



Committee on Community Resources and the Northampton City Council

Committee Members:

Chair: Councilor Gina Louise Sciarra

Vice-Chair: Councilor Dennis P. Bidwell

Councilor Alisa F. Klein

Councilor James Nash

Meeting Minutes

Date: October 21, 2019

Time: 5 p.m.

Location: Council Chambers, 212 Main St., Northampton, Massachusetts

- Meeting Called to Order and Roll Call.** At 5 p.m. Councilor Bidwell called the meeting to order. Present on roll call were Councilors Dennis Bidwell, Alisa F. Klein and James Nash. Gina-Louise Sciarra arrived at 5:11 p.m. Also present were Adele Franks, Steering Committee Member of Climate Action Now and Darren Port, Buildings and Community Solutions Manager for Northeast Energy Efficiency Partnerships (NEEP).
- Announcement of Audio/Video Recording**
Councilor Bidwell announced that the meeting was being audio and video recorded.
- Public Comment**
Alex Jarrett of 8 High Street said he was interested to see the topic on the agenda today of the international codes and the voting on that. He had a thought about the question of affordability as the proposed changes will enact more stringent codes that essentially cause the cost of new construction to rise. However, it is important to keep in mind that it is only the initial cost of construction that rises as when you look at the life-time with these more efficient codes property owners will likely save money over time, he pointed out.

He posed the question of whether it would be possible to have a program that recognizes the increased cost of energy efficiency improvements and amortizes them over time. .
- Minutes of May 20, 2019**
Councilor Nash moved to approve the minutes of May 20, 2019. Councilor Klein seconded. The motion passed unanimously 3:0 with one absent (Councilor Sciarra).
- Presentation/Discussion of Energy Efficient Codes Coalition (EECC) Voting Guide for 2021 International Energy Conservation Code (IECC)**
Adele Franks and Darren Port jointly presented background information on the Energy Efficient Codes Coalition (EECC) voting guide and the current movement to encourage municipal officials to register to vote and have a voice in the creation of a more energy-efficient and climate-smart 2021 IECC.

Ms. Franks introduced herself as a steering committee member of Climate Action Now Western Mass. She has been following the code development process and brought to the attention of councilors the need to get more voting representatives on board. This time around, it looks to her like they're doing really well as they have at least 20, maybe 24, City of Northampton employees registered to vote. Last year they had one.

Darren Port identified himself as the Manager of Buildings and Community Solutions for NEEP, one of six Regional Energy Efficiency Organizations, or REEOs. He assists organizations in putting energy codes in place.

The Massachusetts base building code basically follows the IECC, Ms. Franks presented. There is a stretch energy code that communities can adopt, and 272 communities in Massachusetts have done so. Over the last few code cycles, the energy code has not been improving as much so there is a lot of interest in improving energy efficiency in the IECC. As of now, the stretch code and the base code are almost the same.

The most important thing she learned from the last webinar is that, to be eligible, Governmental Member Voting Representatives have to be validated, then need to establish a username and PIN. The next step is to set a date and time for members to vote together.

The Energy Efficient Codes Coalition (EECC) has put out a provisional ballot and is recommending that members focus on voting on 80 of the code change proposals. EECC representatives are urging voters to vote on these 80 because these are the ones that will have the biggest impact. For commercial buildings, pro-efficiency proponents are aiming for a 10% increase in energy efficiency.

Councilor Sciarra arrived at 5:11 p.m.

Councilor Bidwell asked Mr. Porter if he has an independent opinion as to whether the EECC submitted the right votes.

There are big jumps from one code cycle to another, Mr. Porter related. Between 2006 and 2012, the IECC gained about 30% in energy efficiency so it was on a great trajectory toward moving toward zero net energy building. In the last few code cycles pro-efficiency proposals have gotten very little gains, however; only about 1.5%. Advocates are very interested in seeing some significant efficiency gains this time around.

In terms of Massachusetts, it is really sort of an unprecedented moment in time, he continued. Massachusetts has always been in the forefront of voting, but this time around over 420 voters in Massachusetts are already registered so Massachusetts itself could overturn some of the rollback proposals or advance proposals that need a two-thirds vote to pass.

With regard to the voting guide, in the past, all energy efficiency organizations - New Buildings Institute (NBI), etc. - put out their own voting guides. This year for the first time, all of the energy organizations have coalesced around a single voting guide, and it is the only one that will be seen on the efficiency side. He pretty much explicitly trusts this one, he confirmed. The guide includes the collective recommendations of all of the best advocacy minds as well as the best building folks. Prospective voters could simply go down and check 'yes' or 'no,' or dive deeper into the actual proposals.

Any number of proposals are applicable to all climate zones but, when drilling down into the proposals, some are only applicable to one climate zone or one type of building, he indicated.

Mr. Porter offered to present some of the highest-priority recommendations, including five universal energy codes, five of the biggest energy-saving proposals and five Major Efficiency Rollbacks/Trade Offs.

Councilor Nash asked how progress in terms of efficiency has slowed down over the last few code cycles. In other words, what is the barrier?

