

City of Cambridge Climate Committee  
March 14, 2024 | 6:00 – 8:00 PM

Meeting Notes

6:01 PM Welcome and Introductions (Michelle Holmes)

6:10 PM City Manager and Department Heads Visit

- City Manager: Climate is at the center of how we think about the work we're doing and the direction the city is moving in.
  - o Deep challenges are coming for vulnerable communities across the world and across generations.
  - o Expressed pride in the work and progress we've seen over the past year, especially with BEUDO.
  - o Fossil Fuel Free – State originally provided a generous timeline, but was revised; grateful to the staff for pushing it through.
  - o City will be creating a Climate Chief position. There's a lot of work to do on legislative and regulatory areas.
  - o Need to engage with building owners; understand new technologies; what resources will be needed to help meet our targets.
  - o Amount of work happening across departments requires additional coordination; more engagement with committee, stakeholders, institutions, community, etc.
  - o A higher visibility leadership position on climate work would help facilitate these efforts.
  - o Governor Healy is focusing on climate work and holding the city accountable.
  - o The City is "the last mile" – where international, national, state policies are implemented and on-the-ground changes happen. We understand the global scale of the challenge – how do we meet that last mile and take actions that make a difference? How do we serve as a model for other cities?
  - o Many pieces across different departments.
- Head of Public Works:
  - o A lot of work is based in public health, climate, etc. – working to institutionalize work so it's part of the department's day-to-day operations.
  - o Zero-Waste Master Plan – 2017 plan that set clear goals for reducing trash; met 2020 targets and in the process of updating the plan.
  - o 2022: Characterization of trash study – it's currently only 45% trash, still significant amount of compostable material and recyclable material.
  - o Clean Fleet Program: Upgrade and increase fleet to electric vehicles; for vehicles that can't be made electric, what can be done to reduce fuel consumption and emissions?
    - 71% of vehicles are still combustible.

- Infrastructure Projects: Hearing on March 27 to go into detail about infrastructure projects. (Including: Improving water quality in local rivers/water bodies; dealing with storm surge; etc.)
- Urban Forestry Master Plan – Reducing loss of trees and increasing planting; increasing maintenance and operations associated with these activities.
  - Met goal of 1,100 tree plantings last year.
- Head of Water Department:
  - Moving water through the plant and through the city requires a lot of energy – how do we move water more efficiently and reduce energy use?
  - Actions: Solar panels on the plants; variable frequency drives on the high-lift turbine pumps (which allows you to reduce energy use); working with electric vehicles and electrifying fleet; new ozone treatment system will reduce energy needs of process; removal of invasive species and maintain greenspaces in Cambridge
- Head of Capital Buildings Department:
  - New roadmap for municipal buildings in place by the end of this year or the start of the new year.
  - School department has been working through a facility plan considering schools that have not been reconstructed in the city – released in 2 months' time.
- Head of Inspectional Services:
  - Enforcement of sanitary codes, zoning ordinances, municipal ordinances, etc.
  - Focusing on Stretch Energy Code, updating zoning ordinance, fossil fuel free demonstration
  - More attention, training, outreach, communication for new Energy Code regulations – Aligns with the City Net Zero Action Plan
  - Leading and setting example for other building departments in different communities.
  - Fossil Fuel Free – It's important that the outreach and training is available to ensure contractors are paying attention to the codes and to be more involved in the inspection process.
- Head of Community Development:
  - Office of Sustainability coming from department reorganization.
  - Most significant part of emissions come from the building sector, so they have spent a lot of time considering how to move this to the next level.
  - Worked with City Council to create new provision in zoning coordinates to look at both energy use and the embodied emissions in the building itself.
  - Climate resilience – creation of resilience-relating zoning – resilience zoning has been adopted for all large construction in the city.
    - Need to reference the projected flood estimates when planning new construction.
    - Considering how to build buildings that last for many generations.
  - Requirements to think about site planning in ways that are more resilient.

- City funds new affordable housing through the Affordable Housing Trust – requirements being applied to this sector as well.
- Reduces energy burden and creates healthier spaces for residents to live in.
- Net Zero Transportation Study in progress.
- Head of the Public Health Department:
  - Consider things from a population health perspective – for the majority of citizens and the greater good of the community.
  - Just submitted application for re-accreditation.
  - Climate change is one of primary objectives of the organization.
  - C3 Workers – Funded by the City
  - Community assessments specific to climate – base programming off of the needs assessment.
  - Equity/Racism – Importance of not just having a conversation but ensuring that equity is considered in all policies; actionable and not just rhetoric.
  - Educate the community on how to care for resources – particularly water (i.e. “Only rain down the storm drain”)
  - Air quality testing
  - Understand the footprint we’re creating organically and communicate that with the residents and the businesses (i.e. the emissions impact of commuting in the office v. work from home)
  - Public health and climate intersection has been embedded into all parts of the City.
  - Collaborative efforts are powerful – sitting at the table when climate change planning activities occur, anticipating future burdens, try to prevent and plan ahead.
  - Inspectional Services – very important in work across the board.
  - Indoor air quality, mold, moisture, bacteria all are impacted by climate impacts.
  - State has taken on new obligations to inform the public in the event of major storms and their impact on sewer and storm surge (which impact public health)
  - Educating those who may be impacted by extreme heat in ways that they have not been in the past.
  - Cambridge Community Core has large role in sharing public education – public health outreach grassroots group.
  - Community Health Improvement Plan: City had identified that community and social resiliency was a priority – can’t be separated from climate change.
  - Social connections as social capital – neighbors supporting each other in challenging situations makes the community stronger.
  - Working with CDD and DPW – supplement their work with public health perspective.
  - Cambridge Community Core – built a curriculum that taught the Core on how to educate and prepare for heat response.
  - Block parties as a proxy for community as a proxy for preparedness.

