

2024 ANNUAL REPORT

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

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I. 2024 Administrative Updates

Commission Organization and General Updates

Staffing

- 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 2023 meeting. They remained the Chair and Vice-Chair for the duration of 2024.
- We had two departures and three additions this year. As of December 2024, we have one vacancy on the commission.
 - Anne Dubose Joslin's appointment to the commission expired in August and she was [not granted](#) a second term.
 - Sam Whitin resigned from the commission in October due to projected scheduling conflicts.
 - Andy Bjork was appointed to the commission in the July 10 Council Meeting. Prior to joining this commission, Andy served on the Historic District Commission for 2 terms.
 - Christina Guarin was appointed to the commission in the July 24 Council Meeting.
 - Didi Lorillard was appointed to the commission in the July 24 Council Meeting.
 - Avery Robertson was re-appointed for a second term in the August 14 Council Meeting.
 - Laurie Love was re-appointed for a second term in the August 14 Council Meeting.

Mission, Policy, and Procedures

- We updated our [Mission](#) via resolution in June. Council passed the resolution unanimously. The NEEC Mission had not been updated since 2008, when it was [established](#) with the intention to help monitor the city's progress in implementing the recommendations of the Climate Control Task Force Action

Plan. The updated mission tasks the commission with serving as the primary advisory board to city staff and City Council on all matters relating to energy and the environment and how these relate to the City of Newport, its culture, its economy, and its future; with the specific focus on climate change, sustainability, and resiliency. The resolution that restated this new mission also instructs the Commission to liaise, collaborate, and, as directed by the City council and staff, represent the city with other organizations and entities, both public and private, in pursuit of this mission. Additionally, we are tasked with promoting and educating the citizens of Newport on all related matters.

- We developed a [Mission, Policy, and Procedures](#) document, which was ratified on October 17th. This document restates our updated mission, outlines policy of the commission related to how meetings are run, how elections are run, and additional protocol. In line with our updated mission, we included exhibits on public engagement guidelines and how we determine qualified experts.

City of Newport Related Updates

- The city hired a [Director of Resilience and Sustainability](#) in October. Teresa Crean, an AICP-Certified Planner, was hired for this role. Teresa has already attended one of our meetings and we intend on continuing close communication with her to support the city in sustainability and resilience.
- In November, Newporters voted on a Question 6: Investing in Infrastructure, Resilience, and Community, and it passed. This \$98.5 million in municipal bonds is intended to fund major sustainability and resilience projects, outlined as: Perrotti Park Bulkhead & Renovation of Harbor Master Building, Elm Street Pier Improvements, Cliff Walk Repair Matching Funds, Seawall Repairs, Easton's Beach Nourishment Study & Program, Easton's Pond Hardening Project-Stormwater Share of Potential Grant Match, and Elizabeth Brook Study & Preliminary Design; North End Stormwater. While the commission's work has not been related to these projects or this bond initiative, we intend to pursue collaborating with the city on these projects as seen fit.
- Aquidneck Island, via the Aquidneck Land Trust, received a \$2 million NOAA grant for "Growing Regional Resilience Coordination on Aquidneck Island." This project seeks to build on resilience initiatives island-wide. The commission has been in contact with the project lead and intends on collaborating as needed. In January, the commission had drafted [a letter of support](#) to NOAA for this grant.

II. 2024 Continuing Project Updates

1. Energy Use Baseline

2024 Update

The City of Newport [signed an agreement with the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank](#) on December 4, 2024 for the Bank's Energy Asset Management Program. This program provides a consultant for the City to develop an action plan to manage building energy use and reduce costs. Under the advisement of Director Crean, Director Reynolds, and City Manager Kennedy, the Consultant will analyze the utility use of the City buildings in order to construct an energy use baseline and craft goals for reduction.

2023 Background

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.

Please see [the 2023 annual report](#) for additional details.

2. Sustainable Event Guidelines & Sustainable Cup

Sustainable Event Guidelines

In January, 11th Hour Racing hosted a “Sustainable Events Workshop” where Avery and Emily were invited to attend alongside other nonprofits, City/Island organizations to discuss needs, resources, and common hurdles. The workshop included presentations from sustainability experts on incorporating sustainability initiatives into events, resources to support said initiatives, and other topics. This platform also allowed us to network with other local groups and community members to form relationships that will help advance collaborative sustainability work for the City. In December 2024, 11th Hour Racing held a second “Sustainable Events Workshop” to continue the discussion and interface with aligned organizations. The discussion included the need for centralization of resources, which we can support in the new year. We will hopefully be invited to similar events in the future to strengthen relationships with allied groups and advance sustainability work in the City.

