

Concord Energy and Environment Advisory Committee
December 22nd, 2021
6:00 PM
City Council Chambers

Attendance: Councilors Rob Werner and Karen McNamara, Nick Babledelis, Dot Currier, Jerry Eaton, Jessica Forrest, Jeffrey Evans

Staff: Sam Durfee

Guest(s): City Councilor-elect Stacey Brown, School Board Representative Jonathan Weinberg, Concord High School students Jennifer Aquino-Patzan and Grace Qiu, Ted Diers (Tree Subcommittee Chair)

Absent: Carl Cooley, Jennifer Galbraith, Henry Herndon

I. Welcome and Introductions

6:07 pm: *Rob Werner calls meeting to order.*

6:10 pm: *Nick moves to approve the November minutes, Jerry seconds. Unanimously approved.*

II. Committee Membership

- **Concord School Board representation**
- **Remaining CEEAC vacancy**

Rob: The CEEAC committee has 13 seats. 11 are filled. Jeff Evans is newest member. Jonathan Weinberg has sent letter of interest to City Clerk. Jonathan would serve as liaison with the school board. During prior conversations with Concord School District (CSD) Superintendent, the CSD and School Board has indicated interests that align with the City of Concord's renewable energy goals. These include the possibility of putting solar on the new Rundlett Middle School, and at other locations such as Broken Ground School. CSD will also enter contract with Briar Hydro. Having school board representation on the committee seems to be a good way of coordinating. Stacey Brown is joining the committee as a City Council representative. Rob is departing City Council, but would like to continue as a member of the committee and would be interested in continuing to serve as chair, unless another person would like to take on the role.

III. Concord Tree Committee Presentation

- **Collaboration with CEEAC**

Rob: Introduced Ted Diers, Chair of the Concord Tree Subcommittee, here to talk about what they do and areas of shared interest with the CEEAC.

Ted: Concord Tree Subcommittee is a couple years old. In 2000, there was pretty significant tree planting in downtown Concord. There was also a downtown inventory in the areas of Main Street to

Rumford. In past couple years, Concord undertook a new downtown inventory, covering presence/absence of trees. Results indicated that downtown Concord lost 38% of trees in one part of the city 2000-2020.

Trees provide a vital service to downtown urban areas, including shading, heating during winter, cooling in the summer, and stormwater management. Without the help of trees, we have to pay to deal with stormwater. Trees also have curb appeal and enhance livability

Reasons trees have been lost: Disease, winter salt, warming climate, conflicts with utilities and pavement, social factors (people don't want to take care of them or clean up the leaves).

Often can't plant new trees in places where they've been lost. Need to rethink how to forest the urban area. Margin between street and sidewalk too small, privately owned. Need to encourage homeowners to want trees on their property.

The Concord Sustainable Street Tree Program was created a few years ago to address this issue, and to address the stormwater challenge that lack of trees presents. Also, a way to promote social equity in terms of access to trees and their benefits.

Street Tree Program has a scholarship program to subsidize the planting of 30-40 trees/year. They will be doing promotion, tree walks, can talk about reducing energy usage among the benefits.

Jessica asked if there is a city-wide inventory, tree planting goal, carbon inventory

Ted : No, not yet. Tree planting has just been to replace what has been lost, though don't know what that is year over year.

Also have a joint project with the Traffic Committee (TPAC): Putting in trees in the South End, improving pedestrian and bike access, calming traffic

Rob: mentioned we have joined ICLEI, have ClearPath, have completed a GHG inventory

Sam: Submitted an application for a new UNH Sustainability Intern for 2022. We plan to use ClearPath to evaluate the GHG impacts of various policy decisions. We can also assess the carbon benefit of reforesting our urban core, perhaps quantify the financial impacts of reforestation.

Ted: Concord doesn't have a city-wide inventory. Should think about trees as infrastructure. Wants to bring focus to Loudon Road and Manchester street, Penacook, neighborhoods north of Franklin street. Spatial approach, could map canopy using iForest

Ted: Through work at DES, understands gathering data is expensive

Nick: How much of the city did the recent inventory cover?

Ted: just the urban core

Nick: St. Pauls School uses the Global Forest Watch tool which allows you to look at acreage each year for 30m x 30m plots

Ted: Need to galvanize interest, build it. Want to replace any tree anywhere within boundaries.

Jessica: How many do you plant per year and how many do you want to plant per year?

Ted: It's hard to tell because there are a few programs and actors: Street tree program, the City, CSD, Parks and Rec. Citywide, estimate planting of 50-60 trees/per year. Concord is losing at least that many, particularly elm, ash, red pine due to disease.

