TOWN OF STRATHAM

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DRAFT MINUTES FOR STRATHAM ENERGY COMMISSION MEETING

Oct 13, 2026

Meeting held at the Stratham Municipal Center

Commission Members:

- **Matthew O'Keefe**
- **Charlie Case**
- **Michael Welty**
- **Joe VanGombos**
- **Paul Deschaine**
- **Tedd Tramaloni - Select Board Member – present remotely**
- **Luke Hanson - alternate**

Stratham Resident - Roy Byrnes – not present

Call to Order: 6:00 PM

September Minutes were accepted with a unanimous vote

<u>Community Education Topics</u> – Writeups for both topics were included in the October 2 Select Board newsletter.

<u>Presentation on Heat Pumps</u>. Amy Farnham and Nicholas Metz from the Exeter Energy Committee will present their material on "Heat Pumps" to Stratham Residents on October 28 at 12:30 PM at the Municipal Center. They will cover how heat pump technology works; what they do well and where they fall short; common mistakes when installing and sizing for your home; and what are the typical installation costs with an overview of rebates and credits available to NH residents.

<u>Window Dressers Program</u> – The Window Dressers Program is sponsored by the Exeter Energy Committee and is open to surrounding towns. Stratham Resident Jennifer Kinsey reported that six residents have signed up so far. Window Dressers are custom built inserts that seal leaky windows and reduce home heating needs.

<u>Community Power updates</u>

Matt and Paul provided a Community Power update to the Select Board on September 21.

Stratham has participated in the Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire (CPCNH) for three years; while the first year brought substantial savings, CPCNH has not outperformed

Unitil's default rate in the past two years. The Commission recommended halting automatic enrollment of new meters unless CPCNH's rate is lower than Unitil's. The Board authorized the Town Administrator to immediately request CPCNH to stop automatically enrolling new meters in the quarterly account refresh mechanism unless the CPCNH rate is below the default rate of Unitil at the time of the refresh. New accounts currently get swept into CPCNH during quarterly refreshes. Opt-out notices are sent, but people rarely take action. Opt-out rates remain roughly equal to new enrollments, keeping participation steady.

Matt outlined the Commission's larger recommendation: if CPCNH's upcoming winter rates (released late December/early January) are not lower than Unitil's default rate, Stratham should begin the process of withdrawing from CPCNH. Three towns have already started this process, though withdrawal steps are not clearly defined and may take several months to ensure no outstanding supply or reserve costs remain.

Paul explained that reserve balances fluctuate seasonally, often going negative in winter, which can complicate withdrawal timing and may require bonds or escrow, as seen in Hudson's case. Epping is pursuing a more collaborative withdrawal process. The Commission noted alternative options exist, including contracting with a third-party supplier, which may offer better pricing. Overall, the Commission recommended preparing to move forward if CPCNH continues to underperform. Mr. Anderson noted the new CPCNH rate should be available in January, allowing the Town to decide whether to withdraw. If notice were given on February 1 with six months' lead time, the withdrawal period would cover winter, with reserves likely positive again by spring or summer. Paul added that while reserve levels are one factor, additional costs such as hedging also affect timing. CPCNH needs a firm withdrawal date so they know when to stop planning for Stratham's electricity load. Because they purchase power in the futures market to hedge for that load, once Stratham's load is removed, those hedging arrangements must be unwound. Matt emphasized the goal is simply to begin the withdrawal process, with the final date depending on Stratham's reserve balance and any hedging already purchased on the Town's behalf. Mr. Tramaloni asked about independent verification of CPCNH's figures. Paul explained that while CPCNH is auditable and relies on third-party data, there is often a reporting delay of several months, complicating timely decision-making. Withdrawal requires a minimum three-month period, often closer to six, and rejoining is not allowed for 12 months. Ms. Knab expressed a loss of trust in CPCNH due to poor financial planning and decision-making.

Matt emphasized that Stratham joined CPCNH solely for cost savings. Paul noted CPCNH is aware of the Town's concerns and has shown some improvement, including returning to a positive financial position and increasing operating reserves. He added that CPCNH may need to add surcharges for several years to reach its reserve goals. Future competitiveness will also depend on forthcoming PUC policy changes that could raise default utility rates as utilities recover significant under-collected costs. Matt explained that CPCNH buys power for Stratham based on total meter load, including residential and small commercial accounts. Because

future supply is purchased in advance, large changes in enrollment can create mismatches between purchased and actual load.

Discussion followed on how residents can opt out and whether awareness is widespread. While outreach has been done, participation remains steady due to both new enrollments and limited resident action. Paul clarified that CPCNH already understands member concerns; declining participation would not change their ability to respond due to financial constraints.

The Board agreed to revisit the issue once new rates are released in late December or early January, acknowledging some legal costs may be involved. If Stratham decides to leave CPCNH, we would plan to use an amicable approach similar to Epping.

<u>Alternate suppliers</u>: Freedom Energy and Standard Power (now Priority Power) were the two other suppliers the Energy Commission looked at when we selected CPCNH. Both are still possible alternatives. Joe will compile a list of suppliers by town with rates for the November meeting. Derry, Hudson and Epping are looking at Freedom Energy as a new supplier. Matt noted that the Energy Commission will review our current share of CPCNH reserves at the November meeting.

<u>Upcoming meetings</u>:
Charlie will attend the Fall CPCNH member meeting on November 5.

The Clean Energy New Hampshire Local Energy Solutions meeting will be held on November 12. Matt and Joe will attend, possibly Tedd also.

<u>Municipal Solar</u>
Monthly Solar Read will be done by Matt – last read was 41456 kwh

<u>Capital Improvements</u> – Matt will continue to track the CIP list.

<u>Possible grant for charging stations</u> – The NH Department of Energy is established a grant program that would cover 80% of the cost of a town owned level 2 charging station up to $10K. The Town will need to submit a letter of intent by November 1 if we are interested in applying for the grant. Consensus was to hold off on this grant application. Issues to be considered are whether the Town would want to own a charging station and maintaining the system. Stratham Hill Park would not be a desirable location.

Adjourned 7:15 PM

Submitted by Charlie Case