Sustainable Cup

The initiative of a “city sustainable cup” was brought to us by a Newport resident and member of the public, Samira Hakki. The initial concept presented was to participate in a deposit based system for a reusable cup, similar to the programs in cities like [Kinsale](#) and [Freiburg](#). The goal would be to move Newport away from single use coffee cups and promote sustainability. After discussion the commission intends to pursue this in conjunction with the *Sustainable Event Guidelines*, a living document that will connect Newport event planners and others interested in sustainability with local resources to incorporate best practices into their event.

III. 2024 New Projects

3. Summer Educational Series

Overview

The NEEC hosted an educational series of three panels over the summer of 2024 on climate change, its impacts to Aquidneck Island, and strategies for mitigation. In alignment with our updated mission, one of our priorities is education and connecting the community with reliable resources on relevant topics. We pursued this series to engage with the community on the severity of climate change and

begin discussion on the concerns and solutions underway. The City of Newport supported this series via [resolution](#) passed unanimously by City Council on July 10.

The summer educational series (panel descriptions below) invited the public to three opportunities to hear from experts in their fields on environmental concerns relevant to our community and have their questions answered. The events were designed to be educational, with panelist introductions, a few questions from the commission, and a period of time for public Q&A. Panel one set the stage, speaking broadly on what environmental changes Newport and surrounding municipalities have seen in the recent past, and what we can expect as climate change continues to impact the area. Panel two focused on the effect of climate change and offshore wind on fisheries and ocean ecosystems. Panel three focused on offshore wind. We decided on these topics in recognition that offshore wind is an important issue to the community. We intended to address the concerns of the public surrounding offshore wind with the help of experts, and provide the context to why this development is happening in the first place (i.e. climate change). These panels were a part of our effort to provide our community with the resources to have informed conversations about these topics, shaped by facts and figures from trusted sources.

Selection of panelists was based on relevant background on the topic in question and the practical consideration of availability. Our aim was to have panelists that can be trusted with a public platform that is supported by the City, without engaging in misinformation or fear mongering. We made an explicit effort to share multiple perspectives on these topics while still supporting scientific integrity. In an effort to provide a balanced perspective, panelists that have been critical of or in opposition to offshore wind development were invited to each panel. We reached out to the group Green Oceans, who we knew opposed wind, to provide us with questions that they were concerned about to help guide the events. We also asked them to provide suggestions for panelists for us to review, which upon review we did not find to align with our value of upholding scientific integrity. As educational events and representatives of the City, we were mindful of inviting speakers who had credentials or experience relevant to these conversations. The full email exchange with Green Oceans representatives can be seen [here](#). We invited the Newport Preservation Society to the third panel in order for them to address their concerns and ongoing legal case; we immediately received no response and when we were ultimately able to connect, no representative was able to join us.

The idea of hosting this series was brought to us by Climate Action Rhode Island (CARI) in our April meeting, the meeting following the presentation by Dr. Barbara Sullivan-Watts at Innovate Newport, which had a large turnout. We worked with CARI throughout the panel planning process due to their commitment to climate action and explicit desire for the panels to be unbiased and prioritize scientific integrity. We had a discussion as a commission about this during our [April meeting](#) and agreed to pursue this series, in particular facilitating a panel with Newport Preservation Society may participate, as they had expressed interest in speaking about their lawsuit if the NEEC facilitated the event. We spoke about the panelists and panel series in our April, May, June, July, and August open meetings. All panelists and topics were voted on by a quorum of the Commission in an open meeting.

After the panel series, there was concern that we had not held unbiased events and that members of the public and a commissioner were “silenced.” The commission was made aware of a [proposed resolution](#) by Councilor David Carlin that called on the City Manager to host a “public hearing...to afford the opportunity to opponents of offshore wind development to participate in a manner that said opponents previously requested.” While the Commission was not reached out to ahead of time for discussion of this or to comment, we attended the Council meeting and attempted to defend our

work and set the record straight. Over the course of over an hour of discussion during the City Council meeting on August 28, the ultimate resolution put before council for a vote was for the City Staff to host a “offshore wind public forum” where both pro- and anti- voices could be heard. This was voted down with the reason given by multiple Councilors being skepticism of using City staff resources to host an event on an issue that the City has no standing on.

[Recordings and copies of presentations](#)

Panel I: Climate Change & Aquidneck Island

July 23, 6:30pm — City of Newport Council Chambers

Panelists:

RI State Senator Dawn Euer

Professor Stephen Porder, Associate Provost for Sustainability, Brown University

Topher Hamblett, Executive Director, Save the Bay

This panel discussed what environmental changes Newport and surrounding municipalities have seen in the recent past, and what we can expect as climate change continues to impact the area. This event explored impending threats and strategies for resilience. Introductory remarks were given by Mayor Xay Khamsyvovong.