Jerry: Said he was initially a sponsor of a program to introduce of dwarf trees under power lines, such as crab apples. Is this currently part of the program?

Ted: Ton of crabapples planted 20-25 yrs ago- now they are all dying. Average life of an urban tree is about 20-25 years. They do encourage dwarf trees planted in appropriate places.

Jeff Evans: 38% statistic questions

Ted: Number of trees lost in urban center 2000-2020

Nick: Great to make it a norm to plan trees. Also thinks data is useful to inventory so we can know for sure we are planting at least as many as we are losing.

Jonathan: Can you describe process for putting in a tree through the Street Tree Program?

Ted: First step is site evaluation from General Services. They consider 3 things: 1) where to put it (avoiding sewer, gas, water lines); 2) what species; 3) implementation: planting it, then homeowner needs to water and maintain the tree.

Ted: Has talked to Matt Cashman, Facilities Manager at CSD about more ways to work with school district, integrating tree observations and planting into curriculum and PTO activities. Concord High wants to have more tree walks in science curriculum.

Jennifer: talked with Mr. Reardon (Concord High School principal) about landscaping around Concord High.

IV. Concord LED Streetlight Project

- **Project Status**
- **Timeline**

Rob: The replacement of incandescent city street lights with LEDs is 80% done. On track to get it done by end of year or early in new year. 2100 streetlights

Jessica: Received some neighbor comments, particularly on whether they are dark skies friendly and if light levels can be adjusted. Can we release specs or information and put it on our website?

Jeff: More full spectrum, can see more with it than with incandescent streetlights

Karen: Initial investment was \$600,000 to put in. Could include cost savings that will be achieved over time in the materials.

Karen: Parking lots with old lights. Can we have a voice in encouraging them to switch over?

Sam doesn't think we have a say.

Jonathan: School district changed to LED

V. Municipal Projects Update

- **Briar Hydro Net Metering**
- **Contract flexibility**

Rob: The proposal to enter into a net metering agreement with Briar Hydro was on the consent agenda earlier this year. We could get 9 MW/year from this agreement.

Concord could get financial credit up to \$100,000/year (1.8 million over course of agreement)
Flexibility to pursue alternatives if things change (such as installing solar). Can shift to other strategies.

Burlington, VT is 100% renewable because they bought the Winooski dam. Same with Washington state.

Nick: Think this agreement is helpful to keep small hydro in business. Cautions around public communications and the EPA gives guidance. The City is *not* purchasing renewable energy certificates (recs) directly. City needs to own the recs from a hydro project to claim that it is using renewable energy. If city doesn't purchase these, then someone else can claim they have the renewable energy. If there is perception of inauthenticity, could be an issue. Nick thinks it would be a loss to not continue to pursue new renewable on city-owned assets. Thinks we need to continue to push city to install solar. To claim the city is running on renewable power, we would need to continue to purchase recs in addition to having the agreement with Briar (perhaps using the \$100K/year credit received towards those purchases).

Rob: There are two large RE projects that may build on city-owned land. Unitil is looking into building a 10 MW system at Broken Ground School. Concord changed zoning to make the building of solar more welcoming at W. Portsmouth Street. NextEra may come forward with a new proposal.

CSD may purchase 2 million kWh from Briar Hydro, then ramp up to 5 or 6 million kWh in the spring

Nick: Briar Hydro agreement is primarily a financial savings instrument. Purchasing recs can be done with credits. Will work with Rob on communications language and clarifying nature of agreement with city staff.

VI. 2022 Policy Priorities/Planning

- **Policy categories**
- **Community Engagement (Q1, 2022)**

Sam: In September, we undertook an exercise to identify energy and environment priorities for Concord. Some people volunteered to focus on certain priorities. Thought is to talk about 1 or 2 items per meeting.

Dot: Not sure volunteers have enough time to push these items forward.

Jerry: Public communication on these items. Need some guidelines

Sam: Communications structure will be developed. The City has a PIO on staff who can work with people.

Rob: May need a communications strategy to include various paths of communication and items. Next year, would like to re-engage community in a larger way as we did with stakeholder meetings.

Jessica: Committee members as volunteers don't have enough capacity and thinks hiring a Sustainability Director is highest priority to make progress.

Sam: Seems to be support for such a position from City Manager but needs to be well-considered because do not want to initiate and then lose the position in a few years.

Jonathan: Maybe a shared role with school district?

