

CITY OF CAMBRIDGE CLIMATE COMMITTEE

APRIL 11, 2024 | 6:00 – 8:00 P.M.
CITY HALL ANNEX (344 BROADWAY 2ND FLOOR) & VIRTUAL (ZOOM)

MEETING MINUTES

6:08 – Welcome & Approval of Minutes (Michelle Holmes)

- Minutes Approved.

6:09 – Director’s Update (Susanne Rasmussen)

- Welcome guest speaker
- Email forthcoming regarding City Council Meeting to review the Net Zero Action Plan report including the letter – Wed. April 24 from 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM
 - o Hybrid meeting
 - o Entire climate team will be there – presentation on the report will be given
 - o There will be a presentation that looks at FY23 but also brings us up to date
- Member reiterated that moving the goal post for the targets is not a good move – should be stated during the NZAP public comment period if possible
- Open Meeting portal – livestreams for the council meetings and the upcoming meetings
- Meeting with City manager and department heads was very valuable
- Introduced Nikhil Nadkarni, Energy Planner for the City of Cambridge

6:15 PM Climate Justice Guest Speaker - Vernon Walker

- Climate Justice Program Director at Clean Water Action and associate minister at Mass Ave Baptist Church
- Discussed climate justice and equity – during a time of transition in the City
- Climate change doesn’t pause because of municipal transitions
- Speaker focuses on citing reform and energy reform; also works on advocacy side
 - o Example: Substation in East Boston was put there without public input – fight between community and Eversource
 - o Upcoming bill would include cumulative impact analysis – if the community thinks a project is an undue burden, then a project should not be approved.
- Climate justice – those who are disproportionately harmed by climate change need a seat at the table, their voices should be heard, and a reciprocity process should exist
 - o Dialogue between the City and the residents who are impacted
 - o Climate justice is racial justice
- Port neighborhood, Alewife, public housing areas, etc. – all experience disproportionately more climate impacts including flooding, dam breaches, storm impacts, etc.
- Urban heat maps – disproportionately affecting certain areas and populations
- What does climate justice and equity mean for the committee?
 - o We have the power to suggest actions to the City – think about the adaptation and mitigation questions, particularly for the most vulnerable.
 - o We need to *prepare*, not just *mitigate*.
 - o Think about who is *not* at the table – how do we build a bridge to those communities? To organizations that are serving those communities?

- Incorporate and operationalize – how does equity look in terms of the voices who aren't here? How does it look in terms of preparing the City for extreme impacts? What do recommendations look like that include all 13 neighborhoods in Cambridge?
- What are the follow ups for our recommendations and how can we *hold the City accountable*?
- Has the City implemented past recommendations from the City? How many?
- Committee respondent:
 - The City has made a lot of effort around what we've discussed, but we haven't always been as successful as we would like.
 - We haven't historically seen the follow through that we would like to see.
- City respondent:
 - SMART goals don't have an environmental/racial justice angle – more based in technical/numeric goals.
 - When the NZAP was last updated, there was an effort to consider equity on each action, but rudimentary level of thinking in the plans overall.
 - We don't have a specific framework.
- Committee respondent:
 - Expressed importance of ensuring frontline communities are heard.
 - Trying to get a climate curriculum installed In Massachusetts.
- Committee respondent:
 - In the NZAP letter, we made a note that a major problem for transitioning to solar and other renewable energy is money, but this is also an equity issue. Maybe this should have been considered in the letter.
- Committee respondent:
 - Question – what's a good set of questions that can help us consider environmental justice in our work?
- Guest Speaker:
 - A few ideas on an environmental justice framework in climate policymaking:
 - Equity advisory boards – community members convened by the City government to evaluate the creation and implementation of climate policy
 - Having subcommittee that would be able to assess work and to consider whether its reflecting climate justice considerations
 - Consider having a stipend for serving on the committees in addition to providing childcare if necessary
 - Find individuals through the communities that are already on the ground and doing the work.
 - Ensuring that people from underrepresented communities have the opportunity to inform the policymaking
 - Keep asking the question of who is involved and who is not involved in the process
 - We have a lot of climate plans, but how can we ensure that underrepresented groups know the plans and have the ability to contribute?
 - Need to consider climate through intersectional lenses – housing, gentrification issues, etc.
- Committee respondent:

