

Notes from the September 14, 2023 Climate Committee meeting

- The meeting was a hybrid meeting with about 2/3 of participants in person.
- We have a quorum!
- Prior minutes were approved.
- Directors report:
 - Welcome to the new members
 - For the time-being, we're going to keep the current structure with David Rabkin as Chair and Steven Nutter as vice chair. We'll cope with not having a secretary for the time being. In January we'll nominate and elect new officers.
 - We skipped the usual updates in the interests of time for introductions and discussions.
- Intros: The group – old and new members and staff, all introduced themselves.
- Meghan Shaw provided an overview of the city's climate action history and some key background information. Among the most salient features were:
 - Our strongest focus is on buildings because Cambridge's emissions are dominated by our buildings. More than 70% of total emissions comes from buildings, and the bulk of that is from commercial buildings. That's a much higher percentage than most American municipalities.
 - [The Sustainability Dashboard](#) provides an overview of the major areas in which we are seeking improvement for the sake of greenhouse gas reduction, and thus climate change mitigation.
 - One of the City's most important efforts is the [Net Zero Action Plan](#) (NZAP), which recently went through a [five-year review](#). The NZAP has many dimensions, including: energy efficiency of new and existing buildings, use of locally-generated and remote-sourced renewable energy, programs to encourage on-site solar, financing mechanisms, and more.
 - A major accomplishment in the City's efforts to move toward its net-zero goals is the recently-passed Building Energy Use Disclosure and Emissions Reduction Ordinance (BEUDERO, often shortened to BEUDO). In its current form, it applies to the City's largest commercial buildings and establishes a schedule of emission reduction goals for them.
- Leila Mekias reviewed City's work to understand its climate vulnerabilities and improve resilience. Some highlights include:
 - In 2012, the City initiated a process to study its vulnerability to climate change, and the report was published in 2015. In some ways it was surprising because it highlighted concerns well beyond sea-level rise as relevant to Cambridge. These included extremes of heat made even more impactful through the urban heat island effect and flooding from more intense rainstorms. It also made clear that the Alewife area of Cambridge – seemingly far away from the ocean – was highly vulnerable, both to flooding and sea-level raise.
 - She reviewed "[Resilient Cambridge](#)," our approach to adapting to and mitigating the effects of the now-expected changes to our climate. Key to the plan are:
 - Strengthening the social fabric of our neighborhoods so people can support each other better.

- Building new buildings, and renovating existing ones, to be more resilient to the changes we expect.
 - Make the urban infrastructure on which we rely every day better able to withstand climate change impacts and to recover quickly from exceptional events.
 - Enhance the natural environment in ways that cool the city, handle rain and floodwater better, improve air quality, help keep our waterways clean, etc.
- We then had a wide-ranging discussion that included questions about what was presented as well as ideas about where the City and the Committee might focus. Some of the items that came up:
 - Do we record these meetings? Should we, for people who can't attend or to simplify note-taking?
 - The topics on which we focus are less important than how we engage with the public. We need to develop engagement methods that can be used for a range of topics.
 - Education only goes so far. People are frustrated; they're told to do things that seem small in their impact. Recycling IS important but people feel powerless. We place too much emphasis on what the individual can do at home, not how to change the big systems of our society. We need a bridge from education to action that is, and feels, effective.
 - We need to learn where people in our communities need help.
 - What are the City's other committees? Where does ours fit?
 - We need some education on basic topics, for example, BEUDO, what's going on with BlocPower. It would be useful to have a 1-page summary of the Committee's role and about the actions that have been undertaken by the City and that are taking place now.
 - The City needs to communicate (with us, with the community) about what's been done, what programs, what projects.
 - We touched on the fact that there has been work done and that there's a flyer used for the Climate Conversations training that might be helpful.
 - Can we have short bios of the group – with photos to help us remember each other?
 - How are we doing at an “all-of-government” approach to the City's work <<**This one needs clarification**>>
 - It would be useful to have a review of frameworks for thinking about equity and environmental justice.
 - It would be useful to get some background on organizational and community change management frameworks.
 - As we think about various sets of constituents, let's not forget homeless people. They're highly vulnerable.