

Ag Meeting May 24th – Special Meeting for Climate Action Advisory Board (CAAB) to present Article 31 via Zoom

Liza Bemis, Co- Chair
Melissa Maxwell, Clerk
Steve Verrill, Member
Jake Swenson, Chair of committee
Dan Schmid, member
Joe Rogers, Member
Brian Cramer, Hutchins Farm
Chip Poutasse, Brigham Farm
Happy Goethert, Scimone Farm

Called to order 7:04

The following is a summary of Jake Swenson's presentation on behalf of the Climate Action Advisory Board regarding the proposed Article 31, a new bylaw and home rule petition to prohibit the expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure for new construction. Important piece to meet town's climate goals.

Last year launched Sustainable Concord. In plan there are 22 priority actions to help make steps to reduce carbon emissions in town: 25% reduction by 2020, 80% reduction by 2050. One of the priority actions is to explore solutions that ensure new construction meets sustainability standards. Progressing in goals – 22% decrease from 2008 to 2019. Great progress but need additional action. The Concord Light plant is making advancements in moving to all renewable energy. Even at 100% renewable energy for electricity if everyone continues as is with everything else we will only reach 32% reduction. Solution he suggests is new construction electrification because the light plant is going to 100% carbon free. Electricity is only fuel you can make emissions free. Challenges in sourcing renewable and emissions free electricity, and peak demand, and base load power. Heat pumps are a practical and cost-effective solution to heat and cool homes with clean electricity. Jake has one in his house. Many existing homes are transitioning. Rocky Mountain Institute has been advising Kate Hanley (Town Sustainability Director) and other citizens. Study showed that in Concord up front costs were lower with heat pump and operating costs were also lower.

The Article 31 is seeking Town meeting approval to establish a new Town Bylaw to require all new construction to be fossil fuel free and the home rule approval to implement. The Buildings Inspections department would be authorized to enforce this bylaw. Exemptions include backup generators, commercial kitchens, portable propane appliances, affordable housing. There is also a process that any applicant can go through to petition for an exemption.

Town meeting will be June 13th.

Liza asked for more info about Brookline, why a similar article was deemed not legal. Jake responded that the Rocky Mountain Institute helped figure out solutions and now Brookline, Arlington and Lexington have already approved home rule petition with a fossil fuel bylaw at their 2021 town meetings. Several other communities are planning to take similar action.

Steve asked what proportion of the electricity we get now is solar vs. wind. Jake does know. Of the 60% emissions free probably about 20% because there is nuclear and hydro in the emissions free bucket. The cost is high in NE, much easier in places with more solar and wind availability. Ideal is in-town generation and storage as well as sourcing more outside of community. Steve's concern is if a number of town take similar and make demand for renewables much faster than capacity is developed. Jake thinks that's a good problem, price would be a concern but demand is a good thing.

Steve is wondering if nuclear is a decreasing in supply. Jake doesn't know. Likely some plants being decommissioned but not sure.

Dan asked how does propane and natural gas figure into this? Are they considered greenhouse gas emitters? Yes, all contribute greenhouse gases when combusted. There are arguments that extraction of natural gas. Trying to limit new infrastructure in town of fossil fuel contributing to climate change. Focusing on need to transition buildings to electricity. Down the road might be other fuels available like hydrogen.

Happy is wondering how this applies to greenhouses. Jake wants to know about construction of new greenhouses, frequency of that. Would not impact existing greenhouses. If you wanted a new one would need to go through exemption to build.

Jake thinks wood might be an option even though causes emissions because is renewable. Would need conveyor feeding a furnace. Would make very expensive. Dan that seems like it would be a lot dirtier than propane, he suggests that natural gas and propane may be a good solution until there is something better. Jake continued that there is technology that can burn wood efficiently but is labor to manage and might be costly for the woodchips.

Jake clarified that any structure that does not need building permit does not have to follow this rule.

