



CITY OF PORTSMOUTH NH
Portsmouth Energy Advisory Committee

Wednesday, March 4, 2026

MINUTES

For the video recording of the meeting on Zoom:

<https://youtu.be/R69JmCvT6Hc>

Roll call – Meeting called to order at 6:35 pm. Attending, Councilor Tabor, chair; Peter Somssich, Tom Rooney, Kevin Charette, Ben D’Antonio, Mary Claire Rodriguez-Abbott. Excused: Sustainability Committee: Fred Calciniari, Betsy Blaisdell, Tracey Cameron. Absent: Peter Somssich. Staff: Jillian Harris. Stephanie Seacord.

1. **Chairman's remarks** – Chair Tabor reported that Councilor Bagley has asked the City Manager to report on what steps would be needed for Portsmouth to opt out of CPCNH. In the discussion at the March 2 the City Council determined they do not have enough information to make that decision and requested a work session with PEAC and a representative from CPCNH – subsequently suggested for either April 6 or April 20 at 6 pm prior to the scheduled City Council meeting. Chair Tabor also reported that Councilor Cook felt it important to have PEAC at that session for their expertise and knowledge of CPCNH and Portsmouth’s participation over the years. The session is to address questions about CPCNH and how it looks for ratepayers in Portsmouth for the next 1-2 years.

Councilor Bagley had also originally included in the Council agenda a motion not to refresh the Portsmouth Community Power membership unless the rate was within 5% of Eversource. That motion was withdrawn before the meeting.

2. **Approval of minutes.** Note: the quorum was not established until 7 pm so the approval of minutes was taken out of order at that time. On a motion by Charette seconded by D’Antonio the committee voted to approve the February 4, 2026 minutes, with Mary Claire Rodriguez-Abbott abstaining because she did not attend the February meeting.
3. **Goal setting for PEAC in 2026** – Deferred from the March meeting. Group exercise in April to rate the priorities. Committee members:

Tracey Cameron (submitted comments in advance)

- Energy efficiency
 - educate residents on low cost options to reduce energy and save money
 - partner with relevant programs (e.g., Button Up NH, Window Dressers, Heat pump funding)
 - state advocacy opportunities

Kevin Charette:

- Energy efficiency, across the board, programs but other educational aspects, with a communications drumbeat to residents: eg. Energy Efficiency Corner from PEAC in weekly City Newsletter recommending the NHSaves homeowner audit and financing for those who qualify
- Advise the City/DPW on energy efficiency in municipal buildings for 5-year tangible priorities and

funding, including update from EEI on actionable items from their energy audit of municipal buildings; help champion what they're doing

- More aggressive posture with CPCNH to hold them to account because there's exposure there and PEAC is responsible for oversight. Need leadership from CPCNH to meet with PEAC regularly with status updates.
- After Jones Avenue Solar Project – what's the next project? With long lead times for solar we should start to identify other opportunities for the City. NREL suggestions?
- Transportation support to align with Climate Action Plan – PEAC member on that committee? Expanding EV charging
- CPCNH Legislative Affairs – Communications loop. PEAC members should subscribe to updates to inform the public <https://www.communitypowernh.gov/advocacy#signup>

Tom Rooney:

- Start with energy efficiency as the foundation with PEAC in advisory role. Start with efficiency and then renewables, etc.
- Contract review on municipal energy projects, if appropriate?
- Education on specific examples for residents e.g. ice dams

Ben D'Antonio

- Support the same priorities as before.
 - Consult with other town energy committees for best practices
 - Lower the municipal carbon footprint
 - Oversight of CPCNH
 - Energy efficiency as the first tool
- Emergency preparedness – identify critical buildings for resilience/microgrid -- public safety circuit on battery? Briefing from City's Emergency Management Operations lead Fire Chief McQuillen?
- Identifying City issues to elevate to Concord/track legislation affecting energy and advise City's Legislative Subcommittee; stay informed and advocate with CPCNH legislative concerns
- Governor's State of the State suggestion of supplementing nuclear power in NH?
- Follow-up on NREL recommendations on solar at Pease Wastewater Treatment Facility

Chair John Tabor

- Move forward with Jones Avenue Solar and review/advise on recommendations
- Get update on EEI energy audit
- Revisit NREL recommendations
- Follow CPCNH legislative updates and advise City's Legislative Subcommittee as appropriate

4. **2026 meeting dates in packet**

5. **CPCNH** – Council asked PEAC to attend work session on whether to withdraw.

