



CITY OF PORTSMOUTH NH
Portsmouth Energy Advisory Committee

Wednesday, February 4, 2026

MINUTES

For the video recording of the meeting on Zoom:

<https://youtu.be/zwEqKF1rif0>

1. Roll call

Meeting called to order at 6:30 pm. Attending, Councilor Tabor, chair; Peter Somssich, Tom Rooney, Tracy Cameron, Kevin Charette, Ben D’Antonio. Excused: Sustainability Committee: Fred Calciniari, Betsy Blaisdell. Staff: Jillian Harris. Stephanie Seacord.

2. **Chairman's remarks** – Chair Tabor reported that the Mayor recommended a new PEAC member whom the City Council will vote on at their February 17 meeting. Mary Claire Rodriguez-Abbott works as Strafford County consultant for the National Grid, interested in urban planning and sustainability.

The City Council held an off-site retreat to discuss their goals for the next two years. Number 1 goal is addressing housing, but three energy goals will be addressed:

- Considering the feasibility of a downtown shuttle loop (recommended by Parking Traffic & Safety),
- Removing impediments to small-scale solar (addressed in the ordinance changes currently recommended by Planning & Sustainability) and
- Building a municipal solar facility at Jones Avenue (as recommended by PEAC and now being advanced).

3. **Approval of minutes.** On a motion by Peter Somssich seconded by Tracey Cameron, the committee voted to approve the January 7, 2026 minutes, amended as follows: Kevin Charette noted that the CPCNH information second bullet misstated the idea of the PUC making Eversource communicate rate changes to CPCNH customers. That sentence was deleted.
4. **Solar Zoning Ordinances** -- The Chair 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 solar installation. Second Reading is scheduled for the February 17, 2026 meeting. D’Antonio suggested that the reference in section 10.1.22 to “alternative energy” be amended to “alternative clean energy” but withdrew the suggestion after discussion. He also asked if the ordinance revision reflected Fire Department concerns about roof access and Harris reported that all ordinances must comply with the NH State Building Code. Somssich spoke at the First Hearing asking the Planning Department and Planning Board to look at solar installation protection (preventing new construction from overshadowing existing solar arrays) as well as permitting.

On a motion by D’Antonio seconded by Somssich, the committee approved the statement that “PEAC recommends that the City Council adopt these solar zoning ordinances.”

5. **CPCNH “refresh” letters to Portsmouth residents** --The majority of the meeting was spent discussing the mailer CPCNH has sent to 2,450 new residents explaining their conversion to Portsmouth Community Power as the default supply instead of Eversource. PEAC did not have the chance to review the letter and had concerns that the mailer did not clearly explain that the CPCNH rates starting February 1, 2026 are higher than Eversource or how PCP customers can easily opt-out and opt back in with no penalty.

PEAC agreed to create a second mailer with that emphasis and approved in substance the draft Chair Tabor offered. An additional note about the benefit of having CPCNH as a voice to affect energy policy in the NH Legislature should be included as well as directing those who need help paying electric bills to the Welfare Office for resources they can access. Portsmouth would have to pay for the mailer (a postcard was suggested to contain the cost) but it would be distributed through the CPCNH mailing house to everyone who received the refresh mailer.

CPCNH Andrew Hatch in attendance via Zoom explained that this refresh was unusual in size because CPCNH paused regular refreshes in 2025 and wanted to get back on schedule to support spreading the load over a larger base. The mailer needs to go out in time for customers to make any changes before March 1, 2026, the start of the next billing period. Andrew also advised that the Call Center is tracking “opt-out” calls, separating those responding to the refresh mailers.

Members asked that PEAC be able to review future mailers and discussed that before the next ‘refresh’ Portsmouth might adopt guidelines that prevent any refresh when CPCNH rates are higher than Eversource. The definition of that delta is TBD as is the question (through the City Attorney) of whether the EAP says the City Council or just the City Manager must endorse the recommendation.

6. **Spot Market Energy Prices** – Because Eversource is required to buy 50% of its supply in the spot market, Councilor Tabor supplied information from google which D’Antonio addressed, saying the google excerpt, “While wholesale prices fluctuate hourly based on demand and fuel costs, retail rates in NH are averaging over 23-28 cents per kWh in early 2026” was misleading as that retail rate figure includes supply, distribution and transmission. He commented that volatility in the spot market is currently extraordinary for two reasons: cold weather and the NECEC (The [New England Clean Energy Connect \(NECEC\)](#) 145-mile, 1,200-megawatt high-voltage transmission line carrying hydropower from Quebec to the New England grid in Lewiston, Maine. Fully operational as of January 16, 2026) has come online in Maine and some other powerlines have cut back and even started exporting power “which almost never happens.” Additionally, because of the severe cold, approximately 25 percent of the power is being generated with oil. “The wholesale market is very, very volatile. I’m not sure suppliers who try to forecast wholesale prices have factored in the volatility we’re seeing. If that’s true the next time rates are reset there may be an effort to recoup some of that unforeseen volatility. However, increased visibility on affordability has meant greater scrutiny on supplier practices, which had led to greater awareness of suppliers adding extraordinary risk premiums on top of the wholesale rate to get to the retail supply rate. In theory some of the volatility in the spot market should be absorbed by the risk premium but as suppliers are not known to be generous and are likely to claw back that premium. It is fair to assume that in the next rate period in the summer there could be a reconciliation of that wholesale premium.” Recent analysis indicates that the current supply price is 10 cents at wholesale and 16 cents at retail – a 60% markup.

7.

8. The Chair invited Cameron to report on her experience with the **Window Dressers workshop** in Exeter. She reported that the nonprofit builds window inserts (wood frames and plastic sheeting) for both residents who order the inserts and 25-30% donated to low income households. The assembly depends on community volunteers but is meticulously organized. If PEAC were to present a Window Dressers session in Portsmouth the needs include: a location for 5-6 days of production, sponsors for the low income product and refreshments, volunteers for 4-hour shifts (all of which might garner interest from Rotary, Timberland, Eco Club students) and residential customers. A concerted outreach effort would be needed – Sustainability Committee might partner. Somssich asked if Window Dressers can supply feedback/results to help promote – U of Southern Maine may have some statistics.
9. **Goal setting for PEAC in 2026** – Deferred to the March meeting. Committee members are encouraged to bring ideas for action they care about – a statement of PEAC work and deliverables. Suggestions include: an update on the City’s energy audit by EEI and an update on the Jones Avenue Solar Project. Somssich suggested that PEAC goals be realistic ones for the circumstances of local and national conditions and suggested PEAC make connections with Sustainability Committee goals. Charette also asked about the monthly Portsmouth data that CPCNH has promised to provide. Still not seeing it.
10. Public comment – None.

Adjourned on a motion by Somssich seconded by D’Antonio at 8:20 pm.

Next meeting, March 4, 2026 at 6:30 pm