

Notes from the Second Public Input Session on Concord 100% Renewable Energy Draft Strategic Plan – May 4, 2019

Welcome and introduction. Presentation by Zach Jonas and Jennifer Galbraith (Concord Energy & Environment Advisory Committee)

Public questions and comments in bold, Committee (or other) answers and responses in regular type:

Climate change is an issue that keeps me awake at night. I am a retired teacher, and I think of my students and my granddaughter. What will their lives be like if we don't address climate change? If we don't do something about it, things will get much worse. Thank you for pursuing this goal and plan.

Thank you for the comment.

I am glad the plan addresses energy efficiency, but you are selling its value short. Reducing energy use doesn't just save money, it makes the building more durable. Energy efficiency makes a building more comfortable. What is the payback on your La-Z-Boy recliner? The cost savings are an added bonus with energy efficiency, but you should do it for other reasons.

Thank you.

Are you prioritizing energy projects for public housing? It should be a priority. Focus especially on municipal public housing. You should make the plan as specific as possible on this issue.

We agree. We think the draft plan points in this direction, but we will try to flesh it out some more.

I think there was not enough promotion of this event. I only learned about it because of a letter to the editor. Can you spread the word better? For example, in the Concord Monitor, on a web site, on social media, on YouTube.

We did most of these things. Announcements ran in the Monitor. Facebook event pages were shared. Flyers were circulated around town. It was posted on the City web site. A member of our committee wrote a letter to the editor. But we will try to do better in the future.

Can you put promotional pieces in water bills?

We inquired about this idea, but it was rejected.

Do you know what Saskatchewan build is? It is a very energy efficient approach to designing the walls of a building. When you have it, you can heat a room with a candle. You should use technologies like this.

Thank you for your comment.

I built and installed my own solar panels. Are you going to find my equipment in violation of code?

We are the Concord Energy & Environment Advisory Committee, and we can't speak for the Code Enforcement office. If your equipment is safely installed, you shouldn't have a problem.

I hear that people are worried about cost-shifting from net metering projects. People just misunderstand the benefits that these projects bring. More renewable energy can save money for everyone. Getting people educated about how renewable energy works is important.

We agree.

What happened to the solar project proposed on Whitney Road?

Councilor Brent Todd answered: The proponent of that project asked the City whether developing the project would increase his property taxes. The answer was yes. This inquiry brought attention to the issue within the City, and eventually prompted the City Council to adopt a solar property tax exemption. I understand that the Whitney Road project didn't go forward for other reasons.

Does the City offer a property tax exemption for all solar projects? If not, why not?

The solar property tax exemption is available to solar projects that generate power consumed on the premises where it is generated – e.g., rooftop solar projects that serve a home. Your property taxes won't go up if you install solar on your roof.

Larger projects that deliver power into the electric grid do not qualify for the property tax exemption. And one of the benefits of those projects to the community is that they generate property tax revenue. That is appropriate – bigger projects can afford to pay property taxes.

There is a tradeoff between making solar projects taxable or tax-exempt. The City can offer a tax exemption within state law where it wants to encourage installation of solar and other kinds of projects. But some kinds of projects should be taxable and keeping them taxable broadens the tax base. Where to draw the line is an interesting question.

I heard they are going to install DC charging stations on the highway. Is that correct? I want to see DC charging stations. How can that be funded?

The State has money from the Volkswagen settlement that it will use to start to build out a statewide EV charging network. It won't build a network by itself but it will be the start. In addition, private dollars will flow into charging stations, and the City could consider some investments.

In your presentation, you mentioned including this plan in a new version of the City's Master Plan. When will the next Master Plan be prepared?

Councilor Brent Todd answered: After zoning changes are adopted, in another year or two.

My name is Dana Lavoie and I am a member of the Dunbarton Energy Committee. Dunbarton is working on a solar project that will power all of the town government energy needs. An added benefit of town-sponsored projects is that it will give residents the idea to install solar projects themselves.

We agree. We hope for the same thing with the Concord City RFP for solar projects at the Landfill, Wastewater Treatment Plant and Water Treatment Plant.

What is the status of Concord's solar RFP?

It is in the final stages of review before it is issued. We hope that will be very soon.

