



# 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

of the Energy & Environment Commission (EEC)  
in the city of Newport, Rhode Island

## [2023 Activities](#)

- [1. Commission Organization and General Updates](#)
- [2. Energy Use Baseline](#)
- [3. Community Choice Aggregation](#)
- [4. Sustainable Events Guidelines & Recommendations](#)
- [5. Guest Presentations](#)

## [Member Attendance](#)

## 2023 Activities

### 1. Commission Organization and General Updates

Chair Sean O'Connor stepped down in November 2023 and the Commission unanimously elected a new chair, Avery Robertson, and vice-chair, Emily Conklin, in the December meeting. For the duration of 2023, the Commission was understaffed, with only 6 members instead of a possible 7. Looking ahead in 2024, we will consider how to recruit members to be at our full size of 7. The Commission has discussed developing a more transparent process for onboarding new members, so that when individuals join, they are easily made aware of rules, protocols, and current projects. We intend to develop this with the support and guidance of the City in 2024 to hopefully smooth the transition of new recruits and ensure we are achieving all necessary Commission goals. This and other communications with the City will hopefully help to include the public in our work. The Commission also intends to revisit our mission and role within the City to ensure we continue to act within our charter and make ourselves available to support the growth of sustainability in the City of Newport.

## 2. Energy Use Baseline

The 2017 Comprehensive Plan of the City of Newport calls for an Energy Use Baseline to get a measurement of how much energy is used by municipal buildings and services so that the city has a comparison to base 20% energy use reduction goals against. This work is listed as high priority and this commission along with the City Council are listed as the Responsible parties.

An analysis of our GHG emissions from municipal buildings and services is simply a reframing of the energy use data that takes into account what types of energy are being used. Measuring our current GHG emissions and energy use is a critical step in taking thoughtful and strategic action to reduce our carbon emissions and become a more resilient city and a climate leader. To date in the state of Rhode Island, Providence is the only other city that we know of that has conducted a municipal energy use baseline.

Since 2022, the EEC has been pursuing the creation of a baseline in Newport. In 2022 the commission proposed hiring a consultant to produce the energy use baseline and also framing the data in terms of a greenhouse gas (GHG) emission analysis. In December 2022, the commission drafted a Request for Proposals (RFP) and began discussions with our commission liaison on the council, as well as Newport's Director of Planning & Economic Development, Trish Reynolds, and our City Planner, Tuuli Martin on this topic.

In 2023, the commission met with Mayor Khamsyvoravong, exploring whether we need a resolution or if we can pursue other options from the Master Pricing Agreement the state of RI has without having to go the RFP route. The commission additionally met with Trish Reynolds and Director of Finance on the topic and potential avenues for funding. An opportunity arose from the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank for funding for this project that would go towards hiring a consultant to help conduct an energy use study of all municipal buildings. An application for this grant from The City of Newport was submitted in August 2023 but we have not yet received a response. The scope of work has been revised to be limited to building energy use, a first step for a broader baseline of all energy use. The intent with limiting the scope is for larger goal setting that could grow out of this work, such as net zero goals and timeline, and understanding of community emissions on a larger scale. The Commission will continue to work with the City on this project in 2024.

## 3. Community Choice Aggregation

The EEC continued to be involved with the growth and rollout of the Community Choice Aggregation plan in 2023. Per the program's website, linked below, Newport implemented an education and outreach campaign from March to April 2023 to make residents and businesses aware of the upcoming program launch and their choice to participate in the Program, or leave before it started (opt out). This included informational meetings, mailers and the online website. The Program began providing electricity as of the May 2023 meter

read. Rates are fixed in six month increments, and were therefore reevaluated in September of 2023. Rates continue to be comparable or more competitive than those offered by RI Energy outside of the program, though participants can opt out at any time. Rates will be readjusted in May 2024. The Commission is interested in seeing statistics on the success of the program, such as opt-out rate and our comparison to other communities' programs. We will continue to monitor the program and are available as a resource for further adjustment or improvement as we strive for increased renewable energy use in the City of Newport.

