

Minutes

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

Friday, September 18, 2020

Zoom

CATF members present: Cheryl Doble, Dan Doyle, Liz Durkee, Alex Elvin, Rob Hannemann, Tristan Israel, Bob Johnston, Joan Malkin, Kathy Newman, Ben Robinson, Alan Strahler, Durwood Vanderhoop

I. Review of Eversource responses to CATF questions

Members reviewed Eversource's written responses to questions submitted by the CATF on Aug. 14. In general the answers were seen as falling short on information that may still be available elsewhere, but still useful in terms of building a relationship with Eversource. Members still need to determine how best to obtain the information that was not provided. The full responses are available [here](#). Key points from the discussion of each question were as follows:

1. What scenario analysis has Eversource done for Category 4 hurricanes, ice storms and other severe weather events on the Island? What is the potential duration of outages under each scenario?

- The claim of there being no scenario analysis is questionable. Insurance companies, for example, may have that information.
- What we need to know is the probable maximum outage time, given climate change impacts.
- We shouldn't set expectations too high; it's more important to have a team to work with than to have specific answers to every question.
- We could reframe this question to ask how we can partner with Eversource on this type of analysis.
- We can also pursue this information through the Department of Public Utilities and Public Utilities Commission; perhaps starting with former DPU chairwoman Ann Berwick, who is on the board of Vineyard Power.

2. Eversource has stated that undergrounding last-mile connections is unfeasible from a cost perspective. At what point will undergrounding become feasible in terms of resiliency?

- The answer is not useful. Rob Hannemann will research other sources of this information.
- We should ask Eversource to pass along any relevant studies, which could illustrate how every mile is not necessarily the same in terms of cost.
- The last mile should be least expensive, but may also be the most extensive if you add it all up.
- Some power lines in Aquinnah were undergrounded a few years ago, with various parties contributing to the cost. How to get different groups to agree to pool their money?
- Undergrounding has also occurred on West Chop, and near Middle Road in Chilmark.

- Usually a community provides money for the engineering, and a company such as Verizon, Comcast, or Eversource does the work.
- Undergrounding may be more tenable in areas where utility poles are nearing the end of their lives and need to come down anyway. MVC is pursuing data about the age of Island utility poles with Eversource.

3. Can Eversource do a peak-load analysis (seasonal and daily) from the average load scenario, including the CATF's projected increase in both EV adoption and electric heating and cooling? (Assume this is similar to today's summer peaks, but proportional to the overall increase in electricity use.)

- The answer is not useful. Eversource could probably do this type of analysis if it wanted to.
- This is not surprising, since utilities have historically lagged demand.
- We could potentially do our own peak-load estimate, but would rather have Eversource understand what they need to plan for.
- The peak would likely be in summer due to increased population and air conditioning.
- Eversource has stated that the Island had a winter peak in the past, but that seems unlikely now.
- Eversource may be reluctant to provide this type of analysis, since it would open the door other communities requesting the same.
- Marc Rosebaum and the CATF energy working group will explore this issue further.

4. How much diesel fuel did Eversource/NRG burn on-Island in 2018 and 2019, and so far in 2020?

- This data helps complete the picture of how much diesel the Island is using.
- All of this fuel comes through the RM Packer Company, which has been helpful in providing data to the CATF.
- There is an Army Corps of Engineers database that tracks all of the fossil fuel that comes to the Island. We plan to get the 2019 data soon.
- The Vineyard Power interns helped ferret out this type of data over the summer.

5. To date, it seems that increasing the electrical supply to the Vineyard and improving infrastructure on the Island have come as a direct response to greater usage. Given the Island's goal of 100% renewable energy by 2040; and the projected increase in extreme weather events, flooding, heatwaves, drought, and wildfire associated with climate change, what steps is Eversource now taking or planning to take to ensure the resilience of our power supply and meet the potential increase in demand?

- The response lists routine maintenance issues. We could reword the question to focus more on future planning and climate change projections.

6. As discussed at our meeting on August 3, please provide a map of areas on the Island that are best suited to community solar arrays.

- This is one area where long-term improvements at the DPU could be helpful.

7. Given its benefits in regard to mitigating peak demand and responding to outages, when will Eversource integrate smart metering on the Island?

- Eversource has been against smart metering in the past.
- We can talk with DPU about how their oversight might change in response to climate change.
- Cape Light Compact has been the leading proponent of smart metering, and spends considerable money on lobbying. We could ask CLC for a tutorial so we can better understand how we can help. Rob will get in touch CLC to get more background.
- This is a political issue; at some point we should engage Rep. Dylan Fernandes and Sen. Julian Cyr to help push things in the right direction.