There is a lot going on in solar and renewable energy. The City of Lebanon is looking at a multi-phase project. Electric vehicle (EV) charging needs to be built out in our region. People are starting to make decisions around where EV charging stations are located. I have solar on my roof and an EV in my garage. I think these are sound economic investments – payback on investment does not take long. People do not realize what is available and how much costs have come down.

Councilor Rob Werner responded: We are looking into siting EV charging stations downtown. The Chamber of Commerce supports this idea so that people passing through the area are encouraged to stop in Concord to get a charge, and dine at a restaurant or shop while they are here. They would like to see signs on the highways advertising that you can stop for a charge in Concord.

Solar panels generate DC power, but power is delivered to the grid and used in homes as AC power. You lose power in the DC to AC conversion. I think it has to do with harmonics. Is there any way to get around it? How much power should I expect to lose in the conversion?

Dana Lavoie responded: Conversion factors vary depending on the equipment and the set-up, but in general you can expect 85% net power output post-conversion.

I would like to see more people use bikes to get around, but our streets are not bike-friendly enough. I am glad we have bike lanes in some places but in general our streets are not safe enough for biking. A big problem is the quality of the pavement – patches are more hazardous for bikes than for cars.

Thank you for your comment.

I tried to bike from the South End to the Heights and found navigating that route on a bike to be difficult. Can this be fixed?

We understand that planning staff and the Transportation Policy Advisory Committee (TPAC) are working on a bike route very similar to what you are describing.

Councilor Rob Werner added: The I-93 widening project is affecting our local transportation plans. The City has been working to get its needs and preferences accounted for in the widening plans. The City's input may be changing the mindset of Transportation Department as it considers the widening plan.

These timeframes (2030 and 2050) seem like a long way off. Why does it need to take that long? Common sense solutions are available now.

Thank you for your comment.

We can follow the example of Scandinavian countries. They are making great strides. Norway reached a point recently where 50% of all automobile sales are EVs. Norway is banning the sale of combustion vehicles (gasoline and diesel) after 2025. They have other policies that encourage EVs – for example, they don't charge for charging. All of the Scandinavian countries are making great strides in renewable energy – wind in Denmark, hydroelectric in Norway. Copenhagen has a great network of bike paths.

We agree. The UK and France have also banned the sale of combustion vehicles in the 2030 to 2040 timeframe. Amsterdam will ban vehicles in its downtown areas in the not-too-distant future. There are important efforts underway around the world that we can draw lessons from.

Councilor Brent Todd offered a series of comments: I included this meeting in my newsletter. You can hear about this and other events by getting on my distribution list. I urge the Energy & Environment Advisory Committee to continue making efforts for public outreach. You should ask for people's contact information at these events and send them updates. More public input is needed to make this plan what it should be. You received some good input here today. Don't drop the word "Advisory" when you identify the Committee. Focus more

on solar energy and conservation. There is not enough information on energy efficiency in the plan. One concern of mine is what happens to the solar panels at the end of their useful life. Where do the used panels go? Noted the solar ordinance which will be considered by City Council at its June meeting. I ask that you don't rush this plan. Make sure the process is thoughtful. It's more important to do it right than to do it fast. The City is proud of the steps that it has taken on energy efficiency and renewable energy in the past. We have been a real energy leader. I thank the Committee for doing a great job.

Cathy Corkery responded: We have been at this for a year. We do not need to wait to wait longer for a plan. Concord has the opportunity to lead. There is no need to wait. You asked that the process be thoughtful – it has been thoughtful.

Councilor Brent Todd: I stand by my comments. Let's get a great final product for this plan.

A different attendee said: Don't go overboard on the plan. This is just a step in the process. Complete this step, then move on to the next step. The plan will always be subject to change. This (a transition to renewable energy) has to happen without delay.

Thank you for coming. Please help spread the word about the final input session on Monday, May 6 at 6 pm in City Council Chambers.

Members of Public Present (not including Committee representatives): 12 to 15

Representing the Committee: Rob Werner, Zach Jonas, Jennifer Galbraith, Chuck Willing, Cathy Kilday, Dot Currier

Notes taken by Chuck Willing