

Town of Concord
Climate Action Advisory Board
Meeting Minutes
April 28, 2021

Pursuant to a notice duly filed with the Town Clerk, a virtual public meeting of the Climate Action Advisory Board (CAAB) was held on April 28, 2021 at 6:00 pm via Zoom.

Attendees: Jake Swenson (chair), Brian Crouse, Warren Leon, Scott Wood, Courtney Eaton, Ruthy Bennett, John Bolduc

Staff: Kate Hanley

Guests: Pamela Dritt, Andy Puchnik, Jane Hotchkiss, Sven Weber, Brian Foulds, Brad Hubbard-Nelson

1. Welcome and Zoom reminders

- The Chair brought the meeting to order at 6:05 pm.

2. Meetings and Minutes

- Upcoming meeting dates: 6pm on May 19th and June 16th.
- Warren motioned to approve the minutes. Minutes of the March 17th meeting were approved with 6 voting yea.

3. Chair's Update

- Jake shared that Article 31 was presented at the public hearing for Town Meeting last night. Kate will cover this in more detail. He noted that at this meeting CAAB will revisit Home Energy Scores for further discussion, and John will talk about commercial building disclosures.

4. Director's Update

- Kate shared that CSEC is working on several case studies about electric homes which should be helpful in our efforts to transition homes from fossil fuels to heat pumps. CSEC has been interviewing folks and writing case studies with the expectation to produce about a dozen case studies, which will include homes with differing characteristics. Two are complete and on the heat pump section of the website.
- Kate shared that the Town has released an RFP for a fleet electrification study. Proposals are due mid-May and the project is expected to begin this summer. The consultant will look at electric vehicles and charging infrastructure needs.
- The Library sustainability planning phase is wrapping up. The current draft is available for community feedback. There is a community event next Monday, May 3, to learn more about the draft plan, share comments, and ask questions. The plan should be completed over the next month or so.

5. Town Meeting Article for All-electric New Construction

- Kate shared that Article 31 is the fossil fuel article that CAAB recommended to the Select Board. It is on the warrant for town meeting. Kate presented on the article at last night's public hearing, shared some history, why it is important to Concord's climate efforts, and what it entails.

- Received questions about affordable housing and generators, CMLP and whether they could handle additional electrification load, hot water heating for buildings, power supply and whether electrification is really the way to decarbonize, and whether the fossil industry will attempt litigation.
- Next step is a meeting on June 13th. Between now and then, Alice is interested in spreading the word to other committees. Kate and Alice have prepared a 10-minute presentation that can be delivered by others. Kate asked if any committee members may be interested in presenting. If interested, email Alice.
- Jake echoed that there were a lot of questions and comments. There was some pushback on the affordable housing exemptions. We discussed all-electric requirement of new construction vs. existing construction. Alice was able to address these questions and why but this may be worth our committee discussing further. There are opportunities to strengthen and reinforce that this is just one piece of a larger strategy for the town and that they need to work together.
- Jane Hotchkiss shared that while she has not been as involved in the process as she would have liked, that one of major issues she heard feedback on was that people like their gas stoves. She suggested that showing more data on the increase in non-carbon electric generation. She commented that Concord alone can't solve the problem but Concord can lead the way and we are one of many in a coalition. She emphasized another important piece is related to infrastructure – i.e. stranded assets and that we need to send market signals that we don't want this new infrastructure. Jane suggested outreach to the League of Women Voters and the Concord business groups.
- Sven Weber commented that he recently moved to Concord. This is an extremely important warrant and that there is a need to deal with some of the fear about what this means for the electric grid, especially given the recent events in Texas. He suggested the group make the answers about reliability and costs very transparent to the community. He also commented that heat pumps are a good strategy but efficiency is important and asked if there was anything in the article that would prevent builder from installing inefficient electric resistance heating.
- Jake agrees that we should touch on the reliability issue and commented that there was some misinformation in Texas about renewables and the outages had more to do with natural gas lines. He suggested that as we head toward a Net Zero Stretch Code, he thinks it would be difficult for resistance systems to be used and meet the efficiency requirements, not to mention the cost of full home heating system with electric resistances would be significant.
- Kate agreed and comments that she would be surprised if a new building could comply with the stretch code if using resistance heat. While the warrant is technology is agnostic, the only logical and cost-effective technology would be heat pumps.
- Brian Foulds commented that we know buildings are the largest sector of emitters. We have struggled to find ways to change that and change the dynamic around buildings given the limitations to changing the state energy code. He suggested we not get stuck debating the technology and should not let perfect be the enemy of the good. This article is the result of RMI's recommendation of what is possible and it's a coordinated effort with other towns that could influence the state to change the code.
- Pamela Dritt commented that it's not easy to find the right information, specifically examples of how building electrification is cost-effective and reduces emissions. She asked if there was some way to get an FAQ in the packet or more widespread?
- Kate shared that the FAQs are being developed but will be made available.
- Jake feels that there's a great opportunity with this article to educate the community about it and everything else that's going on.

