillian Harris to outline the **solar zoning ordinance changes** being presented to the City Council for First Reading at the January 20, 2026 meeting. Reviewed and approved by the Planning Board the revisions are designed to remove barriers to residential sola installation. Chair Tabor suggested PEAC review the recommendations for discussion at the February 4 meeting, preparatory to comment(s) from the committee or its members at the City Council Second Reading on February 9. Peter Somssich asked if the Planning Department and Planning Board would look at solar installation protection (preventing new construction from overshadowing existing solar arrays) as well as permitting.

- Approval of minutes (taken at the end of the meeting).** On a motion by Peter Somssich seconded by Tom Rooney, the committee voted to approve the December 3, 2025 minutes.
- CPCNH rate announcement for February 1 – June 30, 2026 and draft Portsmouth Community Power press release and communications plan**

The majority of the meeting was spent discussing the new higher CPCNH rates starting February 1, 2026. PEAC still fully supports CPCNH and the benefits of choice, renewables and local control. Electric customers do better when they combine their buying power; but the current rate situation causes PEAC members to express several concerns:

- This is the third (and forecasted fourth as of Aug 1, 2026) rate period where the CPCNH rates are higher than the default Eversource. PEAC must serve Portsmouth customers by safeguarding low electricity costs for residents, which was easier when CPCNH rates were lower than Eversource. In the Feb-July rate period the CPCNH rate is 30% higher than Eversource.
- There is concern that CPCNH is not aggressively communicating the rate changes or what members can do – i.e. change from Portsmouth Community Power to Eversource and back – to address the challenge of higher rates. PUC requires the utilities to communicate clearly and extensively; CPCNH is not held to that standard. Although CPCNH says there's been little 'opt-out' migration so far that may be just because the average community power customer is not aware.
- CPCNH communication to members is not as robust as was suggested: awareness of the direct notification is low and monthly (?) reporting specific to Portsmouth financials is not yet available. PEAC would like to know how many Portsmouth customers have signed up for the CPCNH notifications.
- While the need to 'take the hit' now to restore reserves, pay outstanding invoices and eliminate the line of credit and its interest costs is understandable and commendable, Committee members need further explanation on why CPCNH procurement is contracting energy supply at a cost higher than Eversource, cf. "Building the Rate" slide #4 in December 18 CPCNH presentation to Board.

<https://public.onboardmeetings.com/Meeting/vYUuabApLpjlwPC6A5tYdFyHs4hIdaJFSIxfURAecuAA/3GJvdHKwWwbKegHK4SZ8QraAbfYyuTmmLzRdKUwcZ6IA?ReturnUrl=%2FOrganization%2FvYUuabApLpjlwPC6A5tYdFyHs4hIdaJFSIxfURAecuAA>

On the communications issue, PEAC recommended edits to the draft press release that provide candid and transparent guidance to Portsmouth residents regarding the lower Eversource rate, the ability to switch service provider to Eversource and back without penalty, and the programs Eversource offers to help low income customers reduce their bills. A final draft of the press release was subsequently advanced to PEAC and the City Manager's office.

Tom Rooney noted that one direct source of information is the weekly "Office Hours" zoom on Fridays at 10 am. Link to join on Jan 9, 2026 and future meetings:

<https://www.communitypowernh.gov/members/office-hours>

On the energy supply procurement and costs, PEAC concluded it would be helpful for Ben D'Antonio to schedule a meeting with the Risk Committee/Ascend to understand how CPCNH is procuring the supply, and then report back to PEAC.

5. Old Business

- **House Bill Governing Portable Solar Installations**

Peter Somssich reported the bipartisan bill, Senate Bill 540, sponsored by State Senators David Watters, Rebecca Kwoka and Kevin Avarad parallels legislation in Utah to remove hurdles (such as utility interconnection agreements) impeding the use of "balcony" plug-in solar. He is still tracking the record of his own unit but views it as a good, simple, easily-installed and operated option for renters. Legislation: <https://legiscan.com/NH/text/SB540/id/3285735>

- **Jones Avenue Solar Project**

At the December 3 PEAC meeting, DPW Director Peter Rice and DPW project manager Christine Sprovier reported that the City received quotes from five vendors to produce a feasibility study for a Jones Avenue solar array project and hired APEX based on their qualifications and price. APEX is also evaluating and will report on a comparison of bond-to-own, power purchase agreement, land lease, net metering and hybrid or community solar approaches and should have an update in March. Chair Tabor said he expects PEAC with the extensive expertise of its members to be heavily involved in shepherding the project as it develops.

6. New Business

Chair Tabor noted that PEAC meetings are scheduled for the first Wednesday of each month except August. **Agenda items for the February 4 meeting include:**

- Discussion of the recommended zoning ordinance changes for solar
- Goal setting for PEAC in 2026.

7. Public comment – None.

Adjourned on a motion by Tom Rooney seconded by Peter Somssich at 7:51 pm.

Next meeting, February 4, 2026 at 6:30 pm.