

C: Hi my name is Cassandra Bull. I go to Tufts University. This summer I am the Sustainability Fellow with Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire. I am really excited about this work because it allows me to combine my background in Environmental Science and Fine Arts and share the story of New Hampshire folks through videos and other multi-media ways.

I am here today with my mentor, Henry Herndon, who is supporting the formation of Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire. Henry, thank you so much for having this conversation with me today.

H: Very happy to be here Cassandra.

C: How long have you worked with Community Power Coalition?

H: I was technically hired [by the City of Lebanon] first in February of this year, 5 months ago. But since fall of 2019, a little more than a year and a half ago, I've been involved in the Community Power market. I was initially at Clean Energy NH where I worked with leading cities and towns to move the legislation forward through the state house for the Governor's signature. Throughout the course of 2020, I was working with the growing coalition of cities and towns across the state to research national best practices and look at how to we implement Community Power for NH to give our communities the most benefit. My role evolved from one of research and support to being contracted to develop Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire as the new public nonprofit to support this new market.

C: Can you tell me a little bit about your role and what your day to day looks like these days?

H: Yeah. I am one of two consultants who are dedicating a lot of effort to this project. My role is very much on the community engagement, education and member recruitment side of things. Lots of speaking with elected officials from municipalities, or committee members or staff – meeting with those committees and helping them chart a path forward. Lots of communications, email, phone calls, Zoom, and a little more in person meetings recently.

Also, I facilitate the group that is going to form the Board of Directors of the new organization, and acting a little more like their staff person who can work on things on a day-to-day basis and receive direction from that governance level.

The other piece of my role this past five months has been policy communication and media engagement aspects. A little bit of lobbying,

grassroots organizing and lobbying, making folks in communities aware of important policy issues.

C: Yes, lots of communication, lots of public facing. Which is what you are doing with this fellow. What were your initial goals when you created this project?

H: My initial goal is to inspire communities around the state with the potential of Community Power. I see Community Power as something that can be transformative. It can really change the way our energy system works, democratize it, so that communities are in control and can choose innovation or renewables if they want to. I feel it is a very exciting and inspiring opportunity and I want to convey that message to other community leaders in the state. I want to inspire them to take action and join this movement, build the movement. The goal is to expand and to build the Community Power movement.

C: Why specifically did you choose to involve a Fellow through UNH Sustainability in this work?

H: I am an alumni of the UNH Sustainability Fellow program. I thought it was an excellent program and I have since had an opportunity to mentor a fellow or two tangentially, but not directly work with a fellow. I know that the program is high caliber. It's a great opportunity to partner with UNH, they can provide a lot of structure and management and support, while also recruiting really high caliber Fellows to work with me on this project. This is a project I am very much NOT capable of doing on my own, and I am team oriented. I like to work with people on projects. Those of some of the reasons I wanted to go through the UNH Fellows program.

C: Thanks Henry. I'm really grateful for the opportunity to be that Fellow. What I am really hoping to get out of this summer is to develop an amazing portfolio of professional videos and get to meet with the leaders in NH surrounding energy and innovation.

After I graduate, I am still undecided on what I want my next career path to be. I have a lot of experience in agriculture but I wanted to expand to more policy and sustainability roles. Somewhere between a high-level position and the grassroots. It sounds like you get to do that a lot in your work. I am interested to hear about what your goals were when you were at the same stage in your career that I am now.

H: I do really appreciate my multi-level perspective where I get to work from the grassroots up to the state policy level. No federal policy. What were my goals?

So I read this question ahead of time and I went and looked up the article that UNH wrote about me in early 2018, not quite five years ago. What I said then was, “my goal is to leverage my relationships with municipalities and my understanding of the regulatory commissions and renewable energy industry to help implement smart grid time-based energy management systems at the local level in NH” (chuckles).

Maybe I'll unpack that just a little bit.

When I was doing research at UNH I was completely focused on state policy. My work with Clean Energy NH was focused on municipal technical assistance – educating cities and towns. My goal has been to connect these things – to connect the leadership at the local level to influencing things on a statewide basis, in terms of policy but also in terms of the market. Connecting municipal local leadership with statewide influence.

