

Minutes

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

Friday, April 17, 2020

Zoom

Members and staff: Richard Andre, Cheryl Doble, Dan Doyle, Liz Durkee, Alex Elvin, Rob Hannemann, Tristan Israel, Joan Malkin, Kathy Newman, Ben Robinson, Marc Rosenbaum, Alan Strahler, Noli Taylor, Richard Toole

Key points

- Staff will begin reviewing applications for the sustainability planner position.
- Ben has begun discussions with Nantucket regarding opportunities to collaborate on climate initiatives, including permitting issues and the SSA. We should invite Nantucket special projects manager Chuck Larson to attend a future CATF meeting on Zoom. Richard has shared his list of Nantucket contacts.
- The Woods Hole Research Center has proposed a pilot study for Dukes County, focused on detailed modeling projections on a decadal scale. The results would be delivered in the fall. Ben will know in a couple weeks if the project will move forward.
- CZM Cape and Islands Coordinator Steve McKenna has contacted Liz Durkee about a regional project as part of their coastal resilience grant program. The MVC will apply for a storm-tide pathway study for the Vineyard. Alex will begin a list of current and future adaptation and resilience projects on the Island for reference.
- Members discussed challenges and opportunities that have arisen with the Covid-19 pandemic, including how best to approach the 100% Renewable warrant article at the annual town meetings. The CATF will need to decide whether to stay on course for the spring or postpone the article until the fall.
- The CATF will send a letter to Attorney General Maura Healey in support of the Brookline natural gas infrastructure bylaw.
- Outreach to school board members in regard to the high school building project should begin soon. The high school should be encouraged to seek review by a qualified design team.

Summary of discussion

I. Applications for MVC sustainability planner

MVC staff has received more than 146 applications for the position of sustainability planner. The application period closed at 5PM on April 17, and staff planned to begin reviewing the applications in the next few days. Alex Elvin agreed to help sort the applications into three

initial groups (desirable, potentially desirable and not desirable) based on qualifications. Once that is complete, a committee that includes Adam Turner, Joan Malkin, Ben Robinson, Lucy Morrison and Alex will determine criteria to further narrow the field. That process could also involve asking applicants to provide relevant samples of their work.

II. Collaborating with Nantucket

Ben reported on a conversation he had with Nantucket special projects manager Chuck Larson, who had contacted him to discuss supply chain issues, which Nantucket had identified as a high priority in their MVP workshops. The conversation included a discussion of how the Vineyard and Nantucket can work together on climate initiatives. Ben highlighted some differences in each island's approach, including the allocation of \$500,000 for climate change adaptation at Nantucket's last town meeting, and the fact that the Nantucket selectmen were apparently leading the charge in terms of adaptation, rather than the planning boards or the public at large. Noli Taylor pointed out that it was somewhat opposite here.

Both islands struggle with permitting issues, and Ben noted the benefits of lobbying together on issues related to permitting and also the Steamship Authority. Ben expected the CATF's relationship with Chuck and Nantucket to continue, possibly with Chuck attending a Zoom call with the CATF in the next few weeks. The CATF sent Chuck some background information about climate change planning on the Vineyard. Alex Elvin will begin a list of other contacts on Nantucket, and also look into whether Nantucket has adopted a climate action plan. Richard Andre will share a list of about 15 Nantucket contacts that we gathered a couple years ago for a 100% Renewable summit on the Vineyard. He said about six of those people had attended the summit. He also pointed out that the town leadership has been opposed to offshore wind development south of the island, which he saw as mostly a cultural position.

III. Woods Hole Research Center pilot study

Dave McGlinchy of the Woods Hole Research Center has reached out to Ben about the center's interest in doing a climate change modeling study for Dukes County. The project would involve about three months of work and result in a granular, scientifically based model for the Vineyard in the fall. Ben expected the result to help advance the Island's development of adaptation strategies for the climate action plan. He said he had asked about involving Nantucket as well, and expected to hear in the next couple of weeks whether the project will move forward.

