

Somerville Commission on Energy Use and Climate Change
Meeting Minutes
May 3, 2023 7:00 P.M.
Virtual Meeting

Commissioners Attending: Ramón Bueno (Vice Chair), Eliza Johnston, Julie Wood, Larry Yu (Chair), Christine Blais (*ex-officio*)

Commissioners Not Attending: Eri Furusawa

Staff Attending: Erik Larson (Energy Manager), Elyse Belarge (Sustainability Planner)

Attendees: Alan Davis, Brianna Walsh, Corey Donahue, Crystal Huff, Grace Hall, Lindsay Lucke, Mary Gage, Ron Cavallo.

Meeting started at 7:02 PM.

Introductions

Chair Yu opened the meeting and let commissioners introduce themselves and asked attendees to introduce themselves.

OSE Staff updates: Elyse Belarge joined OSE as the City's first Sustainability Planner. Ms. Belarge's work includes development review, managing community-facing electric vehicle supply equipment, managing the creation of a zero-waste plan, and coordinating with consultants on the specialized code update.

Subcommittee updates

Policy (Slides attached)

- Erik Larson, Energy Manager presented slides in which he discussed the 5-year new Capital Investment Plan (CIP), with a focus on sustainability and resiliency. Mr. Larson's job focuses on energy conservation in City-owned buildings and vehicles. He also manages the Energy Stabilization Fund.
 - Highlights of the presentation include:
 - Streetscape and Open Space Improvements
 - OSE grant-funded for program for backup
 - Oldest High School buildings are being converted to City departments.
 - Assembly Square fire station, etc.
 - Spring Hill Sewer Separation Project
 - Fire Station Master Plan
 - The Commission discussed timelines and scopes of various projects and the value of including educational displays in schools.
 - Attendee Ron Cavallo commented that the CIP is important but missing is road repairs, adding the Historic Commission is major obstacle to reaching Climate Forward goals. He is upset and noted there are disincentives to small scale development. Director Blais clarified that Mr. Larson works on city-owned buildings only and that the City is in the process of hiring a residential energy manager that will focus on the community side.

- Attendees Alan Davis and Lindsay Lucke asked about electrification goals. Mr. Larson noted electrification is included in plans for municipal buildings (including heat pumps). School conversions are challenging because there is nowhere to move people, and the work must be done as the buildings is being used. Mr. Larson estimated most vehicles in the City's fleet can be replaced within 10 years, but larger, specialty vehicles will take longer. Director Blais added the capital improvement plan has annual tweaks and considers Climate Forward, return on investment, cost-benefit analysis, and emergent issues when there is, say, a heating system that needs replacement

Outreach

- **Climate Forward:** Chair Yu reported that he and Commissioner Furusawa met with the Climate Forward consultants the prior week. There will be no community-wide sustainability survey, but relevant questions will be inserted in other surveys being conducted. The outreach will focus on 5 sectors. The goals are to present solutions and see the barriers they face to allow for upstream input, etc.; to explore tactics for outreach to those sectors. Director Blais suggested a meeting with Emily Sullivan and Commissioner Furusawa, on outreach strategizing. Commissioner Johnston highlighted the importance of engaging Climate ambassadors, etc. Director Blais mentioned they are working on the survey and will use responses from past surveys, too. Commissioner Bueno suggested that the ARPA Community Engagement Toolkit has great potential if made widely available. Commissioner Wood commented that participatory budgeting is a great opportunity for outreach, asking Commissioner Yu on the outreach timeline. Director Blais mentioned the great outreach opportunity had during Sustainable Week in late April (300+ attendees at 5 events).
- **Community Choice Electricity:** Director Blais said following up on last month's conversation, the dashboard hadn't been given to Emily and that the 2024 goal is to increase by 10% the number of participants who have opted up to 100% renewable electricity share.
- **Zero Waste Plan:** Director Blais said this is delayed to September, then will focus on the top 3 priorities with the incoming Environmental Policy Manager.

Buildings

- **Specialized Stretch Code:** Director Blais shared OSE is working with a consultant to review how the updated code/specialized stretch code adopted by the City may impact our zoning code and sustainability review. Biweekly meetings with consultant, Linnean solutions, include staff from inspectional services department and planning, preservation and zoning. At this time we are gearing up for focus groups with architects and developers who work in the community to better understand potential challenges complying with the Specialized Energy Code. They expect this work to be wrapping up by June and will conduct citywide engagement. The main change in the Stretch Code is the reduced threshold for compliance, from 100,000 to 1,000 square feet. The Specialized Code will be enforceable on July 1st. Attendee Crystal Huff asked who to ask if a project triggers the code. Director Blais said to ask Inspectional Services. Chair Yu added that part of OSE's work is to make all that better known and understood.

Administration

- **CEUCC vacancies:** With Commissioner Gallaway's departure (to City's Capital Projects Division, there are two CEUCC vacancies. The applications period is closed for the first one, for which there are 12 applicants. Director Blais and Chair Yu will conduct interviews. The Commission discussed for the second position, having buildings expertise is especially relevant with Commissioner Gallaway's departure, but that we should approach it holistically. Other

priorities could include a qualified candidate who does not live in West Somerville, a renter, and lived as well as professional experiences. The Commission discussed the possibility of youth member(s). Director Blais reported the experience of other commissions, some of which can have voting and non-voting members. Commissioner Yu expressed a desire to post the second position urgently.

- **Quorum:** We now have only six commissioners which drops the quorum requirement to 3, meaning that subcommittees cannot meet with more than 2 people outside of a public meeting.

April Minutes:

With some suggested edits added Christine Blais as an absent commissioner, in one instance correcting CEBI to CBEI, clarifying a sentence regarding the greenhouse gas inventory to reflect that the total was likely short-term, significant reductions due to the pandemic, and clarification that climate change program manager, not OSE, has access to a CCE dashboard. Commissioner Bueno made a MOTION to approve the May 2023 meeting minutes at 8:39 PM. Director Blais SECONDED at 8:39 PM. The motion was PASSED UNANIMOUSLY at **8:39 PM**.

Any and all business before the Commission

- Commissioner Wood asked about going for any Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness grants. Director Blais explained OSE is signing on to two regional proposals, one for cool roofs and one for the Mystic River waterfront. They are also applying for the MVP 2.0 grant program.

Meeting adjourned at 8:44 PM