<https://newportcommunityelectricity.com/>

#### 4. Sustainable Events Guidelines & Recommendations

The Commission has been pursuing a project to review and update 2012/13 sustainable event guidelines created by this Commission 10 years ago. The current Commission is now working on updating event sustainability guidelines and enhancing the process with the City to ensure that events of all sizes have a positive impact on our community and our environment. This work is in alignment with the City's dedication to sustainability and to protecting our natural resources. Updating and promoting guidance for sustainable events within the City will support our efforts to be a leader in environmental action within The Ocean State. Ultimately, our goal is to increase the number of events in Newport that run in accordance with sustainability best practices in order to eliminate waste and pollution, protect our waterways, coastline, and natural resources, and ensure a clean, beautiful environment for all visitors and community members.

This year, the Commission focused on understanding past work in this area, forming concrete objectives, and meeting with community and municipal partners on the subject. Partners include local nonprofits such as Clean Ocean Access, 11th Hour Racing, Sailors for the Sea, and the Newport Folk and Jazz Festivals; businesses and organizations such as Discover Newport, Bowen's Wharf, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) and past Commission members Dawn Euer, Lauren Carson, and Kristie Gardiner; as well as our City Council and staff liaisons. We met with organizers of events of various sizes in what we referred to as our "Summer Pilot" to learn about their sustainability work and the hurdles they faced. This allowed us to understand the practicalities of running events within the City. We also met with Lou Iannotti and Dawn Piers of the City of Newport Public Services Department to understand their current methodology, support of events, and capacity for expansion.

Outside of the City, we connected with the RIDEM team responsible for their Green Events program, both to learn from their work and to use the resources from their program to support Newport's initiatives. According to [the RIDEM website](#), "The RIDEM green events checklist provides a menu of best management practices that event organizers can use to achieve a reduction in environmental impact at events and festivals." Our goal is to use this

program as a model to provide effective advice and Newport-based resources to event planners within the City.

Originally, we had aimed to introduce a resolution to Council by the end of 2023 to require event sustainability for every event within the City of Newport. Based on the complexities of enforcement and the information on current practices and needs we learned through all of our meetings, we pivoted our focus to developing resources that will be useful for events to incorporate sustainability into their planning and organizing a public outreach initiative to ensure that this information is available to all event planners. In 2024, we will continue this work in order to produce concrete results. In this vein, we plan to organize a workshop for public awareness, and continue to work with both the City and the State to advance our sustainability goals. The Commission strives for continued close communication with the City to ensure an effective, long-lasting policy that will benefit our environmental, economic, and community well-being goals.

## 5. Guest Presentations

### a. Stormwater Management

Member Sam Whitin presented on the project proposal to daylight Elizabeth Brook in the north end of Newport, an application for which was submitted through the National Coastal Resilience Fund. The full presentation is linked in the July 2023 minutes. This project outlined a proposal meant to fund a preliminary design of daylighting, which is functionally an uncovering of the waterway that has been diverted and covered up over the past few hundred years of development in the City. The ideal scenario is to maximize tidal flow as much as possible in order to enhance the natural environment, mitigate flooding, increase aesthetics, among other positive benefits. This project was also supported by the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank, principally by Aquidneck Island Resilience Coordinator Paige Myatt, who attended many 2023 NEEC meetings. This topic was also discussed in the 2023 City of Newport workshop on stormwater and flooding. As of the end of 2023, the application had been rejected, but other avenues to improve the habitat and potentially daylight the brook will likely be pursued in 2024 and beyond.

### b. Waites Wharf Development Project Presentation

Presentation from Charlie Donahue, professional with a public health background & concerned citizen. He presented on the environmental concerns of the development including the legacy of coal burning and coal ash remaining impacts, coal ash deposited on the waterfront, in 1984 a 10k gallon oil spill on what is now the Waites Wharf property. Expressed a concern to study the presence of toxic chemicals in the area and potential remediation tactics should they be found. Addressed the comprehensive land use plan in reference to the potential for flooding on this site, due to hurricane storm surge and damage, as well as impending sea level rise.

