

Somerville Commission on Energy Use and Climate Change
Meeting Minutes
October 8, 2024 7:00 P.M.
Virtual Meeting

Commissioners Attending: Christine Blais (ex-officio), Eri Furusawa, Larry Yu (chair), Ramón Bueno (vice chair), Courtney Koslow, Julie Wood

Commissioners Not Attending: Alexis Washburn, Eliza Johnston

Staff: Josh Eckart-Lee

Attendees: Tom King, Sada Schumann, Wilson Otter.AI bot, Ben Capraro

Meeting started at 7:02 PM

Introductions

- CEUCC members, then members of the public, introduced themselves.

Staffing Update

- Director Blais shared that Erik Larson, Energy Manager, and Julia Damiano, Environmental Policy Manager, have moved on to other roles. We're sad to lose both and working to both positions. Emily Sullivan will fill in for Julia as liaison to CEUCC going forward.
- Director Blais shared the Office of Sustainability and Environment (OSE) is hiring an intern to conduct the greenhouse gas inventory update. We have training material from our last consultant to provide the tools so that we can do this in-house now.
- Director Blais shared that the City received a Mass EmPower grant to fund a two-year energy advisor and offer grants for low-income residents for electrification. An offer has been made to a candidate.

Grants

- Josh Eckart-Lee shared updates on electric vehicle supply equipment initiatives. We have joined with the Mashpee Wampanoag and others

for a grant for combination Level 2/Level 3 charges at three locations, two existing (Lombardi St and the Somerville Ave. ice rink) and one new (Foss Park). Working with Weston & Sampson. Looking at additional funding opportunities.

- Commissioner Bueno asked whether there is an app to locate stations. ChargePoint has an app, plus there is a PlugShare app which includes all vendors.
- Commissioner Yu asked how the relationship with the Mashpee Wampanoag began. The City joined with several communities and MAPC for grants and we were turned down twice. This time, we coordinated with a ChargePoint sales partner, Voltrek, who put us in touch with Everett, Brookline, and the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe, who had a different take on it that Voltrek thought would be interesting.
- Commissioner Furusawa asked about the site selection process. We worked with CDM Smith, who developed a rubric that included EJ communities and commercial/retail demand, evaluated that against the availability of electrical panels. There 37 sites evaluated. We picked these three because there aren't that many municipally owned lots; the two existing sites are among the most used and Foss Park is close to 93 and would have co-benefits.

Climate Forward

- Director Blais reviewed the Climate Forward memo
 - **Reflections on the process.** Took learnings from the October kickoff. For example, the October kickoff included a lot of familiar faces. With a lot of intentional outreach, the April launch brought in more new faces. We also circled back with all groups we spoke with and shared how they helped shape the plan.
 - **What worked well with the outreach.** 32 focus groups and interviews, almost 600 responses on the survey. That informs how we might approach it next time.

- **Where did we get stuck?** We had capacity constraints. We had difficulty contacting “hard to reach” groups, for example, there were few responses to translated surveys. The City does a lot of surveys and some feedback we get from “hard to reach” groups is, “you’ve asked us a lot of questions already, let’s see some action.” We were able to glean some things from other surveys the City conducted instead.
- Commissioner Bueno asked if we could piggyback on Ward meetings and language-specific community meetings. Director Blais responded that we will be at those meetings going forward.
- **Gameplan for implementation.** We circled back with groups that provided input. Creating City task forces aligned with the topics of the plan.
- **Where can the Commission help?** The Commission is helping with the update of the ordinance and can be helpful with decision points and with engaging the community. A few examples include input on the CCE updates, writing letters of support for grants, and attending events. One area the consultant suggested is to have a meeting-in-a-box so Commissioners could pick up a box and run a meeting with it. We didn’t get any uptake. OSE is attending 30 community meetings this Fall. We could use all the help we can get!
- Commissioner Bueno noted that being reminded of upcoming meetings would be helpful.
- Commissioner Yu noted that it wasn’t really clear what to do with the meeting-in-a-box idea.
- **How are other City departments engaged:** All departments are really engaged and have been from the ground floor. Almost all departments have folks assigned to be liaison and most have some background in sustainability. The Mayor has driven home that sustainability is to be included in all

conversations. OSE had been a planning department; now it is also implementing programs.

