

**CITY OF PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE
PORTSMOUTH ENERGY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**



WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2026, 5pm

City Hall Conference Room A

1 Junkins Avenue, Portsmouth NH

For the Zoom recording:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8r4QmmMgxig>

MINUTES

1. Call to order and Roll Call

Meeting called to order at 5 pm. Attending, Councilor John Tabor, chair; Kevin Charette, , Tracey Cameron, Betsy Blaisdell, Sustainability Committee: Fred Calciniari, via Zoom: Tom Rooney, Excused: Peter Somssich, Ben D'Antonio. Chair noted that Mary Claire Rodriguez-Abbott is moving out of state and has submitted her resignation to the Mayor. Staff: Jillian Harris, Stephanie Seacord

2. Approval of minutes for September 2, 2026

On a motion by Charette, seconded by Cameron, the committee voted unanimously to approve the minutes.

3. Chairman's Remarks/Solar Update

Councilor Tabor noted the light agenda due to limited time. He reported that the City Council voted unanimously to approve PEAC's motion on advancing municipal solar projects in the Capital Improvement Plan, with emphasis on staff guidance in prioritizing the solar projects with best potential. There is \$4.1 million in funding for rooftop and Madbury in the CIP and the Sustainability Committee has expressed support. The APEX study was determinative in terms of how well the Jones Ave. project could work but there are hurdles to overcome for its completion by the end of 2027.

4. Do we want to hear from Freedom Energy?

Chair Tabor posed the question to PEAC as a followup to Councilor Bagley's interest in the fact that both Hudson and Epping left CPCNH in favor of Freedom Energy. He outlined some of the reasons PEAC chose CPCNH over Freedom/the broker model in Keene (Standard Power) after reviewing the options.

- Although the startup rate was lower than Eversource, Freedom required a 1.5-2 year contract and as time passed, the rate balance shifted in favor of Eversource. CPCNH changes rates every 6 months. What are the downsides and the upsides to a rate change at 6 months vs. locking in the rate for the longer term. Might be good when rates are going up but not if they start to tumble due to global market changes.
- The power supply contract is with the municipality with Freedom Energy

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- CPCNH has the advantage of buying power from its aggregation of members.
- PEAC liked the towns' ownership of CPCNH and their joint powers rather than a profit-making focus

He also noted a couple of issues:

- CPCNH financial troubles, though now rebuilding
- Potential shifts in the regulatory environment whereby the utilities will not be able to recover spot market losses

The members agreed PEAC should invite Freedom to provide an informational update but emphasized the invitation should make clear there is no current intention to shift from CPCNH.

- Charette: For our own education, if the Chair makes clear the City is not weighing options. They operate in the same energy market as CPCNH and the utilities – Freedom Energy doesn't have any special pixie dust. There are many broken players.
- Chair Tabor: We should understand how their model works and what the risk is to the City with Freedom as the advisor but the municipality signs the contract.
- Cameron: Agree it would be useful to gain the knowledge.
- Blaisdell: As it is PEAC's remit to have the options and plans, after CPCNH's difficulties, we should hear Freedom's experience as long as they understand we are not shifting. Then it's an informational session and they can decide whether to allocate their time. Also ask how they are reaching out to customers – she received a postcard from Freedom regarding the CPCNH difficulties that seemed to be offering themselves as an alternative – a communications challenge.
- Charette suggested contacting the NH Consumer Advocate regarding the confusing message.
- Rooney: Agreed with hearing from Freedom but hesitated that contact might be sending the wrong signal that PEAC is just asking for an update.

Questions for informational session with Freedom Energy from PEAC:

- What is the refresh rate, given Portsmouth's large number of renters. Charette noted that in MA aggregators refresh every month as standard practice.
- What does Freedom have for customer service? Can they assist with opting-in/-out and resolve issues as CPCNH does? The level of service is important.
- Are they transparent about any financial issues? The City would have to be able to explain the customers.
- What is the term of the contract – is the underlying agreement ongoing or does each rate period require a new agreement?
- What about large commercial/industrial and the City's electricity contracts? City still has time on its 0.08 rate contract.

5. Other Business –

- a. Rooney provided an update from the CPCNH Board meeting:

5th anniversary of CPCNH. Discussion around the possibility that utility rates might go up as the result of the PUC hearing on the spot market recovery request – and whether CPCNH should collect more reserve while having an advantageous relative rate or stay conservative. Goal is to get to 60 days cash on hand but CPCNH could be more

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creative with contracts if they had a better reserve.

Regulatory environment may be getting back to normal such that Eversource purchasing is more fair relative to CPCNH.

There are several bills addressing default power purchasing in the NH House – may shift depending on the political composition after the election.

Charette hoped CPCNH would give members/customers a win after four rate periods higher than the utility, to stem the tide of regression.

Charette noted another advantage to CPCNH over power brokers is that CPCNH has a strong voice in Concord, representing the members to advise the Legislature on energy matters. Chair Tabor agreed there is value in the near and longer term in having a presence, being a player in Concord to advocate for time-of-day rates, etc. along with the goal of reinvesting surplus in projects for the public good.

Blaisdell agreed, noting the outreach efforts of CPCNH/Clean Energy NH to mobilize citizens and provide guidance on energy issues. Also mentioned the advantage that Community Power offers the community a mechanism for energy investments while the broker suggests municipalities aggregate their energy savings for those projects.

b. Solar projects –

Blaisdell returned to the CIP solar priorities to ask about next steps. Chair Tabor noted that Dantonio had offered to pencil out the numbers if the Jones Ave. site triggered additional DES review. He said first the CIP must be finalized and staff is expected to report back October 13 about the project priorities. Initial funds could be used for Jones Ave. design but that rooftop on the DPW extension and City Hall as part of the Municipal Building Complex are ready options. Chair Tabor summarized by saying PEAC wants Staff to queue up the most valuable options and advise on the pacing.

Questions:

- Need to clarify the school opportunities such as Little Harbour with its southern exposure and no trees?
- Need to compare against any maximum megawatt limits while considering all City facilities?
- Would the schools not under DPW management be a different ownership model?
- Other funding opportunities: WalMart school projects for the RECs, restoration of Federal 30% credit with a different Administration?
- Sustainability Committee in synch with PEAC – do we need to engage APEX for more numbers?

c. Window Dressers –

Cameron reported that the Portsmouth build workshop in January has received 150

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orders so far via the York ME effort. Need outreach for more volunteers and more customers – goal of the project is to donate one-third of all product. After 10 years of use, the products are holding up and providing insulation from cold and sound as well as saving money. Chair Tabor will ask Portsmouth Rotary for volunteers and Charette will share volunteer opportunity through his wife to the Portsmouth Women's Club. Charette noted the "energy corner" in the City Newsletter is providing good, consistent messaging from PEAC and this is a good message to add.

6. Public Comment – None.
7. Adjourn 5:50 pm

DRAFT