PEAC reviewed the follow-up postcard (reviewed with Jackson Kaspari at CPCNH) being sent to the 2,450 'refresh' list of new Portsmouth residents. Chair Tabor reported that Clr Bagley was concerned

that Portsmouth missed the deadline to reject the refresh but the Mayor was not in favor of pausing the refresh as that would create two classes on ratepayers.

In advance, the City Manager should have specific answers from CPCNH on the impact of withdrawal according to the terms of the City's Cost Sharing Agreement – cost and timeline. The timing for withdrawal depends on making CPCNH whole in terms of the revenues anticipated from Portsmouth which impact the procurement profile. In the original CSA there was the possibility of allocating reserves paid in by Portsmouth ratepayers to offset the gap; but the reserve funds were depleted in correcting the CPCNH shortfall. **Recommend the City Manager get the specific CSA rules, the cost and timeline from Henry Herndon – and have Hency or Clifton Below be the CPCNH representative at the work session.**

PEAC members want the work session with Council to address the hard questions and get answers from CPCNH. Bow and Wilmot are in the process of withdrawing and many other cities such as Nashua are considering that option. Dover took the municipal contract out of CPCNH. CPCNH should be well prepared to answer the questions to regain member confidence. Portsmouth was close to Wave 1; and has concerns.

Chair Tabor commented that there is more to the context than just CPCNH v Eversource: there's a changing regulatory environment such that CPCNH's original procurement model advantage over the utilities set procurement schedule is no longer the case. But CPCNH procurement model by itself has not driven the PUC regulatory changes. Spot market price exposure in NH is likely to affect the regulations.

Key questions the Work Session should address:

- Remind ratepayers they can switch from Community Power to Eversource and back without penalty, even as the City considers the pros and cons in the cost and timing of any withdrawal. Do ratepayers know? How many have opted in/out over 13 months of higher rates?
- Recognize the in-depth knowledge and energy industry expertise of PEAC members who, as the City's community power stewards need to hear level setting from CPCNH: how did we get here? CPCNH explain what happened over past 12 months and what they're doing about it.
- What is the track record for Portsmouth customers: two years each of \$1+ million savings, then \$800,000 loss, now at break-even? **Have rate chart showing the balance.** Ask: where are the promised monthly City-specific reports?
- CPCNH needs to education Council. This is the third rate period with Community Power higher than Eversource. CPCNH: how long will the recovery take? If the Eversource rate advantage diminishes (due to Eversource reconciliation, and possible better CPCNH rate).
- The high rates are caused not just by cold weather and the regulators. Need to be honest and detail the steps for turning the problem around. What is the recovery plan and where are we? Why weren't the controls and procedures not followed? We want them to be successful and to have an energy coalition representing 40 towns to compete at scale with the utilities.
- What is the plan for staffing critically important roles and when? Need the in-house leadership, especially Director Finance, but also Executive Director and Director of Power Operations (procurement).
- Even if the rates are the same as/competitive with Eversource, what does the City get from CPCNH membership? Sell us again on their active procurement management.
- All members available for a work session on either April 6 or 20. All work sessions are public with a zoom option and public comment.

6. Public comment – None.

Adjourned on a motion by D'Antonio, seconded by Rooney at 7:55 pm.

Next meeting, April 8, 2026 at 6:30 pm

Topics to include:

- Jones Avenue Solar recommendations and next steps from consultant.
- Prioritizing goals.

DRAFT