Current status of Waites Wharf development: development is still moving forward, as of 2023 the zoning board has rejected the proposal and is pending further action by the applicant.

c. **Vehicle Idling**

Presentation from Sharon Gold on the issue of vehicle idling. 28% of GHG emissions come from the transportation sector overall. Not idling is a personal action that can reduce emissions from this sector. She presented that the habit of leaving vehicles running is not currently being critically examined: the typical driver is not aware of the issue and their potential impact. Shared that RI DEM has “No Idling” signs available free of charge. The Commission is willing to help on this topic as appropriate and needed in the future.

d. **Geothermal Microgrids**

Presentation from Yaning Zhang from Celsius Energy on Potential for Geothermal Microgrids for Heating/Cooling in Newport. Celsius Energy has expressed interest in a pilot project in Newport to install Geothermal Microgrids as a solution for building heating and cooling. In Framingham, MA they have installed a system with involvement from the Eversource MA-based utility. In some areas where these kinds of district grids have been installed, sometimes they are fully privately owned, and other times they are public-private partnerships, and in some cases they are partnerships with local utilities where the utility owns the infrastructure. We will continue to learn about and explore this topic in 2024.

[www.celsiusenergy.com](http://www.celsiusenergy.com)

e. **Other emerging topics**

**Fossil Fuel Free Pilot Program in RI**

2023 Chair Sean O'Connor was contacted by the Acadia Center and Green Energy Consumers Alliance concerning a fossil fuel free pilot program in RI for building decarbonization policy at the state level. They are pursuing this program with two to three municipalities in Rhode Island and would like to gauge Newport's interest. A similar bill recently passed in Massachusetts in part due to municipal support. We will continue to stay in contact with these groups in the new year to learn more about the project and the Commission's, as well as the City overall, potential role.

# Member Attendance

*\*Meetings in May and November were canceled due to varying circumstances including member availability, so only 10 meetings were held.*

## Meeting Schedule

- \*Monday, January 30
- \*Monday, Feb 27 (moved due to President’s Day federal holiday)
- Monday, March 20
- Monday, April 17
- \*Monday, June 12 (moved due Juneteenth federal holiday)
- Monday, July 17
- Monday, August 21
- Monday, September 18
- Monday, October 16
- Tuesday, December 5\* (moved due to holiday schedules)

| <b>Commissioner</b>   | <b>Meetings Attended (10 Total)</b>                                       |
|---|---|
| Sean O’Connor - Chair since July 2022, stepped down from position and commission in November 2023 | Attended 9 out of 9 possible (stepped down prior to the December meeting) |
| Laurie Love (member since 2020)   | Attended 9 out of 10 possible (missed June)                               |
| Sam Whitin (member since 2021)  | Attended 5 out of 10 possible (missed Feb, March, June, August, October)  |
| Avery Robertson (member since 2021)   | Attended 10 out of 10 possible  |
| Emily Conklin (member since 2022)   | Attended 9 out of 10 possible (missed October)                            |
| Anne DuBose Joslin (member since 2022)  | Attended 8 out of 10 possible (missed June, October)                      |

Intended 2024 schedule, subject to change with proper notice, is to hold all Commission meetings on the third Wednesday of the month at 6:30pm in the Newport Public Library. Any location or timing changes will be posted with ample notice in accordance with open meeting laws.

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| Wednesday, January 17  |
| Wednesday, February 21 |

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| Wednesday, March 20  |
| Wednesday, April 17  |
| Wednesday, May 15  |
| Wednesday, June 19* (may need to be moved due to Juneteenth federal holiday) |
| Wednesday, July 17   |
| Wednesday, August 21   |
| Wednesday, September 18  |
| Wednesday, October 16  |
| Wednesday, November 20* (may need to be moved due to Thanksgiving holiday)   |
| Wednesday, December 18   |