6. Home Energy Score Programs

CAAB discussed last month's presentation on home energy scores.

- Jake recapped the presentation saying that there are many things we could try that would leverage the Home Energy Score concept and the resources from DOE. It's important to get beyond the people who are proactive about energy efficiency, and broadening this to giving more people visibility to helping people understand their energy use, benchmarking against neighbors, and related carbon emissions. There are case studies showing significant impact of engagement and adoption of actual actions. It wouldn't have to be mandatory. It's also an opportunity from an education standpoint. Jake likes the idea of leveraging CMLP's data but there is missing data from the other utilities.
- Warren believes we shouldn't be looking at home energy scores only or primarily as a climate change issue; this is a consumer protection issue. There's no bigger purchase than a home and without doing a score, we're asking them to make a purchasing decision without complete information. Warren share that the Energy Trust of Oregon is a member of Warren's organization and offered to ask them to present and share their experience and suggestions for us.
- Courtney asked if the HES is a national or city-wide program.
- Jake shared that it's a national methodology that DOE developed. There is an engine they have that ties into other energy systems. It can be customized for different communities. Unclear to what extent MassSave has tapped into the system to generate the home energy scores that they use.
- Courtney asked if they only did it at time of sale or more frequently.
- Jake responded that it was only done at time of sale in Portland
- Courtney shared that she sees benefits to consumers making the trade understanding what they're getting; also from a behavior standpoint. She expressed concerns about the load on whoever has to do this work and asked who would take on such a system, do we have capacity to manage it and if annual updates may be a reasonable timeframe for seeing an update on this.
- Jake shared that a group of residents, working with Kate and CMLP, is looking at what approach we can take to get oil heated homes to transition directly to electric. The fact that DOE has the model would mean not a lot of expertise needed and we could think about it as being supplemental to an auditing program (e.g. MassSave)
- Kate asked for Portland example, how they got the data.
- Jake responded that it came from a scheduled audit, where they do a site visit and evaluate the home's assets.
- Kate notes that recently there is a lot more MassSave data available currently (e.g. uptake in rebate programs). It's not address-level specific but better than we've had in the past.
- John Bolduc shared that there is a similar issue with utility data with Eversource and privacy threshold. There is an authorization form for the owner. You would have to pass some sort of bylaw to do a time-of-sale requirement (on owner). They will have to get you the data one way or another. If National Grid is reluctant to provide data to the town, there needs to be authorization from the owner.
- Jake asked if we could do it not as audit-based approach, but using info from town records and ask residents to provide updated information about their home heating systems, for example.
- Scott added that inviting a speaker from Energy Trust of Oregon would be helpful.
- Jake wrapped up the discussion and said that he and Kate will continue to explore this and keep digging to see what opportunities might look like in terms of access to data from National Grid.

7. Commercial Building Disclosure Ordinances

John Bolduc presented on Building Energy Benchmarking Laws, which are slowly spreading across the country. Boston and Cambridge have these ordinances now along with many other major cities. 33 cities have ordinances currently, with populations as small as 20,034 (West Chester, PA). These laws require certain building owners to annually benchmark their buildings and report results to the local government typically. Data is typically publicly disclosed. John reviewed the key components including building attributes and energy usage data (e.g. energy consumption), and energy indicators (e.g. EUI).