- Suzanne – Standing in for Head of Transportation
  - Large amount of work happening to create and maintain low-carbon infrastructure on our road system (i.e. electric vehicle charging infrastructure, building out bike lines, building out transit infrastructure, etc.)
  - Cycling Safety Ordinance as impetus for building out additional infrastructure.
  - MBTA – anxious to see additional bus infrastructure to coincide with the bus network redesign effort.
    - Still a lot of repair work that must occur underground; so, will require a lot of shuttle transportation in the interim.
  - Currently in the process of improving/creating 3 miles of bike/pedestrian facilities (paths, junctions, etc.)
  - Won \$2.4 Million grant to complete Pitchburg bike and pedestrian bridge
- City Councilor: Thank you for presentations and for highlighting work.
- Committee Discussion and Questions:
  - How can the committee be most helpful to the City Manager and to the City given the challenges/opportunities that were described today?
    - Continue to have this committee bring ideas to the City; we're all watching what's happening at different policy levels, but we're always looking for new ideas. Encourage this to be a place to raise opportunities and express ideas.
    - Like to think about how we collaborate more on advocacy. City is trying to do this in a more high profile manner – Voice as a city. Ways to consider advocacy agenda at the State level.
    - There's always going to be tension – activism and push to be aggressive v. day to day operations. Are we going far enough? An important and continuous conversation.
  - How are departments thinking about equity and are there any City-level things that are being considered?
    - Infrastructure: Flooding in the Port – lower income neighborhoods that is more susceptible to flooding than other areas in the City. Prioritizing this area and investing into neighborhood infrastructure. Commitment to environmental justice in the area.
      - Not just listening to the loudest voices; looking at the data and who is the most impacted.
      - Who is concerned the most v. who is impacted the most.
    - Community Development: Start with engagement – voice has power in government and who we listen to has historically driven what actions happen. So equitable engagement is crucial and prioritize those whose voices are not adequately represented in the conversations.
      - Community engagement team that's recruiting from sub-communities – have connections to the community so they can go out and talk in the language of the people we're

trying to connect with and bring back concerns – bi-directional connection.

- How are we supporting *small* businesses to meet new requirements?
- Initiatives within the general population: Example: subsidizing Blue Bikes memberships for low-income individuals
- Resilience in areas like Alewife = redevelopment; but, redevelopment isn't happening in the area; rezoning as a catalyst to see the changeover it needs.
  - Public Health: Every training we do begins with climate justice/equity because it's the definite point.
- Building and infrastructure construction – how do we bring costs down for those who need it?
  - Technical assistance, support, subsidizing, etc. for converting buildings that need to be reconfigured; hope that technological changes and market changes will bring costs down.
  - Electrical assistance program – connecting people with the available incentives that exist for electrification. Trying to reach at least 750 households per year.
    - We cannot use tax dollars to fund improvements in private property; using federal grants to help support technical assistance
    - Looking for new ways to find additional resources to supplement what's available through programs like MassSave.
  - We're not spending our effort and funds on large buildings; focusing on residential. But, more is needed.
- What is the policy that you are most excited about that's upcoming?
  - Excited for resilience-related work – it's comprehensive, it embraces multiple stakeholders, it helps make the city more survivable for future generations.
  - Working across department and City boundaries to make progress – regional collaboration
  - Clean Fleet – when we make the purchases, we're also feeding a market for those vehicles (i.e. electric garbage trucks)
- Homeowner electrification comment – there's a lot of fear associated with the costs of electrifying; as a City, we need to explain what the electrification requirements are – what is and isn't happening.
- Did not receive Eversource money for geothermal heating – is the City doing anything to open up the possibility of network Geothermal?
  - We have a highly advanced draft of a RFP for a geothermal geogrid feasibility study. Hope to get Eversource to partner.
- Eversource approaches the supply/transmission problems on a case-by-case basis instead of what we need as a City overall. Can we do anything about that?

- Doing more regular meetings with Eversource at a higher level to try to get a bigger picture view of what is going on/what plans are/projections. City is trying to share more potential build outs and projects that are coming in.
  - Eversource has been building in electrification, EVs, etc. into their models preemptively.
- What is the City doing to manage electricity load in a way to balance electrification moving forward?
  - Active programs in terms of looking at high energy use days, looking at contracts for third party company for setting standards, reducing loads on peak use days, etc.
  - Eversource community process is lacking. They know that the electric transition is coming, but citing is huge challenge and so is community acceptance.
  - City manager: Climate, housing, transportation are three biggest issues in the city and they're also trade-offs within the community.
    - There's a need to confront difficult conversations and determine how to make trade-offs where necessary.

7:50 PM Net Zero Action Plan Letter Review and Approval (David Rabkin)

- Additional data added where requested. Discussed any outstanding questions.
- Approved.
- Health and Environment Committee of the City Council will discuss letter on April 23.

8:01 PM Approval of Minutes (Michelle Holmes)

- Approved.

7:57 PM Public Comment and Members Updates (Public + Members)

- Public Question: Are Eversource and the City planning to elevate the Alewife Quad electric substation due to flood zone?
  - It needs expansion and planning needs to be undertaken to ensure it's protected from flooding, but it has not happened yet.
- Green Cambridge – Canopy crew is planting across the city and planting more than 100 trees. Looking for new sites.

8:07 PM Adjournment

Additional Notes: Considerable public attendance.