The launch of this series was covered in Newport This Week: [“Climate Change Series Delves into Offshore Wind Projects”](#) by Zane Wolfgang.

Panel II: The Effect of Climate Change and Offshore Wind on Fisheries and Ocean Ecosystems

August 8, 6:30pm — City of Newport Council Chambers

Panelists:

Dr. David Bethoney, Executive Director of the Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation

Dr. Jeremy Collie, Professor of Oceanography, Graduate School of Oceanography, University of Rhode Island.

Andrew Lipsky, Chief, Offshore Wind Ecology Branch, NOAA.

Frederick J Mattera, Executive Director, Commercial Fisheries Center of RI

This panel discussed how fisheries are an important economic and cultural aspect of Rhode Island life. Our various fisheries employ and feed many individuals, as well as support the tourism industry. In this discussion, panelists spoke about the effect climate change has on Rhode Island fisheries. This panel also spoke on how we can implement mitigation tactics, such as offshore wind, while continuing to support sustainable fishing in the Ocean State.

This panel was covered in Newport This Week: [“Scientists and Fishermen Agree About Uncertainty of Offshore Wind’s Impact”](#) by Zane Wolfgang.

Panel III: Offshore Wind Development off of Aquidneck Island and Newport County

August 15, 6:30pm — City of Newport Council Chambers

Panelists:

Julia Livermore, Deputy Chief of the Division of Marine Fisheries, RI Department of Environmental Management.

Nick Horton, Climate Action Rhode Island

David Langlais, Iron Workers Local 37

Offshore wind development off of Rhode Island and the East Coast has increased in recent years. This panel discussed how developments are planned and executed, and how they will impact our communities. We also discussed what the role of offshore wind is in meeting climate goals.

This panel was covered in Newport This Week:

[*"Final Offshore Wind Discussion Centers on Ethics, Economics"*](#) by Zane Wolfgang.

[*"Man Arrested After Outburst at Newport Offshore Wind Discussion"*](#) by Zane Wolfgang

[*"Energy and Environment Commission Discusses Long Range Plans"*](#) by Zane Wolfgang

4. Green Energy Consumers Alliance Workshop

Overview

Green Energy Consumers Alliance (GECA) approached the NEEC with the opportunity to collaborate on a community engagement session to collect feedback to inform the state's 2025 Climate Strategy. GECA has received a grant from RIDEM to host these workshops within disadvantaged communities (as defined by the CEJST tool), in partnership with a community organization. We are pursuing working with Conexion Latina on this workshop and to coordinate with the newly elected Councillor Ellen Pincock to host this in Ward 1. At these sessions, we will discuss the impacts of climate change, what the state is doing about it, and how the state can revise their strategy in order to be more inclusive in the transition to a clean & green economy. GECA will be facilitating stipends that are available for community partners and attendees.

5. 10-Year Plan

Overview

Commissioner Andy Bjork proposed the idea of developing a 10-year plan for the commission, which we have begun developing in coordination with Newport's Director of Resilience and Sustainability, Teresa Crean, and Aquidneck Land Trust's Director of Climate Resilience, Paige Myatt.

The intention of this 10-year plan is twofold. First, it aims to identify the role of the commission both now and in the future and to develop a roadmap for how we can be most effective in addressing our responsibility toward climate resilience, as well as how we may function within the network of organizations and related legislation in pursuit of our mission. Second, it seeks to support the City of Newport by bolstering its Comprehensive Plan and Strategic Plan with elements designed to encourage the conservation of energy resources, support renewable and alternative energies, enable the efficient allocation and movement of water, and mitigate the challenges posed by natural hazards and severe storms to ensure the safety, security, and stability of homeowners and businesses in the city.

The Commission's plan is designed to integrate with, amplify, and support Section 5 of the City's Comprehensive Plan, as well as the City's Strategic Plan. Additionally, the plan will reference and align with State and Federal directions and programs on Energy and Environment, ensuring consistency

with the State of Rhode Island 2021 Act on Climate. This alignment includes adhering to mandated climate emissions reduction targets and support requirements. The Commission will liaise with City staff, particularly the Director of Resilience and Sustainability, as well as other relevant City boards, commissions, and public and private resources as needed.

The Commission has developed a [draft resolution](#) to support this endeavor, and has met with Teresa, Paige, and members of the City Council. We are working toward presenting a draft framework of the plan to the City Council by the end of March 2025.

