

Community Power Public Hearing

Wednesday December 20th at 6:30pm

Members in attendance: Bill Sebastian (chair), Rita Sebastian (committee member), Mark Runquist (committee member), Dan Boyton (ex officio). Andrew Hatch from the Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire joined for the presentation.

6:30 Dan presented a motion to start the meeting. Mark seconded the motion. Community members voted for the meeting to begin.

Dan opened the meeting by explaining the history of Community Power in Campton and public interest in the issue. This is the second public meeting on the topic. The first was at the select board meeting on December 4.

Bill Sebastian led the presentation on Community Power. See attached PowerPoint. The presentation began with a discussion of what community power is, the community power coalition of New Hampshire, the plan, issues for input, and questions and answer opportunities. Community Power will not impact who delivers the electricity, whether it is the electric co-op or EverSource. Community Power impacts the choice of supplier of electricity. State law prevents utilities from generating power. By default, consumers get a supply deal set up by the utility. Consumers have the option of shopping around, but often do not and use the default. Community Power committees can negotiate supply deals offered as a default in their towns. Towns can then work together to find the best deals for everyone. The idea of coming together is aggregation. Towns that have currently launched community power are paying 14% less than EverSource and have options for lower carbon footprints.

Andrew then introduced the Community Power coalition of NH. The coalition was formed in 2021 as a nonprofit. They are required to be completely transparent, subject to right to know laws. In the 1990s, there was deregulation but has not benefited all consumers as not all have shopped for power suppliers. Last year, Eversource's rates went up significantly for natural gas. New rates for EverSource will be published in early February. The coalition will also be coming out with their rates soon. 50 towns have signed on to the coalition thus far. The first launches were in April and May of this year. Some have launched, some are approved but have not launched, and some are in planning. About 30% of residents in New Hampshire are now served by the co-op. Board of directors are volunteer from widely varying backgrounds. The coalition is one community, one vote so smaller communities have equal representation with larger ones. The coalition has just hired its first staff but intends to stay lean and to be competitive in the market. The approach is opt out because the state's opt in program for the deregulation has not worked. Community power would be the default and people could opt out to choose a different supplier. Residents can opt out by email, calls, or going to the website. Opting in or out is immediate with no cost. It covers net metered customers and residents on assistance programs. If residents are generating electricity through solar or other means, that is included as well. At this moment, net metering customers need to opt in to the coalition to make sure that it is a good value for them. The plan is based on the vision of Campton residents, not the vision of the coalition and needs to be approved by the town and the electric regulation commission. The process of paying bills would stay the same. Residents would continue to pay the distributor of electric (co-op or EverSource) and that group would then reimburse Community Power as they currently do their suppliers. The process would begin with customer notification. Key points are that no program expenses are paid by the town or by tax revenues. The town is also protected

from liability. Participation is voluntary. The town does not have to use CPC as its supplier. The community power law does not require that states use the community power coalition as its supplier. The program can only be launched if it provides lower rates to the consumers. The Select Board will have all contractual authority.

Bill then presented on the community power timeline for Campton, with the establishment of the committee in June. The plan was drafted in October. This is the second public meeting, and the next step is to go to the town meeting. The earliest service would launch would be end of summer. The three key issues to resolve are selection of the vendor, the opt-out option for the co-op as it could be opt out for Eversource and opt in for the co-op. The current recommended vendor is the CPC as it offers the lowest rate, support for clean energy, and support for local energy. NHEC and CPC are complementary services with strong ties and overlapping personnel. The current recommendation is for opt out for both EverSource and NHEC because the cost is lower with more renewable choices. The third issue is the default amount of renewable in the default plan for the town.

At 7:12, the floor opened for questions and answers. The first question came in the on the chat was whether, as more towns come in, the coalition would have more buying power and options. Andrew responded yes. The organization is building credit worthiness which requires 120 days of cash on hand and three years of audited books. Once the CPC has met that, they will have more negotiation options. As the CPC grows, there will be less overhead costs as well.