IV. Coastal Zone Management Coastal Resilience Grant

CZM Cape and Island coordinator Steve McKenna has contacted Liz Durkee about doing a regional project as part of their coastal resilience grant program. Along with an Island town (probably Oak Bluffs) the MVC will apply for a storm-tide pathway study for the Vineyard, which will identify the flow of stormwater more precisely than the existing floodplain maps.

Cheryl Doble said the project resembled the Applied Coastal project that is finishing up in Tisbury, and she offered to share those findings. Ben recommended that project dovetail with the CZM project, and he mentioned that Tisbury is considering another CZM grant through the MVC that would address flooding in the commercial area along Beach Road. CZM has also done work related to the Tisbury Marine Terminal and is working with Applied Coastal on another project in Oak Bluffs. Alex will keep a list of current and future adaptation and resilience projects so people are aware of similar efforts happening elsewhere on the Island. He will also keep County Manager Martina Thornton in the loop.

Cheryl point to the limitations of doing these kinds of study on a town-by-town basis rather than regionally, which could potentially tap into greater funding resources. Ben added that grant-funded studies often require a significant match from communities.

V. Permitting issues

Ben reported on a recent call with CZM to discuss the challenges of environmental permitting in the state. He pointed to a need for comprehensive permitting to speed up the process for adaptation projects, and suggested that a solution may lie in the state executive branch, possible by way of an executive order for the Island.

VI. Lessons from the pandemic

Members discussed challenges and opportunities that have arisen with the Covid-19 pandemic, as they potentially relate to climate change planning on the Vineyard. Many agreed it was heartening to see the Island's resilience in terms of responding to the pandemic, but they worried how a return to "normal" would affect the momentum of climate change initiatives. For example, less funding may be available for adaptation and green infrastructure, and people may find themselves with "crisis fatigue." Some pointed out that the current crisis was a prelude to health and economic conditions when climate change gets worse. Members stressed a need to reenergize their adaptation and mitigation efforts moving forward, including advocating for net-zero design for new construction projects.

Others drew attention to the 100% Renewable warrant article, and questioned how the pandemic would affect public opinion in regard to approving something that could be seen as costing them more money. The original plan had been to gradually increase public outreach prior to the town meetings, but that has not happened. Rob Hannemann said he planned to work with VSEC when they resume meeting in the coming days, to better understand what actions can still be taken. He suggested that in Chilmark, information be sent to voters by email. Some argued that it would be better to postpone the warrant article until the fall, when town budgets and other factors are potentially more stable. It was unclear if the article would even appear on the warrants in the spring, since towns are making some changes to their warrants in response to the pandemic

In general, members agreed that climate change messaging should be done with an awareness of the Covid-19 situation, and with a balance of warning and hopefulness, but perhaps more of the latter. Some cautioned against the task force appearing to exploit the pandemic for the sake of climate change planning, while others encouraged using the current crisis as an opportunity to highlight the urgency of climate action. Rob noted that one advantage we have is that the effects of climate change on the Island are predictable.

Thinking beyond the Island, members mentioned the need to pressure Joe Biden to adopt stronger green initiatives in his platform. They also agreed to send a letter to Attorney General Maura Healey, in support of the town bylaw amendment in Brookline that prohibits natural gas infrastructure in new construction and renovations. Alex will draft the letter, with a focus on why the bylaw is important to the state and the Island.

VII. High school building project

Members discussed the need to begin working with the high school sooner than later in regard to its upcoming building project, to make sure energy efficiency is considered. By the time the project comes to the MVC, it may be too late to change the heating and cooling elements. Many people in the high school community are in tune with climate change initiatives, but those in authority may not be. Joan pointed out that school boards carry weight in terms of decisions making, but perhaps don't know how best to use it. She suggested that CATF members use this down time to reach out to board members. Ben added that the focus should be on the down-Island boards, and Noli suggested drafting talking points or backgrounders for outreach to schools in general.

Marc Rosenbaum said he had sworn off working with public schools due to some bad experiences, and he noted the shortcomings of schools working with the state on building projects. He said the high school should request a competitive study of the project by a team of professionals, not just an engineer, with a selection process that involves an evaluation of the team members' past work.