- We could use preexisting networks to distribute surveys (public housing, students, etc.) to find out about the biggest issues they're facing and so they know about the upcoming committee meetings, etc.
- Committee respondent:
 - Citing reform – Can you share a little more about what the concerns are (for any community) for having a substation around where they live?
- Guest speaker:
 - During flooding, substations can explode
 - For example in East Boston – they are vulnerable to flooding and their substation is right across the street from the local playground
 - Climate change will bring more flooding, so higher risk of explosion
- Committee respondent:
 - There's another substation in Alewife – and the construction impacts daily life as well.
 - Bypassing the process because they know the community has other pressing concerns (i.e. paying rent, getting food on the table, etc.)
- Guest speaker:
 - Eversource – touted community benefits of Kendall Square substation, but are charging rent-payers for these benefits
- Committee respondent:
 - Community input is very important; but also the substation is location constrained to some extent and can bring resiliency
 - Balancing the various interests is important and can be challenging
- Committee respondent:
 - Equity advisory boards – where have they been implemented and have they worked?
 - Cambridge already has a lot of public meeting inputs – and they don't always have a direct impact on the outcomes
- Guest Speaker:
 - Boston Urban Canopy group – 2021/2022 – convened environmental groups and different communities to talk about the urban canopy and the forest plan – had a lot of good representation
 - All meetings were virtual and had small stipends
- Committee respondent:
 - Planning fatigue – hiring a consultant to make the plan and then asking for community input
 - How are we doing better or worse in engaging the community at the right time?
- Guest speaker:
 - City has engaged with certain groups on policing reform
- City representative:
 - Example in Cambridge – working with advisory committee to propose a net zero transportation plan
 - New process – advisory group members were invited; contacted organizations that represent underserved communities for volunteers who were paid a stipend for their time

- Considering transportation injustices in Cambridge first – the consultants and the community representatives worked together from the beginning
- Committee respondent:
 - It sounds like some of the engagement methods require a lot of time from the participants – are there other methods?
- Guest speaker:
 - Maybe there could be a once a quarter meeting, maybe it's 6 times a year – the frequency can be developed to ensure that it's not monopolizing people's time
 - But climate change is a long-term problem and we need a long-term solution
- Committee respondent:
 - How can we create more connections across neighborhoods – unique populations that are experiencing specific things?
- Guest speaker:
 - Social connection and neighborhood building is very important – example, Block Party program during the summer
 - City is hiring a chief community engagement officer
 - Boston – Open Streets – neighborhood where streets are blocked off for the day so people can come together (cooking outside, meeting neighbors, etc.)

7:09 – Climate Justice Discussion (Michelle Holmes)

- Committee Member: It was recommended to me that we change the committee's name – which we can do by appealing to the City manager
 - Could we be the advisory committee that we spoke about? How could we remove the obstacles that make it hard for people to come out to the committee meetings?
- Committee Member: The bigger question is – what are we doing? We landed conceptually on where to focus our work for the year
 - What are we focusing on for the next 6, 12, 18 months?
- Committee Member: We have a current list of focus areas, but justice would be weaved through each of those ideas.
- Committee Member: We should be looking at everything through a climate justice lens, but it's not everything that we do.
 - We need to ensure that we're communicating the right things externally.
- Committee Member: Prioritizing climate justice through action; actions will spread a message that a name cannot.
- Committee Member: This committee used to be the "Climate Action Committee"
 - The committee has been in place for many years and the name should focus on all the issues.
 - Climate Action and Justice Committee
- Committee Member: Hesitant to change the name – Our agenda changes and sometimes those changes are driven by what specific things the City needs.
- Committee Member: Feel like we're almost thinking about this backwards – how will we introduce and follow through on environmental justice? How will we work through the lens? We need specific plans.
- Committee Member: Climate justice could be a subcommittee of the current committee.
 - This subgroup could particularly interface with the community.