Ann Berwick then spoke about her experiences with municipal aggregation in Newton Mass and as the undersecretary for energy for Massachusetts. She has worked on the equivalent program in Mass. The law in Mass has existed for multiple decades with opt out. Ann stated the importance of opt out based on her polling and experience in Newton where people stated they were willing to pay more for more renewable but did not opt in to it. The current default level of renewables in Newton is now 95% with opt out options but residents have still on average saved money over other power suppliers. She emphasized the importance of renewables as well. Rita added that Ann is an advisory member of the committee.

Jennifer asked on Zoom if CPC members were elected, hired, or appointed. Andrew responded that the board is elected, with one vote per town. Each year one third of the board turns over. This also applies to the finance, member services, and audit boards. Members are volunteers and serve for three year terms.

An audience member asked whether town members would be able to opt up or down on the amount of renewables in their supply. Bill responded that the default would have a set amount, but town residents could opt out by phone/email/website to select more or less renewables. Ann added that you can switch at any point with no fee, which is in contrast to for profit suppliers that charge fees for changes. Andrew specified that the towns can choose between the Granite and Granite 33. Residents would have to opt in to higher levels of renewable as those two are both lower in cost than what residents currently supply. Andrew emphasized the importance of opt out and stated that several towns have chosen Granite 33 with the higher percentage of renewable energy. Thus far only a fraction of a percent of residents in community power towns have opted out of the town's default plan.

Jenn asked over chat what dictates the rates of renewables and what would reduce rates. Andrew responded that the reserves of the CPC will be used to increase local communities ability to have local renewable options which would bring down rates.

An audience member asked a question about net metering and the impact on residents interested in solar panels. Andrew responded that the current challenge is with the software used by the utility companies. The state regulatory system has asked for updates and CPC should be able to support net metering customers within the next few months.

An audience member asked about the co-op and whether the rates will be better for residents with CPC. Andrew responded that, most likely, yes, but the new numbers are not in yet. EverSource has announced lower rates this year in response to competition.

Audience member asked whether Campton has plans to put in renewables. Dan replied that the select board sees CPC as an easy first step to this and that the campus design committee is also looking at options. The CPC reserve could be used to support local renewables.

Audience member asked about the role of brokers and why the town is not recommending them. Dan responded that brokers have costs for the town like mailers. The town is also on the hook for liability and would need to develop savvy in vetting brokers and deals. Brokers are also for profit. Bill added that they met with brokers on rates and proposals. Standard power was brokered a three year deal with Keen at 11.4 cents, which is now much higher than EverSource is offering. The long contracts with brokers might cost townspeople money and there is also a broker fee to pay.

Audience member asked about the reserves set aside by the CPC. Andrew responded that the amount set aside for each community is based on their kilowatt hours. If Campton leaves CPC, they would be able to take their reserves contribution with them for renewable development. Currently the reserves are being used to establish credit worthiness. Once that has been achieved, reserves can be used for development or to bring down consumer rates.

Dan asked the timeframe of the agreements. Andrew responded that the town is deciding right now broadly on community power, not deciding on choosing CPC as the supplier. If the town wanted to begin the process now of choosing CPC, the town would need to send their plan to the regulatory commission 60 days before a town meeting, which would result in an approved plan for the town to vote on. The town can opt out of CPC every six months.

Dan asked whether the town could change the default plan for CPC in the future. Andrew responded that the town could change default plans every six months.

Dan asked about challenges in other communities. Andrew responded that the utility companies had mislabelled a few commercial net metering companies, which resulted in a too large bill. The utility company paid back the difference to one company and CPC to the other although the mistake was by the utility company, not CPC.

The community members present then voted on whether they would want to have opt in to CPC for co-op members or opt-out. All residents wanted opt out. The community members then voted on whether they wanted CPC or a broker as a supplier. Almost all voted for CPC. Finally, the community members voted on whether they wanted the higher or lower renewables plan as the default and all but one voted for the higher renewables option.

Dan then discussed with an audience member what information to bring to the town meeting and requested that the committee shares share the broker information with the select board for review.

An audience member then asked if the town's aggregation plan was ready as it had been waiting on final numbers from the utility company and Bill responded that it was.

Dan made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Bill seconded and the motion was approved.

Bill then proposed accepting the aggregation plan. It was seconded and approved. The meeting was then adjourned.