Chip mentioned Karl and Elena of Small Farm in Stowe recently built a couple of greenhouses with electric heat. Maybe the Ag committee could ask them them how it's working out. Small Farm in Stow.

Melissa mentioned that she had tried using a wood furnace in a greenhouse once but greenhouses are not well suited because they have high need at certain times, not a steady need for heat which meant the fire went out between needs, and needed lots of feeding when

it was being used. Our need for heat is during a very concentrated time so we need a good reliable source of a lot of heat but not for many nights so it does not add up to very much fuel used.

Steve has hot water heating in floor. They also have a lot of hot water discharge from dishwasher during day that automatically becomes gray water trying to find an easier way to use it.

Happy asked for clarification that if greenhouses considered temporary structures we wouldn't be under this? Dan said not to get building permit had to be in theory be able to move it. There is a need for clearer info from building department. Liza shared that she had spoken with the building department and that while some greenhouses do not require a permit, if the public will have access to it they do.

Jake shared that if the article passes still need to get home rule petition before bylaw could take effect. Says will take effect in 2022 or within 6 months of home rule petition. But could be later. Building permit issue and exemption option mean that in the special use there are some consideration if alternatives really work.

Brian would not like to be at mercy of a committee deciding if a greenhouse gets an exemption.

Liza worried about how this might impact a new farmer in town. It could have a negative effect on local agriculture if there's no clear plan forward for how that could work.

Dan asked if it too late to have a greenhouse exemption built in?

Jak shared it is too late because Town meeting is so close. For a change to be made there would have to be a motion to amend the Article at the meeting. Or if it does pass at this meeting, at next town meeting there could be an article to amend to add an exemption. Jake will check in with the team that's working on it. Groups that are supporting it don't want negative impact to Ag in town, don't want unintended consequences and hardships. He is open to changing it.

Liza mentioned other towns with similar articles don't have as many farms. Dan shared that he doesn't want anything that makes it harder for young new farmers.

Brian shared that growing plants is a good way to use solar energy very directly. Our need for additional heat is during a very short season

Jake will find out if there's any way we could incorporate this. Will circle back to Liza and Lise.

Chip asked if new construction only mean brand new building or extensive renovations on a building count? When he hears infrastructure and new construction he thinks heating system?

Jake said that the intention and focus is on new construction. If there is a major renovation not

covered. This is one piece of overall approach to carbon emission in town. Eventually want to convert existing homes to cleaner sources.

Steve has been wanted a solar powered tractor – but out in field. John deere has been working on for years. Need easily exchangeable batteries.

Dan shared that greenhouses are an unusual situation because relying on solar most of the time and cost is particularly important on a farm, how much you'll be able to sell the produce for the cost of heating it.

Jake see if we can adjust. No answer right now.

Joe asked if Brookline Arlington and Lexington laws very close to this consideration? They have approved and waiting for state to give approval for home rule?

Jake replied yes, Alice Koffman has most expertise. The state did recently pass a next generation energy code. A climate bill that includes a net zero energy code. Need less heating cooling load to run efficiency. Will help all communities build for zero carbon homes.

Brian mentioned that one issue this raises is that municipal things dealing with electricity are hard because dealing with a regional and national pool. For instance, this kind of demand for renewables will drive down fossil fuel prices and poorer communities will be buying that. Concord is part of a big community.

Steve added that if demand is doubled but not supply then price goes through the roof.

Happy would prefer to not make a statement at this time. Not against what they are doing but not for the way they are going about it.

Steve not sure how much difference it would make. Liza also feels like not worth making a statement at this position.

Steve motioned no position. Dan seconds. Vote tallied, all agree that the Ag Committee will not take a position.

Public comment

Steve shared that Stone Soup is being planned and they were thinking of September 19th for Stone Soup Dinner. They could move to the 12th since market is the 11th. The Concord Museum doing a bunch of events that week. That Saturday they had a really big event. Thinking of paying restaurants for the dinner. Would like this added to agenda for next time.

Happy moved to adjourn. Steve seconds.