C: Fascinating Henry. I don't think you are very far off from that goal five years ago. Do you think that you achieve those goals? Or how do they change?

H: There are degrees right. If I can help this one group of community leaders with energy efficiency program funding and they do an LED project, I play some small pollinator role. At least that's what I did a lot of the time at Clean Energy NH. Helping connect the dots, networking, helping small – you know, an LED streetlight project, maybe a solar RFP.

Where we are now, we have this opportunity with Community Power Coalition to really amplify and magnify that goal. Absolutely we have not achieved the goal yet. I think it will always be a moving target. It's about the degree to which we are able to achieve that goal. We have to a degree, to a small degree. It is a question of if we are successful with Community Power may be able to in a very large way achieve that goal.

C: That's interesting Henry. Was there a mentor that was important to you as part of this entire journey?

H: Yes. Dr. Clay Mitchell Esq. at UNH is a critical mentor. When I was a senior at UNH finishing my Bachelor's in Political Science I took his first ever Introduction to Sustainable Energy and Our Energy System class. It clicked with me. I got excited about working in NH's renewable energy industry. Clay... in a lot of ways, sometimes the best mentors are the heretics. The people who get there first, and they have a vision, and they see “here's all the ways in which the system is wrong and we need to change it” and they can trailblaze and clear a path for other people who will eventually catch up. So, yeah, I think in a

lot of ways we have to sort of... like... who are the people who are saying the things that are different from whatever is going on in the mainstream, and get there first. I think that's an important part of mentorship and leadership, and I think Clay did that in a lot of ways for the state of New Hampshire as a whole.

C: Do you feel like you are taking on that trailblazer mentality in your work? Or are you just appreciating it as you move forward?

H: I got to a point sometime when I was in grad school, I was doing these solarize weatherize campaigns where you partner with community energy committees you help educate neighbors about how to do solar and efficiency. I started to realize that I could be a leader. We didn't have to always look up to, you know, who are the "adults in the room" or who are the "professionals that know what they're doing." Cause those people aren't necessarily pioneering things. So. Through my work with Clean Energy and Community Power realizing that, we can get municipalities together and change state laws. We can get communities together and create a new institution that is of, by and for them...

C: Thank you for sharing that. That relates to something I am working on for another project. Thank you for that moral support.

I am really happy to have you as a mentor for this summer. We are in a critical and perhaps pivotal time right now. How do you think the field of sustainability might change as a result of this moment.

H: How might the field of sustainability change as a result of this moment?

C: Perhaps you can take the context of racial reckoning, Covid-19 as the pivotal moment.

H: So I... During the thick of the Covid chaos, you know, everyone, we were all experiencing shock. And trauma to some degree. It was disorienting. Part of me was very angry that... you know. "We have to flatten the curve! We have to flatten the Covid curve!" Yeah, that's really important, but what about the Climate curve? Why is there no... What if we gave the attention to the climate crises that we give to the short-term, very real crises of Covid. But, like, I was angry that we don't seem to care in our media echo-chamber about things like climate as much, and it's harder to because they are more long-term.

As a result of this moment... I think the Trump administration was fantastic for mobilizing grassroots activism and activity and I got to experience and see a lot of that. I hope that that doesn't peter out, I that maintains its momentum throughout the Biden presidency. I hope people don't sit back and relax and

say, "oh now we've got it covered." Because we absolutely do not. We cannot wait for help from on high from the Federal Government to solve any of the challenges related to climate, related to equity. Any of these issues. We really have to rely on local communities and state-level change. That's been my personal experience here in NH. I think the change will come from local grassroots and statewide organizing as opposed to from some higher authority.

C: I can definitely see where you are coming from with that. As I am exploring career options, I am looking at what level to be at, and where I can make the most change most effectively. And I've reached a similar conclusion.

Well, thank you Henry for having this conversation with me today. I've learned a lot, and I look forward to working with you this summer and to sharing the perspective with the other fellows. I'll talk to you soon.

H: Thanks Cassandra.