John shared an example and experience from the Cambridge Building Energy Use Disclosure Ordinance (BEUDO). He spends about 20% of his time administering the ordinance with support from consultant who provides a Help Desk service. Results are about 80-85% compliance by buildings and 90% by floor area. Have not issued fines. GHGs are reducing about 1% per year, which is not on pace with 3-4% needed. Cambridge is now developing performance requirements.

John shared additional insights and details from Cambridge's experience, including:

- Cambridge launched visualization this year using ArcGIS Story Map platform
- Have developed scorecards that they intend to send to each reporter, which will contain EUI, trend data, comparison to local and national median EUI for their building type, fuel use and emissions breakdown; and what to do with this data and how to make improvements.
- Pros of these ordinances include: benchmarking is straightforward, provides building level consumption and trend data which helps to prioritize buildings for improvement, community & stakeholder conversation, creates market competition, foundation for policies and programs
- Biggest cons are administrative burden (most communities doing this in-house). Administering the law is the most challenging step (e.g. maintaining database of covered properties, access to energy and water usage data, procedures for exemption, communications with property owners, enforcement, etc.)
- We could consider sharing the administrative load with another local municipality (e.g. Lexington).
- We could possibly get Foundation support to help fund this.
- We could include a sunset clause in case the program doesn't go as well as planned.

The board discussed the presentation.

- Warren asked if John had a sense of how much it costs a building owner or property manager to comply with this (time and money). Also, if there is evidence that this program is linked to driving the 1% GHG reductions. He also asked Kate how many buildings this would be in Concord?
- John responded that there are typically early birds who start early but most do this in the couple of weeks ahead of the deadline. In terms of level of effort, it depends. For larger organizations with in-house property managers, it's part of their job and they're already collecting and benchmarking data anyway. It takes less than 1 day of effort to setup and after the initial setup, it's straightforward to enter your data. Some properties have farmed this out to 3rd parties. Cambridge provides list of providers, fees in the range of \$600-800 per property. It's hard to tease out whether the 1% reduction is tied to the ordinance.
- Kate said there are about 50 commercial buildings over 10,000 square feet in Concord.

- Scott asked if by not enforcing this and issuing penalties, are you seeing attrition in those who participate as they may realize it's not being enforced?
- John responded that when Cambridge passed the ordinance, they were concerned about resistance, but over 6 years, the number of people who have made a negative comment can be counted on one hand. There were some businesses and universities who supported the ordinance (e.g. Boston Properties). There were more concerns about disclosing data than about the reporting process. They have seen a steady compliance rate.
- Jake finds it interesting that there are apps where you can link all of your financial accounts and get access to all of your finance data. Why can't we do that for utility data? It's important to understand what we are trying to drive. Are buildings in these programs adopting GHG reduction measures. It's harder to sell if we can't quantify it.
- John doesn't believe benchmarking on their own will drive improvements we need but we could think about staging the requirements so people get used to benchmarking, as advanced warning to future performance requirements.

8. Public Comments

- Pamela Dritt asked if there could be some way for homeowners to get involved in this. In Concord Green where she lives, all gas usage is rolled into their HOA fees and there is no visibility into consumption. She expressed a wish for a benchmarking ordinance that could be applied to condos like Concord Green.
- Jake replied that this could be an issue for CAAB to consider.
- John shared that the Cambridge ordinance does apply to condo complexes. There are some separate challenges but it does apply and the data is public. You can look at the visualization or play with the data from database. Including condos here would be a matter of money, staff and political will.
- Pamela looked on agenda and it says we could get the packet one day in advance, but didn't see it on the website.
- Kate apologized for not updating the website and will make that change.

9. Adjournment

- Courtney motioned to adjourn and Warren seconded. Meeting adjourned at 8:00 pm.

Minutes prepared by Scott Wood