- Committee Member: Is there anything that we would do that would not have a justice lens?
- Committee Member: It sounds like there's a bit around process – do we have every neighborhood represented? Are we recommending that we work in a certain way? It also sounds like there are specific justice issues we address (flooding, heat, etc.).
 - o Energy infrastructure – maybe less clearly justice oriented, but important still.
- Committee Member: Everything we're doing will have impact on environmental justice; confusion as to why we're hesitant on changing the committee's name.
- Committee Member expressed interest in creating subcommittee to look into how we can incorporate more equity/justice into work and process.
 - o Create a subcommittee to look into other groups that have worked in the past and present on their actions. Work will then be incorporated into the committee's work as a whole.
 - o Create a proposal to how we're going to incorporate environmental justice – incorporate into process.
 - o Subcommittee members include: Mallorie Barber, Pasang Lhamo, Joel Nogic, and Rachel Mural
- Beginning to incorporate a framework.
- Question raised about how we can use this framework to support the City in what it actually needs right now.
- Equity and justice changes – framework needs to be flexible
- Member proposed the idea of a workshop – apply the proposed framework to BIUDO because we have a good understanding of that legislation; see how well the framework works in that context and see if it needs to be tweaked.

7:36 – MA Recommendations of the Climate Chief – part 1

- 8 topics and 39 recommendations
- Funding and State Capital Investment
- Recommendation 3 – Insurance – An area that the Committee hasn't discussed
 - o Insurance regulators are in the front lines of climate response
 - o This may be particularly important for City buildings, homeowners, etc.
 - o Climate Risk Disclosure Survey – All insurance companies will need to state how they are addressing climate change
 - The survey results could help the City think about shaping policies around climate risk and developments in high-risk areas as well as building designs
- Recommendation on EJ – Cumulative Impact Analysis on the permitting process
 - o Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act – looking to improve and strengthen EJ reviews
- Recommendation 5 - to update the air pollution control recommendations
- It would be worthwhile for the City to look into the recommendations that are coming out at the state level around how state departments should be organized around climate change
- Recommendations 11-20 – many are not specific
- Areas we could have an impact –

- Procurement – Recommendations 11 and 12 → Are we supporting minority/women-owned businesses? Have we done work on the emissions side?
 - Scope three emissions could be addressed.
 - Minimizing the consequences of our purchasing decisions
- Waste stream and compost – Recommendation 19 → Commercial composting – are we capturing the food waste in a way that minimizing emission generation from larger sources?
- New committee members to look at the next recommendations on the list and come back with relevant areas.

7:47 PM – Public Comment and Member Updates

- No public comments.
- Members Announcements:
 - Community benefits training coming up. Information will be sent through email.
 - Reminder that Tom did create a Google Group for Committee information.
 - Member noted that the Committee sometimes feels like a ship travelling through the night. The City Manager meeting was helpful for us, but not sure what they got out of it. We began the conversation of what we're going to focus on; but they noted we are more reactive than proactive.
 - Need to figure out what we're going to *do*.
 - Would it be worthwhile to see if we can come to a few key areas to focus on for a period of time and see if we can engage the City on those?
 - What are our deliverables? Specific deliverables.
 - We've made important progress on our areas of focus, on our focus lens, about what's coming from the State level, etc.
 - There was a meeting of the Cambridge Climate Resilience Schools Coalition – district level resolutions on green school infrastructure and climate curriculum; infrastructure piece affects our work since it deals with buildings.
- City has nailed down the budget request for the next year – may be helpful for the City to share what the work plan is for the next year, since they touch on the topics we've decided to focus on.

8:01PM – Adjourn