

BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE ON SUSTAINABLE
PRACTICES
PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

**Remote Meeting Via Zoom Conference Call
Please register to attend the meeting via Zoom**

May 27, 2021 MEETING
6:30 – 8:30pm

Minutes

I. CALL TO ORDER 6:30 PM

Present: Bert Cohen, Cliff Lazenby, Larry Lariviere, Rebecca Obrien, Ben Doyle, Darla Mahoney, Valentina Giordana, John Kennedy, Maya McKinnon, Aubrey Gewehr, Guest Robert Marsilia,.

II. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES FROM April 29, 2020

Committee voted unanimously to approve the minutes.

III. NEW BUSINESS

1. Building Code Brief Presentation and Discussion Robert Marsilia

Bert Cohen provided a bit of a framework for why the Committee invited Portsmouth's Chief Building Inspector Rober Marsilia who provided a bit of his background That he began as a builder, then construction management, moved to Massport, then building inspector in Lowell as building commissioner and is certified as MA building commissioner, then Portsmouth Building Inspector. Robert said that the City adopted the State ICC Codes 2015 edition of international energy code as well as other codes all residential, building, plumbing codes adopted by state. This was an update from the 2009 code. According to Robert it appears that the state is on track to adopt the 2021 codes. Most codes have more strict items and some relaxed items except the energy code which generally only gets stricter. Amendments can be used mitigate challenging portions of the energy code. For example air exchange test in climate zone test you cannot have more than 5 air exchanges in an hour. The state allowed 7-9 exchanges these amendments make things a bit easier.

The codes are adopted by a board made up of a mix architects, builders, firemen, inspectors and others. They are experts in their field and also sensitive to economic impacts. This group listens to the trade associations such as the home builders association. In Portsmouth the adoption is brought to the City Council for formal approval. In addition to the state code we have local ordinance we can do as long as they are not less restrictive than the state code. Could not make it less restrictive but can make it more restrictive. State does not like it when the locals adopt more stringent code than state. Example of trying to ban a certain type of gas line got pushback from many. Did put in place more restrictive code on certain electrical outlets. List of websites:

<https://www.nh.gov/safety/boardsandcommissions/bldgcode/index.html>

<https://www.nh.gov/safety/boardsandcommissions/bldgcode/board/index.html>

<https://www.nh.gov/safety/boardsandcommissions/bldgcode/bldgexhibits.html>

All codes have lists of amendments. Current code is 8000 pages including reference materials. Builders must demonstrate compliance in a variety of ways but builders must document the r values types of insulation, blower door test, it is a several page long checklist with detail about proposed project focusing on thermal envelope of building. Commercial projects have even more tests and documentation than residential projects. These commissioning requirements are helpful but not always required. 250 Million Dollars of new construction for last year fiscal year. Residential about 500 new units. Next code they will adopt will be either 2018 or 2021. Question about building materials and their carbon footprint. New materials are a big part of the code. Bert talking about timeframe of 5-10 years to get global warming in check. Are advocates for getting to a climate safe planet having a significant input on how the code is being written? Robert answered that it often comes down to costs and tolerance for additional spending on more efficient buildings. Affluent communities like Portsmouth can afford to require more efficient buildings. Aubrey closing comment that energy efficiency needs to come a long way and bringing down the blower door test from five exchanges to 7 per hour is poor performance at 5 so the fact that even this standard is being weakened at the state level makes it clear that the codes are not moving fast enough. It is possible that we could put stronger codes in place and we would need members to work on this. Cliff stated that by working on this topic could result in a significant payoff if we are able to make this type of change. We could work on recommendations from the committee to the City it could be put in as a priority for 2021 to review building and other safety codes to improve sustainability at the local level. It is one of the areas where we can be more ambitious. There is opportunity to work and make a difference in this area so it is smart to work on this.

2. **Community Power Update: Gearing up for June 7th meeting.** Keep plan to do presentation in front of the City Council that we have a good power point presentation ready to go. Next week request will be submitted to request getting on the agenda then the other thing to do is for the presenters to meet and do a dry run. A number of sustainability committee members met with the NHCPC(NH Clean Power Coalition) group who will be the useful to engage with and get input from that group's members who said they will help us with our work session (request to Council will be for this summer) and who will go. Two eco club members as a max email Cliff when they decide and they can plan a time to connect. Slides are pretty much done but need to do a dry run with the slideshow. We can send out slide show to whole group.
3. **Portsmouth Drawdown Event** Bert Cohen gave a brief update on what the Portsmouth Drawdown Group is working on
4. **Priorities for 2021:** Looking at utilizing what Cliff was able to summarize. Bert wants to keep idea of staffing and how to leverage the City Structure to have enough full time folks

to assist the Committee, More staff would be a way to get more leverage. How are we using our city personnel currently? Discussion about how to build staff capacity in sustainability. Discussion about ideas included conversation with City Manager and Larry suggested a grant writer to pay for their time. Examples of cities of comparable size with departments with sustainability. Need to get in the game to get money while it is there referring to Covid Recovery money. Bert thinks urgency is important to push on this given there is limited time to make something happen as climate change impacts increase. Bert suggesting getting a group together to discuss and also look for grant funds. Even community power could require more work. Shooting for the fall to research and get strong arguments together to make a case to the City Manager about this topic. Larry will research a sustainability grant writer.

5. **Other Business** Tracy Cameron is going to leave the committee due to time constraints. She is sad to leave. Bert suggest an in person. Larry suggests we meet at Conference Room A on June 24th will follow up to confirm location.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

June meeting Peter to facilitate and Cliff to take minutes.