

# 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

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

### [I. 2025 Administrative Updates](#)

#### [Commission Organization and General Updates](#)

### [II. 2025 Continuing Project Updates](#)

#### [1. Sustainable Event Guidelines & Sustainable Cup](#)

#### [2. Green Energy Consumers Alliance Workshop](#)

#### [3. Energy Use Baseline](#)

#### [4. 10-Year Plan](#)

### [III. 2025 New Projects](#)

#### [5. Community Composting](#)

#### [6. Support for a gas moratorium](#)

#### [7. Additional Activities](#)

### [IV. Member Attendance](#)

## I. 2025 Administrative Updates

### Commission Organization and General Updates

#### Staffing

- Avery Robertson was reappointed as Chair for the year and Emily Conklin was reappointed as Vice Chair. Christina Guarin was elected as Secretary in the [January 15](#) meeting.
- We had one addition this year.
  - Ken Smith was appointed to the commission and his first meeting was [January 15](#).

#### Mission, Policy, and Procedures

- We've begun developing additional standard operating procedures to function as a supplemental document to our Mission, Policy, and Procedures which was ratified last year.

#### Commission Liaisons

- Each commissioner has been assigned as a liaison to another commission in an effort to better communication and collaboration across commissions.
- Appointments
  - Planning / Zoning Boards Avery
  - City Council / School Committee Emily
  - Tree and Open Space Commission Christina
  - Beach Commission Ken
  - Waterfront Commission Laurie



making strides in operating from a sustainable baseline and the appetite for sustainability in event planning and execution is high, both from organizers and attendees. An opportunity exists for the City to facilitate the process for events and set a high standard for the many well-attended events run in Newport.

Based on capacity and resources, we decided to focus on supporting events through resources and connections rather than work towards business implementation of a “city cup” at this time.

To continue this work and produce concrete results in 2026, we plan to share a draft of our *Sustainable Event Guidelines* with the City early in the year to get in front of event planners before the high season. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with event organizers and community stakeholders to support sustainability in the many events we see in the City annually.

## **2024 Background**

The Commission has historically been involved in guidelines for events to run sustainably in Newport. In 2024, Avery and Emily attended two sessions of Sustainable Events Workshops hosted by 11th Hour Racing alongside other nonprofits and organizations to discuss needs, resources, and common hurdles. These workshops included presentations from sustainability experts on incorporating sustainability initiatives into events, resources to support said initiatives, and other topics. Engaging in these events helps us to learn new methods and reinforce best practices, as well as network with other local groups and community members to form relationships that will help advance collaborative sustainability work for the City.

We also discussed the potential idea of a “city sustainable cup” was brought to us by a Newport resident and member of the public. The commission discussed pursuing 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.

## **2. Green Energy Consumers Alliance Workshop**

### **Update**

In the fall of 2024, the Green Energy Consumers Alliance (GECA) approached the NEEC with an opportunity to collaboratively design a community-centered engagement session aimed at gathering resident input to inform the state’s 2025 Climate Strategy. GECA received a RIDEM grant to hold these workshops specifically within environmental justice and historically under-resourced communities—as identified by the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST)—in partnership with local organizations. Commissioners Avery and Christina led the NEEC effort, working alongside GECA, Conexión Latina, and Councillor Ellen Pinnock to host an event at the Florence Gray Center in Newport’s North End.

The workshop, held on March 26, 2025, featured a presentation from GECA on the impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities, Rhode Island’s strategy to address the climate crisis, and cost-saving clean-energy programs designed to reduce household burdens. The session concluded with an interactive Q&A and a facilitated dialogue inviting residents to share their lived experiences, priorities, and visions for a more equitable and inclusive transition to a clean and green economy.

Recognizing that sustainability must be a conversation accessible to all socioeconomic groups, the event incorporated live translators, bilingual materials, free child care, food, and stipends to remove barriers to participation. The workshop exceeded expected attendance and received overwhelmingly positive feedback, demonstrating strong community interest in shaping Newport's sustainable future.

### **2024 Background**

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.

## **3. Energy Use Baseline**

### **Update**

Under the advisement of Director Crean, Director Reynolds, and City Manager Kennedy, the hired Consultant through the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank Energy Asset Management Program worked to gather all required data to conduct an energy use baseline. The consultant completed a review of City Hall as a test case in 2025 and the Commission looks forward to receiving a full report in 2026. Lessons learned from this analysis will be incorporated into the 10 year plan and comprehensive plan update.

### **2024 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.

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. Please see the [2024 annual report](#) for additional details.

