

City of Cambridge Net Zero Transportation Plan Advisory Group

Meeting Notes – Thursday, February 2, 2023

The Advisory Group held its first meeting on Thursday, February 2, 2023, at the Cambridge City Hall Annex and via Zoom. The objectives of the meeting were to –

- Get to know each other
- Share information on why we are doing this plan
- Agree on how we will work together in this process, including –
 - Understanding what group members need to participate effectively
 - Developing shared commitments for group members and staff

Below are key takeaways and action items, followed by a brief summary of discussions.

Key takeaways and action items

- Advisory Group members –
 - shared hopes and questions for the process,
 - discussed what a Net Zero Transportation Plan entails, and
 - reviewed the first half of their draft charter.
- Advisory Group members will continue to review their charter at the next meeting.
- Members identified the following future discussion topics:
 - Broader community engagement strategies
 - Ways to share information back and forth with members' communities
 - Ways to assess whether this is a successful process (including examples from other cities)
 - How emissions-reduction strategies interact with equity and racial justice
- Members who are eligible for compensation should fill out their ACH and W-9 forms and submit them to USDN.

Introductions

Participants introduced themselves and shared something about their community or neighborhood that they were grateful for this past year.

Hopes for and questions about this process

Participants also shared one hope and questions about this process, summarized as follows –

- *Embedding equity in the outcomes of this process:* How do we get to net-zero while either addressing or not further adding to the inequities that already exist? How will net-zero impact those already impacted, e.g., unhoused people? Good access to public transit is seen as a mark of privilege. Transportation can also be a tool to increase equity, if done right. The hope is that this process will lead to real, brave changes that get us toward climate solutions.

- *Involving underheard voices:* This process should ensure that marginalized voices that will be affected by policies have a seat at the table. (“Nothing about us without us.”) Certain marginalized communities (e.g., low-income, unhoused, and people with disabilities) navigate transportation infrastructure differently, so any future system should be responsive to their needs. Advisory Group members are interested in asking questions to and hearing from their communities so that their voices can be heard in this process.
- *Working together as an Advisory Group:* The Advisory Group is an opportunity to work together toward a realistic plan that hits the net-zero goal. While there will be much technical information to get through, there should also be opportunities for collective learning about each other’s lived experiences.
- *Making Cambridge a model:* This process can serve as a model for other cities, and hopefully other cities can replicate this process.

What is the Net Zero Transportation Plan?

Stephanie Groll (Community Development Department) shared an overview of what the Net Zero Transportation Plan will include and how the process of developing it could work.

The City Council set a goal for the Cambridge to use only renewable energy by 2035 and reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Around 11% of Cambridge’s emissions comes from transportation. In order to achieve the City’s climate goals, the Advisory Group will help study and make a plan to reduce transportation emissions.

The City aims to make the process of developing this plan more equitable than processes in the past. A more equitable process should help create a plan that can serve community members, especially those who have been historically excluded or underserved, better than plans in the past have done.

Below are summarized themes from follow-up questions and discussions –

- *Are there goals/steps/measures that we can track along the way to the larger 2050 climate goal?* The City conducts a “greenhouse gas inventory” every 5 years that measures emissions across sectors (including transportation). In getting to net-zero, the City will need to address all emissions, regardless of who is causing them. The two broad methods for addressing emissions are:
 1. switching from transportation that causes emissions to net-zero or more efficient means of getting around (known as “mode shift”), and
 2. transitioning from fossil-fuel to electric-powered vehicles.

Rather than dictating specific outcomes, the goal will be to promote better options for people and give them a range of options for their trips. The Advisory Group will also need to consider other concerns like safety, traffic congestion, and land use.

Part of the Advisory Group’s work will be to recommend ways to measure progress towards achieving the plan. As an example, the Net Zero Action Plan (for building

emissions) includes interim goals to measure at different times along with actions. That plan also includes a 5-year review process.

- *What has the approach to planning been like in the past? Why is there a desire to do things “differently” now?* In previous processes, participants from highly technical backgrounds and people with power tended to dominate conversations. These processes also tended to not be racially diverse. The City would also develop plans first and then invite feedback from the public. In this process, we are hoping to build the plan with community partners “from the ground up”.

Advisory Group process

Revisions to the draft charter

Afterward, Elizabeth Cooper (Consensus Building Institute) led participants in a review of sections 1-5 of the draft charter for the Advisory Group. Participants proposed the following edits to the draft charter –

- Include the “higher why” for the Net Zero Transportation Plan (i.e., to fight climate change)
- Outline what the Advisory Group’s work will inform (policies, etc.)
- Think about benchmarks for assessing success of this process, including similar community-involvement processes from cities around the world
- Describe the community involvement process so far and potential plans and options for broader engagement
- Be clear about representation (Advisory Group members do not need to speak for the communities they work with, but should raise up issues that they are aware of)
- Outline that Advisory Group members will liaise back and forth with their communities and that they will be 2-way conduits of information

The Advisory Group will continue working on the charter at its next meeting.

Other matters

Dr. Neenah Estrella-Luna (consultant for the Urban Sustainability Directors Network) is part of a team developing equity metrics for the state’s Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) program. Dr. Neenah offered to share this framework with the Advisory Group when they are ready.

Dr. Neenah also shared that measuring equity is always a context-specific process. Historically marginalized communities should be partners in the process of designing equity frameworks. Equity is not a “box to check” but, rather, needs to be an aspiration.

Advisory Group members also recommended Cambridge Public Schools District (CPSD) and taxi/Uber/Lyft drivers as potential groups to fill the remaining seats on the Advisory Group.

Attendance List

Advisory Group members

- Pastor Farris Blount (Western Avenue Baptist Church / Cambridge Black Pastors Alliance)
- Elizabeth Brusie (De Novo Center for Justice and Healing)
- Karim Elrazzaz (Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center)
- Ben Engle (Food for Free)
- Maria Melo (Cambridge Multi Service Center)
- Ibrahim Omar (Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center)
- Ali Sorrels (Cambridge Women's Center)
- Rachel Tannenhaus (Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities)
- Yao Wu (Chinese American Association of Cambridge)

Community Development Department staff

- Seth Federspiel (Climate Program Manager)
- Stephanie Groll (Mobility Strategy Manager)
- Susanne Rasmussen (Director of Environmental and Transportation Planning)

Consultant team

- Brandon Chambers (Consensus Building Institute)
- Elizabeth Cooper (Consensus Building Institute)
- Dr. Neenah Estrella-Luna (consultant for the Urban Sustainability Directors Network)
- Kate Fichter (Arup)
- Katie Wholey (Arup)