

5/6/19

Dear House Government Operations Committee,

Thank you for your time and attention to this charter amendment for the City of Montpelier. As the mayor of Montpelier, I am delighted to represent the voting public, who approved this amendment on Town Meeting Day in 2019. I'm joined here today by Richard Faesy, a national leading expert on energy disclosure with the Energy Futures Group, and Abby White, from Efficiency Vermont. They are here to help answer any questions, but it's also important to note that the City of Montpelier has the right partnerships with service providers to help us iron out the logistics and best practices for implementing energy-related ordinances.

We are here asking you to pass a charter amendment that would allow the city of Montpelier to regulate energy efficiency and disclosure in new and existing buildings. I understand that our original charter language needed to be tweaked in order to actually accomplish this. These language changes don't alter the intent of the bill, how it was discussed among the council or the public, but instead make the language more closely align with what people understand it to be about.

~~(D) Enact ordinances that regulate and enforce Regulation and enforcement of~~ minimum energy efficiency standards and disclosure requirements for existing and new commercial and residential ~~properties~~ buildings. The ~~City~~ energy efficiency standards ~~will be no lower than those established by the State~~ shall be at least as strict as the standards set by 30 V.S.A. chapter 2.

A clean version is below:

“(D) Regulation and enforcement of minimum energy efficiency standards and disclosure requirements for existing and new commercial and residential buildings. The City energy efficiency standards shall be at least as strict as the standards set by 30 V.S.A. chapter 2.

Here's a little background on how we got to this point. The Montpelier City Council passed a resolution to reach net-zero energy for the entire community by 2050, which complimented the State's own energy goal of reaching 90% renewable energy by 2050 for the entire state. Unfortunately, neither the state, nor the city are on track to hit those goals with business as usual. It's important to note that market forces alone are not going to get us there, and there are some key reasons why the market has broken down especially in terms of building efficiency.

Leading up to the town meeting day vote there was a lot of community discussion about a barrier known as the split incentive: wherein renters pay the heating bill, but have no power or authority to weatherize their homes or businesses, and rental property owners are often unwilling to make the investment because they don't see a return.

Another failure is the lack of information that homebuyers have about the relative efficiency of the homes they are planning to buy. When you buy a car – auto manufacturers are required to provide information on the fuel economy standards of the vehicle. That way, car buyers can make informed purchasing decisions. This is not the case for individuals purchasing a home – where they are often not provided with any information about the efficiency of the home.

In order to address market failures and achieve our energy goals, the city needs to intervene. We see the adoption of efficiency ordinances as just one component of a comprehensive approach to helping move Montpelier toward its net-zero goal – combined with incentives, outreach, education, and other engagement.

We are committing ourselves to a comprehensive effort and public process to engage Montpelier residents and businesses about the challenges and proposed solutions. In fact, we already have plans to hold a series of public forums regarding energy efficiency in June.

Municipalities already have the authority to enforce energy efficiency standards in new and renovated construction through our zoning bylaws, so this authority is a logical extension to existing structures. Montpelier is largely already built out, and a significant portion of our housing stock is over fifty years old. If we are going to meet our goals, we need to be able to address energy efficiency in existing buildings.

One of the inspirations for this charter amendment was an ordinance that Burlington has, in which multi-family buildings must meet a certain energy performance standard any time the building is sold. The city council also envisioned a home energy labeling ordinance similar to what's being done in Portland, Oregon. We anticipate that by getting better information into the hands of homeowners, they will be able to make better-informed decisions about energy retrofits for their new home.

For the sake of the climate and to address affordability and energy independence in our community, the City needs more tools at its disposal to facilitate the changes we know need to happen. We're excited to get to work on this. Please honor the voters of Montpelier by passing this charter amendment with the language adjustments.

Gratefully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anne Watson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A" and a stylized "W".

Anne Watson,
Mayor of Montpelier