6. Additional Presentations and guest speakers

“Fossil Fuel Free Pilot Program”

February 21st Commission meeting

[Presentation](#)

[Meeting minutes](#)

*Presenter: Amanda Barker from Green Energy Consumers Alliance
(amanda@greenenergyconsumers.org)*

In February Amanda Barker from GECA presented on the potential for Newport to participate in a “Fossil Fuel Free Pilot Program.” This is a program that Massachusetts participated in after signing a climate law, allowing 10 communities to apply to participate in a demonstration program that prohibits or restricts fossil fuel use in new building construction or major renovation projects. The ask of the commission was to support the Building Decarbonization Act in the 2024 legislative session so that Newport can create affordable, climate friendly, and healthy buildings. If this act was passed then GECA would look to include Newport in a similar pilot program to the Massachusetts one. As of November 2024, the Building Decarbonization Act has been held for further study.

"Straight Talk about Offshore Wind"

March 20th Commission meeting

[Presentation](#)

[Meeting minutes](#)

[Video recording of the presentation](#)

Presenter: Barbara Sullivan-Watts, University of Rhode Island Graduate School of Oceanography, Professor Emerita, Citizens' Climate Lobby RI, Real Offshore Wind.

For our March meeting, we took a big leap in public engagement and hosted a presentation on offshore wind from Barbara Sullivan-Watts followed by audience questions. Dr. Sullivan-Watts invited Nicole DiPaolo (Director of Energy Justice & Independent Consultant at Roots2Empower) to support the presentation and answer questions, based on their past work together on the topic. Dr. Sullivan-Watt's presentation covered the marine environment and the impacts of offshore wind construction, all under the umbrella of climate change. She spoke to the science of our coastal marine ecosystems, the common questions surrounding how offshore wind development could impact these ecosystems, and addressed community concerns about the impacts.

We had a large turnout of close to 100 people for this event. After this meeting we saw there was more interest from the community to further engage in this topic, what followed was a series of three panels surrounding offshore wind and its context and potential impacts.

Additional Guest Comments (*shorter form presentations or updates*)

Almy Pond: In our [November 20th meeting](#), Elena Kissel and Paige Myatt of Aquidneck Land Trust, shared an update on Almy Pond. The Almy Pond Watershed Protectors currently have two proposals in for funding for filtration and holding of stormwater in the North End of Almy Pond which is hoped to move forward in 2025. They have been coordinating with Rob Schultz, Director of Utilities for the City of Newport. They shared that there may be an opportunity for the EEC to have a role in community engagement/outreach further on in the project. They shared two documents with us, first the "[Almy Pond Background and Status Prepared for the City of Newport Energy and Environment](#)" which provides a comprehensive status update on the project, and second the "[BAY-Friendly Living Guide](#)" from Save the Bay.

Sea Level Rise: In our [May 15th meeting](#), Ken Smith spoke briefly on concerns regarding Newport's response to sea level rise and [Easton's beach plan](#). He presented [the NOAA SLR visualizer](#) and requested the commission look into the threats and vulnerable areas for Newport.

Rogers High School Construction Dirt Pile: In our [November 20th meeting](#), Louisa Boatwright of the School Building Committee and School Committee shared background information on the Rogers High School build and dispelled common misconceptions about the on-site stockpile and related risks, presenting [an email from RIDEM](#) that clarified some of these misunderstandings. Resources are linked in the minutes and can be found on the [RIDEM website](#).

IV. Member Attendance

Meetings were typically held the third Wednesday of the month in the Newport Public Library

2024 Meetings Schedule

Wednesday, January 17

Wednesday, February 21

Wednesday, March 20

Wednesday, April 17

Wednesday, May 15

Wednesday, June 20

Wednesday, July 17

Thursday, August 20

Wednesday, September 18

Thursday, October 17

Wednesday, November 20

Thursday, December 12

<u>Commissioner</u>	<u>Meetings Attended (12 Total)</u>
Avery Robertson – Chair since January 2024 (member since 2021)	Attended 12 out of 12 possible
Emily Conklin – Vice Chair since January 2024 (member since 2022)	Attended 11 out of 12 possible (missed February to donate a kidney)
Laurie Love (member since 2020)	Attended 12 out of 12 possible
+ Christina Guarin	Attended 5 out of 5 possible (Joined in August)
+ Andy Bjork	Attended 5 out of 5 possible (Joined in August)
+ Didi Lorillard	Attended 5 out of 5 possible (Joined in August)
- Anne DuBose Joslin (member 2022 - 2024)	Attended 6 out of 8 possible (missed January and June, was not reappointed in August)
- Sam Whitin (member 2021 - 2024)	Attended 6 out of 9 possible (missed May, July, and August. Stepped down after September)

Intended 2025 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 sufficient notice in accordance with open meeting laws.

Wednesday, Jan 15th
Wednesday, Feb 19th
Wednesday, March 19th
Wednesday, April 16th
Wednesday, May 21st
Wednesday, June 18th
Wednesday, July 16th
Wednesday, Aug 20th
Wednesday, Sept 17th
Wednesday, Oct 15th
Wednesday, Nov 19th
Wednesday, Dec 19th