Rob: Nashua, Lebanon have energy positions. Can talk with them.

Nick: Would this be an Energy or Sustainability manager? What is the job description.

Rob: Time frame is to develop the job description and proposal asap

Sam: Action item. Someone needs to talk with various departments about what they envision.

Jonathan: Can also look at university sustainability roles as models.

Nick: Prefers title of Sustainability Director rather than energy manager

Sam: Likes the title. Recommends committee follow up .

VII. Energy Efficiency

- **Public Utilities Commission (PUC) decision status/reconsideration**
- **Legal strategies**
- **Legislative strategies**

Rob: Met with Senator Waters last week in Dover regarding the PUC decision to reduce the systems benefits charge and resulting funds available for state weatherization and energy efficiency programs. The Governor, Department of Energy, and utilities have realized it has created a political problem. Now there is a desire to change. Chairman Vose felt the initial agreement was too costly, but people felt the PUC went too far. Clean Energy NH filed a lawsuit in superior court. There is also a move for the PUC to reconsider the decision, but two new commissioners have conflicts of interest. Don Kreis felt Pradeep should recuse himself, Pradeep thinks he should participate. Carlton Simpson worked at Unutil. Presumably, governor needs to appoint a temporary commissioner. Lawsuit could be quick. PUC reconsideration could be lengthy.

There is also a legislative solution proposal to put funding back to 2020 levels prior to triennial agreement. Wide bipartisan support. Could move quickly. LCV looked at whether Concord should join lawsuit. Will not join due to standing and question of success. But, we are clearly harmed by the decision as a community – lots of people are unable to move forward on weatherization. Concord could

file statements with the PUC. Concord did draft a letter last summer and could do this again. Concord could also draft support for legislation or testify.

Rob: Likes the idea of testifying on legislation

Dot: Where does small business land on the PUC decision?

Rob: BIA doesn't agree with the decision either. Didn't like the high funding levels as originally proposed, but also not the extensive decrease. Rather, prefers something in the middle.

Jerry: No one from legislature or BIA was there to tone the PUC discussion down. Utility ratemaking is based on gradualism and this was not.

Rob: Yes, need more people to engage to have more enduring support

Rob: Will talk with city manager on whether Concord can advocate for the legislative solution.

VIII. 2022 State Legislative Priorities

Rob:

- **Net metering Expansion** – there is a bill to enable large entities to build large solar on their roof and be eligible for net metering credit. Senator Avard is chief sponsor
- **Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) defense** – there is an effort to reduce RSP requirement
- **EV infrastructure** – RFP from state due at end of February. Funds available for charging infrastructure in garages and surface lots. Thinking about spoke streets in Concord. Charging money is also coming from fed - \$17 million, DoT. TNC wants to figure out processes and educate.

Stacey: Sam Evans Brown (Clean Energy NH) suggested that base of streetlights could be a good location for charging infrastructure.

IX. Community Gardens Water Access

Regarding the proposal to improve water access at the community gardens.

Karen: Reached out to Emily Hayes (Land Surveyor, Division of Forests and Lands) with questions regarding any restrictions on building in Russell-Shea State Forest. Emily is researching and will get back with answers.

Jerry: Need an understanding of what state requires and then can talk with mayor, general services, etc.

Karen: spoke with Tracey Lesser – they did something similar at NHTI. Took 6 months to get through the process. Arduous time to get it accomplished.

X. New Business

Rob:

1) Community Power – The proposal to have Concord join the Community Power Coalition of NH was presented to Fiscal committee in the fall, some questions. Mayor generally supports community power. The issue will go to Fiscal Advisory committee early next quarter and then to City Council.

Nick: How would managing community power intersect with proposed job Sustainability Director job description? If in exploratory phase it may not be a requirement, but new position could help to develop a strategy.

2) Exit 17 development. First state liquor store with solar. Constructed but operational in spring – needs traffic circle in order. Tesla is going to put 12 charging stations there. May open charging infrastructure to other cars.

Sam:

3) Pitco: Initial construction estimate was \$40m pre-pandemic and this has moved to \$90m. Revised plan to be submitted to City in next few months and to include charging infrastructure and 3MW solar on roof.

Rob:

4) We filed an application for a UNH Sustainability Fellow for summer 2022 and we were approved at UNH. Also received preliminary approval for our portion of cost-share (\$4,000) prior to a formal vote by City Council. Need someone to help with data entry prior to Fellow starting. Jennifer talking with Tracey (NHTI) re intern.

8:15pm – Unanimous vote to adjourn meeting.