

Somerville Commission on Energy Use and Climate Change
Meeting Minutes
August 16, 2023, 7:00 P.M.
Virtual Meeting

Commissioners attending: Christine Blais (ex-officio), Eliza Johnston, Courtney Koslow, Larry Yu (chair).
Eri Furusawa joined at 8:18pm.

Staff attending: Emily Sullivan, Alexis Washburn, Brad Rothrock, John Peterson, Ron Cavallo, Vanessa Arslanian, Carol Seiple

Meeting started at 7:22 PM.

Larry opened the meeting after some technical difficulties (7:22pm) and suggested that the meeting may run until 8:45pm. Formal introductions were skipped given the delay in the meeting start.

Climate Forward

- Feedback on Climate Forward presentation. The Climate Change Program Manager indicated that the city asked the consultant for 3 ‘new’ 2030 scenario pathways for how the city can reach its goals. She explained how the scenarios were developed in the content of science-based targets released recently. The Commission discussed preferences and questions about the scenarios. Eliza asked about the feasibility of the scenarios. Scenario #3 (low) path is aligned with the State law. Might approach this in the context of how much more aggressive than the state we want to be, overall or by sector (residential, commercial or vehicles). Our residential is likely more challenging than the statewide average so despite attention, we may need longer to hit residential goals. Staff will consider Commission discussion and consultant team can craft an approach. The Commission agrees that it does make sense to set 2030 goals. We want to push the edge but not be so far out in front that we are laughable. The state has already met there 2020 interim targets.
- Discussion of the Carbon Net Negative (by the books, with targets and a date) or alternative language that is still bold and accurately demonstrates the city’s commitment. The Commission suggested that the statement have a target (2050) and a consequence of not meeting but not be unrealistic (as the first definition may be). The group liked the “restorative” and “sequestering” terminology. Eri raised the question of the purpose for the statement – is inward or outward – and how that might influence the terminology. The statement will be both and be used to influence policy or leverage funding. The group is fine with either term ‘carbon net-negative’ or ‘carbon neutral,’ but generally recommended removing “negative” and keep “neutral” terms.
- Climate Forward Community Meeting at the Armory (Oct 11th). Emily described the meeting and the more interactive format (gallery walk), 7-8:30pm. CEUCC could sit at booths, help with outreach, speak. Eliza suggested having a table for climate ombudsman. CEUCC members will attend. Eri suggested a youth contingent – possibly summer youth training program. Emily will coordinate with the Outreach subcommittee.
- Attendee Ron Cavallo provided public comment that raised concerns about development costs in Somerville, specifically condo conversions.

Policy updates

Christine discussed the Fossil Fuel Free home rule petition at a high-level, with the hope that we can spend time during the September meeting.

Administrative

- Commissioner Johnston made a MOTION to approved July 2023 meeting minutes at 8:43 PM. Commissioner Furusawa seconded. The motion was UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED at 8:44 PM.
- Courtney raised the topic of decarbonizing the Somerville Public schools to future agendas.
- The Mayor plans to attend the September meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 8:45 PM.