At the end of each proposal is a cost impact, Mr. Porter advised. Only one proposal actually pays for itself. Builders are always concerned about the first cost. The home office is saying they are not going to sell houses because the new features are not affordable but researchers are saying people are willing to pay for efficiency features.

Another reason there haven't been large efficiency gains has to do primarily with politics, he acknowledged. The effect of the lobbying strength of the builders is that builders and the International Code Council (ICC) came to an agreement that, on every code committee, there would be at least five seats dedicated to builders. This has changed the dynamic of what can get done. Because of the interests of builders being seen on these committees, they have been able to either defeat efficiency proposals or roll back efficiency gains, he presented.

In response to a question from Councilor Klein about the practical significance of changes to the IECC, Ms. Franks said her understanding is that Massachusetts by law has to adopt IECC-recommended codes. In addition, Massachusetts can adopt a stretch energy code. All green communities are required to use the stretch code, she asserted.

The two major code-making bodies are the ICC and, on the commercial side, the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE), Mr. Porter added. Every year is the same process, review committees are assembled and code change proposals are put out for public comment. The ICC promulgates code every three years and each state has its own mechanism for adoption. In Massachusetts, state law requires the IECC to be adopted within one year of when it's promulgated (published nationally). States often adopt amendments to specific code requirements.

On January 2, 2020, the energy code becomes effective in Massachusetts but it will take another year to get the structural code into the ICC, it was noted. Changes adopted in the 2021 edition of the IECC won't be seen until the spring of 2021.

Regarding the IECC's evolution, through the late 1970's, each region in the country had its own code because codes were based on different climate zones, Mr. Porter explained. Eventually, the idea of having just one code with provisions for different climate zones was accepted.

The IECC was easier to promulgate with uniform codes. It is called 'international' but he thinks there are only a couple of countries using it. In the majority of countries, codes are much stronger than in the United States, he observed. He believes Dubai uses the IECC and maybe an African country.

States vary in their code adoption processes.

It used to be the IECC was two years behind ASHRAE so ASHRAE was always a more rigorous code.

Massachusetts has strengthened the code. Code officials have taken seven provisions and put them into the commercial chapter of the code and said builders have to pick five.

Councilor Sciarra asked if there is any movement to bring the United States in line with one of the European countries so that it has a stricter code.

That's certainly his organization's goal, Mr. Porter confirmed. They would like to see all codes go to zero energy. The code council is moving toward zero, but at 2% a year, it's not going to happen anytime soon. ASHRAE has committed to its code being zero energy by 2030.

He discussed progress being made in improving energy efficiency building requirements in other states. In Massachusetts, there is a movement afoot to adopt a zero energy stretch code that might be the next version of the stretch code. Senator Comerford has introduced legislation for a zero energy stretch code and the Board of Building Regulation and Standards (BBRS) has committed to creating a zero energy stretch code, he related.

Ms. Franks noted that RE223 is a zero energy proposal.

Members asked questions and offered comments. Councilor Bidwell asked about affordability. Are there mechanisms available for financing the additional cost of energy-saving features at the outset of a project? He asked.

The reason Massachusetts adopted a 'solar ready' provision is that regulatory officials recognized people may not be able to put solar panels in immediately but wanted to at least require new structures to be 'solar ready,' Mr. Porter noted.

He reviewed some of the EECC's specific voting recommendations. There are six universal proposals they would really like to see adopted. In addition, RE223 would give states and municipalities the option to go to zero energy, while RE206 introduces a flex-point proposal, adoption of which would lead to a 5% built-in efficiency increase.

RE147 requires houses to be electrification ready with electrical receptacles installed near gas/propane equipment, built-in wire chases, an area in the garage to attach an inverter and an area on the outside for a heat pump.

Councilor Klein said she thought CRC members needed to discuss as a committee how much detail of specific code change proposals they wanted to present. She noted that the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) is offering technical assistance on the voting process.

Councilor Nash said he would like to send forward to the council the EECC voting guide as the committee's formal recommendation. Councilor Bidwell seconded.

Councilor Klein offered the friendly amendment that the EECC voting guide be sent to councilors together with a link to detailed explanations of individual proposals, and motion makers accepted the amendment as stated.

Staff was reminded to be sure to include the updated version of the ballot. The updated one in early November "will be pretty darn close" to the preliminary, Mr. Porter assured.

The motion passed unanimously 4:0.

Members discussed the November meeting schedule. The administrative assistant agreed to consult the council president as to his willingness to entertain two readings on the voting recommendation on November 7th. If so, members could vote at the regularly-scheduled meeting on November 18th, they discussed.

Mrs. Krutzler was asked to invite an MAPC representative to attend on the 18th to provide technical assistance. Members discussed holding November 25th as a potential alternative meeting date in case plans to vote on the 18th do not materialize.

6. Items Referred to Committee

None.

7. New Business

None.

8. Adjourn. Councilor Bidwell moved to adjourn the meeting; Councilor Klein seconded. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No. The meeting was adjourned at 6:28 p.m.

Prepared By:

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