- Commissioner Bueno was encouraged to hear the engagement of departments and was curious how interactions with City Council have gone.
- Director Blais responded that City Council has been very supportive. We get pressure to move faster of course but we're mindful of equity and judicious about decisions that could compound other crises, such as housing affordability. OSE is in conversation with the Council's Open Space Energy and Environment Committee to meet regularly.
- Commissioner Bueno suggested that OSE let commissioners know if we can be helpful in working with City Council.
- **Tracking Micro-progress:** OSE is creating an online tracking platform to track in real-time against Climate Forward actions.
- The City is also scheduling a presentation by Eversource with City Council to talk about efforts to decarbonize the city and infrastructure projects that are pending for the future.
- Tom King observed that there are many community groups that gave input on Climate Forward. Many would love to help with the engagement part of the plan and could be enlisted early on. That includes artists who are skilled communicators. Also kids in the high school who bring material home to their parents.

Buildings (inc. school decarbonization)

- Director Blais shared that the City is working on many projects in the schools. OSE is included in the Capital Improvement Planning process as part of the decision-making team. Still trying to get a couple of projects moving.
- Commissioner Koslow asked what types of things are being considered for the Capital Improvement Plan. Director Blais responded that updates include City Hall campus and the 1895

building, modernizing the fleet and electrifying it. It also includes ordinary maintenance like updating steam traps. The City also received a grant to come up with decarbonization roadmap as required as a Climate Leader Community.

- Commissioner Koslow noted that sometimes, Capital Improvement Plans don't include everything, for example, things funded through different budget mechanisms. Director Blais observed that this appears to be a different process with more voices involved and seems comprehensive. Grant-funded projects and the Energy Stabilization Fund will be wrapped into the Capital Improvement Plan, for example. Not sure when the plan will be done.

Administration

- Commission ordinance amendment update
 - Director Blais is updating the draft ordinance for review internally. Hope to submit in the next two months.
 - Commissioner Bueno asked whether the version online (for the September meeting) final? Commissioner Yu responded that is not the working document and we will probably not iterate in full Commission meetings before it goes to City Council.
- Creation and assignment of subcommittees
 - Commissioner Yu noted that we should probably validate the subcommittee assignments we came up with in September meeting.
 - Director Blais noted that at the September meeting the subcommittees we landed on were Governance, Outreach, Policy, Buildings, with Buildings as a lower priority until we're able to expand the Commission.
 - Commissioner Wood reminded the Commission that we had discussed changing the subcommittees in the August meeting. Commissioner Yu added that at the September meeting we came back these four subcommittees, because as long as there just seven non-staff Commissioners, we're limited in how many

subcommittees we might have. When the Commission expands, we should revisit. Having subcommittees would be helpful for Director Blais.

- Commissioner Furusawa asked whether we could ad hoc subcommittees.
 - Commissioner Yu replied, yes, and that we can start ad hoc subcommittees by email.
 - Commissioner Wood suggested that Outreach could be called Outreach and Equity and that Buildings could be Capital Investment, which would include natural capital.
 - Director Blais said, “Great suggestion.”
 - Commissioner Koslow asked if someone could send around a sign-up sheet and Commissioner Bueno added that it might include priorities.
 - Director Blais replied that we can’t send a sign-up sheet per se, but we can send around notes and take responses by email. Also, one potential problem with “Capital Investment” is that it could imply that it excludes residential.
- There was no public comment

Policy

- Director Blais shared updates:
 - MA Stretch Code updates: DPU put out draft updates and we provided input. They’ll finalize potentially in December.
 - Rental Registry and Energy Disclosure Ordinance Focus Groups: All focus groups were completed. OSE is synthesizing input and will submit a draft ordinance to City Council by end of year. First conversations might not be until early 2025.
 - Community Choice Electricity updates: A mailer going out soon with the new rates. It’s a 37-month contract and the default rate of renewables supply is RPS plus 40 percent.
 - Local legislative efforts: There will be ordinances coming up on the CEUCC, on adopting Climate Forward 2024, on the fossil

fuel free amendment, and on the rental registry. The fossil fuel free amendment changes is a minor change to language on when the policy would come into force.

- There was no public comment.

Approval of July, August, and September Meeting Minutes

- Commissioner Koslow made a MOTION to approve the minutes from the July 2024 and August 2024 meetings at 8:27 PM. Commissioner Furusawa seconded at 8:27 PM. The motion passed unanimously at 8:28PM.

Any and all business before the Commission

- There was no new business.

Meeting adjourned at 8:30 PM