## **4. 10-Year Plan**

### **Update**

Over the past year, the Energy & Environment Commission advanced one of its most significant initiatives: the development of a comprehensive 10-Year Energy & Environment Plan for the City of Newport. Following formal direction from the City Council through [Resolution 2025-02](#), the Commission created and unanimously approved [a detailed Framework for the 10-Year Plan](#), delivered to Council on schedule in March 2025. This framework outlines the Commission's statutory role,

identifies key partners and supporting legislation, and establishes the process the City will use to develop a science-based plan addressing mitigation, resilience, and adaptation across energy and environmental priorities.

Recognizing that the 10-Year Plan is intended to become Chapters 11, 12, and 13 of the City’s updated Comprehensive Plan, the Commission has aligned its next phase of work with the City’s decision to engage a consulting group to lead that update. The EEC has prepared to “dovetail” its efforts—coordinating with City staff, the consulting team, and regional partners to ensure that the energy and environment sections of the Comprehensive Plan are integrated, consistent with state requirements, and reflective of community input. This includes collaboration with the Aquidneck Island Land Trust’s regional climate resilience initiative, review of supporting state and municipal plans, and preparation for broader public engagement.

As the Comprehensive Plan update formally begins, the Commission stands ready to contribute expertise, data, and community perspectives to help refine and complete the full 10-Year Plan. The EEC remains committed to delivering a final plan in 2026 that will guide Newport’s long-term decisions on energy systems, climate resilience, natural hazards, and environmental stewardship—ensuring the City is prepared, coordinated, and forward-looking in the face of a changing climate.

#### **2024 Background**

Commissioner Andy Bjork proposed the idea of developing a 10-year plan for the commission in 2024. The intention of this 10-year plan is twofold: first, 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. Second, 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.

Please see the [2024 annual report](#) for additional details.

### **III. 2025 New Projects**

#### **5. Community Composting**

##### **Overview**

The City of Newport launched a major waste-reduction initiative through a new residential curbside composting pilot program. In July, 2025, City Council approved a \$475,000 grant from 11th Hour Racing to support the establishment of a two-year curbside composting pilot program. This program will provide free weekly curbside compost collection for up to 1,500 households and comes with starter bins, compostable liners, and an annual compost voucher.

The pilot, scheduled to run from October 2025 through October 2027, is projected to divert as much as 30% of household waste from the landfill by accepting a wide range of food scraps and

compostable materials. The program partners are Eastern Rhode Island Conservation District (ERICD), Black Earth Compost, and 11th Hour Racing. The Commission approved a [letter of support](#) for this pilot project in our April 2025 meeting.

To ensure equitable and citywide awareness of the new service, an outreach campaign supported the launch, with media kits and multilingual informational materials distributed to key community partners, including Aquidneck Community Table, Conexión Latina, Martin Luther King Center and Pell Elementary School, as well as promoted through local news outlets and social media platforms. ERICD and Black Earth Compost expanded engagement by tabling at community events, including the Newport Film events, Norman Bird Sanctuary Harvest Fair, Broadway Street Fair, and the ecoRI “Compost Convos” workshop at Innovate Newport.

The composting pilot complements ongoing school and community composting education efforts on Aquidneck Island, strengthening Newport’s commitment to sustainability and circular waste management.

## **6. Support for a Potential Future Moratorium on New Natural Gas Connections**

### **Update**

Over the summer, the Rhode Island Energy Facility Siting Board [held 2 public hearings and sought public input](#) on the idea of a moratorium on new gas hookups. Following those hearings, Portsmouth and Middletown passed resolutions opposing a moratorium. In response to these decisions, the commission and council hosted a joint workshop in October. The decision to host a workshop ahead of voting on a resolution of support in City Council was made because early discussion on whether to support or oppose a moratorium raised questions that proved to require more engagement. To our knowledge, this was the first opportunity for genuine public education and community conversation on this topic hosted by a municipality.

The workshop was attended by most of the commission, with Chair Robertsion and Vice Chair Conklin giving statements. Councilors Holder, Ceglie, Khamsyvoravong, and Smyth were in attendance; Councilor Pinnock could not attend but Councilor Smyth read a statement on her behalf. For expert engagement, James Crowley and Jamie Rhodes from The Conservation Law Foundation presented and answered questions. Dr. Dean Murphy from Brattle Group also responded to our request for answers to questions which were read into the record in the workshop. The full workshop was recorded and can be [viewed on the City website](#).

