

Minutes

Martha's Vineyard Commission Climate Action Task Force (CATF)

Friday, October 2, 2020

Zoom

CATF members present: Liz Durkee, Alex Elvin, Beckie Finn, Doug Finn, Rob Hannemann, Tristan Israel, Joan Malkin, Kathy Newman, Ben Robinson, Alan Strahler, Noli Taylor, Richard Toole, Kate Warner

I. Update on Woodwell-CATF carbon sequestration project

Ben Robinson recapped a meeting on Oct. 1, at which scientists at Woodwell Climate Research Center, CATF members, and others began laying out a scope for the Vineyard CO₂ sequestration project. The main takeaway was that Woodwell is interested in partnering on the project, and will begin developing a scope of work and exploring funding options. CATF members will also work to identify potential funding sources, including organizations and individual donors.

Liz Durkee mentioned a project in Rhode Island to build narrow channels in salt marshes, and relocate the material to areas that are depressed, which increases the marshes' ability to sequester carbon. She recommended looking into that type of effort more closely. Richard Toole inquired about the rules pertaining to salt marshes, including at what point private properties officially end. Beckie Finn mentioned the MassGIS OLIVER website, which includes map layers for coastal wetlands and other land uses on the Island. Joan Malkin said a future MVC Climate Change Planner could take on certain tasks related to the CO₂ sequestration project.

II. Update on MVC Climate Change Planner position

Joan gave an update on the search for an MVC Climate Change Planner, saying the hiring committee would likely recommend offering the job to Kortni Wroten, whom they interviewed on Sept. 28. Kathy Newman, who also serves on the hiring committee, said there had been an interest in filling a more senior position following the retirement of Coastal Resources Planner Jo-Ann Taylor this year, which presents something of a dilemma in terms of staffing. Joan said the MVC would try to make the position more attractive by including relocation costs. Ben said everyone on the CATF would be available to help find housing for the new employee.

III. Discussion of PACE program

Members discussed the Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) program, which Massachusetts adopted in July. Municipalities can opt into the program, which allows them to assign betterment liens on properties so developers can get low-interest loans on solar installation. Ben had spoken about the program with Megan Ansler, director of Self-Reliance, a nonprofit in Falmouth that promotes energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies. Megan had said the program also allows for the

aggregation of solar consumers, and she offered to recommend someone who could talk to the CATF in more detail. Ben said the state is also willing to speak with interested communities.

Rob Hannemann said the Vineyard Sustainable Energy Committee is aware of the PACE program, but felt that now was not the right time to promote it across the Island, since the 100% Renewable warrant article is still on the table. He said the program targets developers and commercial property owners, and could be a good way to increase solar energy as well as heat pump installation and other elements of a long-term energy plan. He argued that the program should be pursued in West Tisbury first, since the new Scott's Grove affordable housing development has expressed an interest in it. Rob said Island Housing Trust director Philippe Jordi would speak to Sue Hruby, who leads the West Tisbury energy committee. As a rule of thumb, he said, the Island should be getting 50% of its electricity from on-Island generation (meaning solar) by 2040, compared to about 7% today. Ben added that if one town opts in to the program, it could open the door for others to follow.

IV. Discussion of establishing contact at DPU

Members continued their discussion of how best to establish contact at the Department of Public Utilities (DPU), which regulates Eversource. The current goal is to develop ongoing relationships with both Eversource and the DPU, so that the CATF can be better informed in regard to Eversource's statements about the DPU and vice versa, and so that questions can be appropriately directed in the future.

Kate Warner said the Cape Light Compact (CLC) is constantly battling with Eversource, so CLC administrator Maggie Downey or commercial and industrial program manager Margaret Song could be asked to provide the names of people at the DPU who have been receptive. Richard agreed that CLC and Eversource are often at odds, and he added that CLC spends a large amount of money on lawyers to represent energy consumers. CLC is currently negotiating with the Cape and Vineyard Electric Cooperative (CVEC) and Eversource about building more solar capacity on the Island. Alan Strahler offered to bring up the discussion of DPU contacts with CVEC director Liz Argo, and suggested that Richard follow up with Maggie Downey. Rob mentioned that he serves on the Vineyard Power board with former DPU chairwoman Ann Berwick, and he planned to get in touch with her as well. He characterized the DPU as geared more toward communication with developers and lawyers rather than communities. Richard said CLC's former lead attorney, Jeff Bernstein, is a Chilmark resident.

V. Discussion of Eversource communication strategy

Rob described his initial approach to working with Eversource as an effort to prod the company toward using the Vineyard as a demonstration project for energy resilience. He said the CATF should be focused on getting Eversource to do the following three things, although he stressed that these are longer-term goals that don't need to be accomplished right away:

- 1) Help facilitate solar energy development on the Vineyard and in southeastern Massachusetts.
- 2) Provide guidance and consultation in regard to energy resilience, in particular the questions of how and where microgrids would be most effective.

- 3) Use the Vineyard as a model for modern electric infrastructure that is resilient to the impacts of climate change.

Kate said she knew someone higher up at Eversource that she could talk with about the three goals.

Alex Elvin noted that Eversource currently has a project before the MVC as a development of regional impact (DRI), which it might view as an indication of the MVC's willingness to partner on energy initiatives. He gave an update on the proposal, which is for a 14.7MW energy storage facility in Oak Bluffs. The MVC review has been delayed by the need for additional information related to the proposed fire safety plan, standard operating procedures for emergencies, and plume modeling in the event of a fire, which the down-Island fire chiefs have been requesting. Joan suggested the possibility of moving forward with the review, with conditions to account for the information still needed by the chiefs. Rob suggested that Alan bring up the topic with Liz Argo, since CVEC has sponsored at least one energy storage project on the Cape. He added that energy storage was not as unproven as some might think. Ben pointed out that the CATF is not able to weigh in on a DRI review process.

VI. Update on draft DRI Energy Policy

Ben announced that the CATF energy policy committee was planning to present the draft policy to MV Commissioners for discussion at the Oct. 15 MVC meeting. He added that the revised Oak Bluffs Town Hall project, which the MVC recently approved, was a good example of how the policy is not asking for more than what some developers are currently proposing. He expected the guidance related to onsite solar generation to get the most discussion. The committee has drafted a list of frequently asked questions, which it planned to distribute to CATF members for feedback.