

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



WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8, 2026, 6:30 pm

City Hall Conference Room A

1 Junkins Avenue, Portsmouth NH

Zoom recording: <https://youtu.be/ivFM9jiGoFw>

MINUTES

1. **Roll call** – Meeting called to order at 6:32 pm. Attending, Councilor Tabor, chair; Peter Somssich, Tom Rooney, Kevin Charette, Ben D’Antonio, Tracey Cameron, Peter Somssich, Sustainability Committee: Fred Calciniari. Via Zoom: Betsy Blaisdell, Mary Claire Rodriguez-Abbott. Staff: Peter Britz, Peter Rice, Christine Sproviero, Stephanie Seacord. Guest: Michael Gordon, APEX.

2. **Chairman’s Remarks** – The two main considerations for discussion at this meeting are:

- Report back from the consultant the City hired to evaluate building a solar array on the Jones Avenue landfill site;
- Councilor Bagley’s request for the City Manager to report back on the possibility of withdrawing Portsmouth from the Community Power Coalition of NH. The Councilor’s request was originally that the City Manager report back on how the City could withdraw from CPCNH. Then he accepted Councilor Tabor’s amendment that the Council also have the work session in addition to the report back and the Council voted to approve that amended motion.

3. **Jones Avenue Solar Update**

DPW project manager Christine Sproviero offered a presentation summarizing the APEX analysis with Michael Gordon from APEX in support:

<https://files.portsmouthnh.gov/minutes/2026/PEAC/Jones%20Ave%20Solar%20Presentation%20PEAC%204.8.26%20Final.pdf>

PEAC supported the recommendation from DPW Director Peter Rice to postpone any solar installation at Jones Avenue due to the cost and time constraints that make it virtually impossible to meet the requirements for Eversource review and DES permitting for wetlands and woodlands impacts requirements and build the project by December 2027 to receive offsetting ITC grant funding. Instead, DPW recommends looking at alternative municipal building sites (e.g. DPW addition roof) for solar arrays. The ENE subsidiary has already evaluated municipal building options for consideration.

PEAC would like to study the presentation more closely and consider:

- other Jones Ave. routes such as the condo development for a virtual net-metering public-private partnership. Also to revisit options in the NREL report, e.g. Pease WWTF after upgrade and Madbury Water Facility site
- solar + storage options and costs so City solar could back up municipal grid
- life cycle of the array and those cost considerations

- factoring in the escalating electricity costs
- converting the Indoor Pool heating system from gas to electric for full use of generated power from solar
- best use of allocated CIP funds “to explore solar”

4. CPCNH/Work Session Discussion

The work session is scheduled for Monday, April 20 at 6 pm with City Council and invited guests: from CPCNH Henry Herndon and Jackson Kaspari and NH Consumer Advocate Don Kreis.

Rather than a work session to evaluate participation in CPCNH, Councilor Bagley asked that the work session consider withdrawal. Committee members made the following comments:

CPCNH Board member for Portsmouth Tom Rooney reported that Henry Herndon is confirmed as Executive Director after serving as interim General Manager. The search committee expects to decide on the financial and procurement executives by the end of May.

Charette: CPCNH needs to confirm two assumptions:

- That CPCNH can demonstrate they have stabilized operations and finances to be competitive in the market
- That their marketing will do a better job of communicating to customers the ability to switch between community power and Eversource without penalty. CPCNH, PUC and the Consumer advocate need to communicate full transparency about rates and how easy it is to switch.

If those two assumptions hold then it would be short-sighted to take CPCNH off the table as an option for Portsmouth. Especially if CPCNH rates are lower, sooner, customers could challenge why we took that option away. Out of 7 rate periods, 4 had lower rates. But they still don't have the required reserves – how long will CPCNH include the adder on the rate?

Somssich:

- Before CPCNH electric customers had the option of the default utility or a third party contract that locked in rates for 6 months or a year with no option to switch back and forth. CPCNH offers best of both worlds: choice, including renewables and the ability to switch.
- Portsmouth Community Power aligns with the City's Climate Action Plan goals. It's a small step but allows residents to do something to support more green energy.
- CPCNH is now the second largest player and not obligated to make a profit. If/when the state supports renewable energy projects again, CPCNH will be important.
- Customers don't pay rates, they pay bills. More education needed on supply vs. distribution costs.
- With Iran war potential impact on natural gas cost (electricity generator) there are just too many variables at work for dramatic decisions.

Blaisdell:

- The freedom of choice is important – 100% renewable option for me.
- We've hopefully gotten through the bad part and should encourage CPCNH and give them time.

Abbott: Agree with Charette about the key assumptions about solvency. Consumer Advocate should be providing a full transparent chart of the rates. Believe that Eversource rates will adjust, mitigating the pressure on CPCNH so it's too early for Portsmouth to

withdraw.

Calcinari: CPCNH should commit to a timeline as to when they will be solvent and when they will be able to offer competitive rates.

D'Antonio: Thoughts and comments are my own and not based on any Eversource information.

- 25 years ago, in an under-mature market, there was restructuring intended to break up the utilities and shift all customers to third-party power supply. That didn't happen but CPCNH was able to take advantage of an opportunity from changes in the legal and regulatory environments to challenge the wholesale power purchase protocol the utilities had to follow. Then that changed (PUC requires utilities to purchase 50% in open market) and there are probably other changes afoot in the framework.
- CPCNH has still not demonstrated competency in the management of the portfolio (admittedly the riskiest approach). New hires are encouraging and willing to give them the benefit of the doubt. But CPCNH must explain to the Council the sequence of adverse impacts, eg refresh in a high-rate period, contract with bankrupt company – stumble after stumble. Portsmouth could make a decision about withdrawing once things normalize – but not there yet.
- We could put effort into communications – give residents the ability to take action. (Charette: Consumer Advocate should be using his bully pulpit to do that, especially addressing low income customers).
- I'm concerned, but still on the bus.

Rooney:

- CPCNH Board has lots to answer for, but withdrawing doesn't make sense.
- Having CPCNH in the energy market impacts the bigger environment to the better but we need to watch out for our residents
- Community Power is a good idea – and not just on the basis of rates. Gives us a voice in Concord where we can't argue as a municipality. Also offers potential for community project development using reserves.
- There are things CPCNH got right and having the right management so the Board is advisory not operations is good.
- We just need to keep an eye on things.

Cameron:

- Wiser to not withdraw
- Need more customer education – low income especially don't read their electric bills.
- Consumer Advocate needs to put pressure on PUC to give CPCNH more access to customers to inform and be community advocate
- Not a time to lock people out of choice.

Tabor:

- Is CPCNH well-capitalized enough for the improvement plan? Only have rates as revenue.
- Made a series of mistakes, eg. Policy compliance – show me they're on the right track
- There's a big difference between an individual and a town opting out. Portsmouth is supporting CPCNH's buying power of 200,000 customers.
- The regulatory environment, requiring utilities to face 50% power purchase in spot market is risky and may change back to a fixed schedule.
- If someone performs well in 4 periods out of 7, do you fire them?

- Don't like the idea of pulling out and leaving our residents with just Eversource.

5. **Senate Bill 538** – Sen Watters' bill on 20 year net metering regulation.
Councilor Tabor spoke in favor at hearing April 6. Bill is likely to pass.

6. **Other Business:** None

7. **Public Comment:** None

8. **Adjourned** at 8:35 pm on a motion by Calciniari, seconded by Somssich.

Next regular meeting: Wednesday, May 6 at 6:30 pm.

Work Session with City Council, Monday, April 20 at 6 pm.

DRAFT