In our December meeting, the commission discussed and voted in favor of sending a letter to Council outlining its recommendations on whether to support or oppose a moratorium based on expert testimony, public comment, and independent research conducted to date. It is important to note that no formal moratorium has been proposed, and neither the commission’s recommendation nor any subsequent Council action in support of a moratorium would necessarily enact policy on its own. Rather, this step is intended to clarify the Council’s position and determine whether further discussion, analysis, or public engagement on this issue is warranted moving forward.

## Background

In January 2019, thousands of residents of Aquidneck Island were left without heat for multiple days. The incident, which disrupted homes, businesses, and visitors, revealed a serious vulnerability in how the Island receives its energy, one that remains unresolved. Aquidneck Island, and specifically Newport, sits at the very end of the Algonquin gas pipeline, meaning any upstream failure can cut off service entirely, as happened in 2019. Since then, the Island has been searching for long-term solutions to address both this vulnerability and the growing strain on capacity demand from new hookups.

Following the 2019 outage, the Old Mill liquified natural gas facility opened in Portsmouth. It was approved as a temporary backup to prevent another crisis, but it has operated every winter since then due to ongoing capacity constraints. Last year, state regulators extended its use for another five years, while also requiring the utility to explore ways to reduce natural gas demand on the Island — including the concept of a moratorium on new gas hookups.

## 7. Additional Activities

### Letter of Support for Ride Island

We wrote [a letter in support](#) of the proposed resolution [“A Resolution Endorsing the 2023 Ride Island Bike Plan as a guiding document in the planning of transportation related infrastructure for Newport”](#). This resolution passed unanimously in the April 9th meeting of the City Council.

### Vehicle Idling

Several members of the public have raised concerns during recent meetings about vehicle idling in Newport, particularly tourist bus idling near Perotti Park and landscaping vehicles idling along Bellevue Avenue. In response, Commissioner Laurie Love has led the commission’s work on this issue to explore what steps, if any, the City can take to address these concerns. Laurie met with City Manager Colin Kennedy and Harbormaster Stephen Land, who are aware of complaints and have been working with the buses to ensure compliance with the law. Based on this discussion, the issue of idling at Perotti Park is considered by the commission to be resolved for the time being.

**Other topics of discussion** throughout 2025 included:

- Electric vehicles and charger availability throughout Newport
- Solar panels on schools and other municipal assets

## IV. Member Attendance

*Meetings were typically held the third Wednesday of the month in the Newport Public Library, with some exceptions for Commissioner schedules, holidays, or room availability.*

Commission Member	Avery Robertson – Chair	Emily Conklin – Vice Chair	Christina Guarin – Secretary	Laurie Love	Andy Bjork	Didi Lorillard	Ken Smith
Wed, Jan 15th	Absent ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Absent ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾
Wed, Feb 19th	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾
Wed, March 19th	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Absent ▾
*Wed, April 2nd*	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Absent ▾	Present ▾	Absent ▾
Wed, April 16th	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Absent ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾
Wed, May 21	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Absent ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾
Wed, June 18th	Present ▾	Present ▾	Absent ▾	Absent ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾
Wed, July 16th	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Absent ▾	Absent ▾	Present ▾
Wed, Aug 20th	Present ▾	Absent ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾
Wed, Sept 17th	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾
Wed, Oct 20th	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Absent ▾	Absent ▾
Wed, Nov 19th	Absent ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾
*Wed, Dec 9th*	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Present ▾	Absent ▾

*\* Irregularly scheduled meeting due to holiday or request*

<u>Commissioner</u>	<u>Meetings Attended (13 Total)</u>
Avery Robertson – Chair since January 2024 (member since 2021)	Attended 11 out of 13 possible
Emily Conklin – Vice Chair since January 2024 (member since 2022)	Attended 12 out of 13 possible
Laurie Love (member since 2020)	Attended 12 out of 13 possible
Christina Guarin - Secretary since January 2025 (member since 2024)	Attended 12 out of 13 possible
Andy Bjork (member since 2024)	Attended 7 out of 13 possible
Didi Lorillard (member since 2024)	Attended 11 out of 13 possible
+ Ken Smith (member since January 2025)	Attended 9 out of 13 possible

**Intended 2026 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 21th
Wednesday, Feb 18th
Wednesday, March 18th
Wednesday, April 15th
Wednesday, May 20th
Wednesday, June 17th
Wednesday, July 15th
Wednesday, Aug 19th
Wednesday, Sept 16th
Wednesday, Oct 21th
Wednesday, Nov 18th
Wednesday, Dec 16th