8. Please explain why a cluster study is needed for the Oak Bluffs Capped Landfill PV/Storage interconnection if the point of interconnection is robust enough to handle the increased power from the diesel generators brought online in the summer.

- The takeaway is that Eversource may not want more renewable energy or smart metering because it will change how they manage their grid and capital investments.
- Eversource may also want to protect existing relationships with energy providers.

9. What is the timeline for upgrading the Falmouth Tap Switching Station, and what will that project mean for the Island?

- This answer is relatively straightforward, although it is somewhat concerning that the project has not yet been authorized or fully vetted.
- It might not be worthwhile for the CATF to apply further pressure on a project that Eversource is already focused on; 2024 is not that distant.
- We could follow up with Falmouth about their understanding of the project and timeline.

On the topic of microgrids, Ben Robinson suggested that the MVC develop a map of critical municipal services and their relationship to utility lines, to help identify the best locations.

II. Name change for Adaptation Master Plan Committee

Liz Durkee announced that the AMPC has changed its name to MVC Climate Resilience Committee (CRC), which the committee felt better described its work and in fewer words.

III. Discussion of messaging and outreach

Kathy Newman reminded the group that a new subcommittee had formed, including herself, Meghan Gombos, and Alex Elvin, to look at issues surrounding marketing and messaging. Ben noted that the CRC has been wrestling with outreach this year, and finding that many Island leaders and stakeholders are not thinking about climate change, at least not beyond the immediate issues such as flooding. The CRC needs to focus more on preparing listening session attendees ahead of time with basic information related to climate resilience. The new MVC adaptation booklets, which include

information about hazards, impacts, and current efforts in each town, can be used for that purpose. Kathy reported on a conversation she had with a friend at an ad agency, who said the first task for the CATF should be to narrow its message, and then build its outreach around that. Ben said it would help to have a fact sheet with consistent information for each listening session or public presentation. Towns on the Cape that have issued climate emergency articles may be able to provide guidance as to what methods of public engagement have worked best for them. Ben said it will be critical for the MVC to have a full-time Climate Change Planner in the near future.

IV. Discussion of funding opportunities

Liz announced that she and the MVC have applied for a Permanent Endowment grant to produce a climate adaptation/mitigation book for the general public, including high school students. The book would be modeled after the Blue Pages, and include short chapters based on Liz's previous writings. Kathy recommended that the books be presented in high school classes.

Alex gave an update on potential funding sources for the Islandwide Climate Resilience Plan, including several foundations and the FEMA Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program. He was still researching a list of about 30 foundations, but many of them focus on mitigation rather than adaptation, or on specific geographic areas. There are various state grant programs for funding physical projects, which might be useful down the road. Norman Willard said he would forward some EPA materials related to state and federal funding opportunities.

Ben raised the prospect of approaching the Island towns for funding in the future. Alex said that could be helpful in terms providing a platform for education, and creating a sense of ownership in the six towns. Kathy asked if town funding could also be pursued for community projects such as solar arrays or a community solar fund. Ben said Tisbury has been discussing the idea of impact fees for projects, which could theoretically be applied for climate impacts as well. He added that town budgets are beginning to stabilize, so it will become clearer what is possible. Liz inquired about the possibility of an Island climate bank akin to the land bank, acknowledging that it would require an act of state legislature. Ben agreed that real estate transfer taxes have been beneficial to the Island, but the natural next step before a climate bank would be a housing bank, and he would not want to water down that process.

Joan reported on a call she had with Edgartown selectman Art Smadbeck, who suggested that the MVC propose a warrant article asking for \$90,000 or so, divided among the towns, for climate change initiatives. The article would require a large amount of public education, including with the town finance committees and selectmen. The article's passage in the first year would increase its likelihood of passing in subsequent years. The conversation had started in related to the MVC Climate Change Planner position, but Art believed a broader approach could also work. Joan said Adam Turner was open to the idea, and she planned to work with him to identify next steps. Other CATF members also endorsed the idea.

V. Update on CRC listening sessions: Emergency managers and town administrators

Liz briefly recapped the CRC's listening sessions with emergency managers and town administrators. The meeting with emergency managers Alex Schaeffer (Edgartown) and Christina Colarusso (Tisbury), focused in part on differing opinions about the need for an Islandwide emergency management position. (Alex and Christina thought it was a good idea, but others may have reservations.) Liz also mentioned that the MVC and Alex have received a FEMA grant to study wildfire risk and resilience at the state forest and other vulnerable locations.

The listening session with town administrators included Jen Rand (West Tisbury) and James Hagerty (Edgartown). Concerns in both towns focus largely on wildfire risk, with Edgartown also focused on pumping stations that are vulnerable to flooding. Liz acknowledged that the last few listening sessions have been sparsely attended, and she recommended confirming people's availability ahead of time. Ben added that part of the value of the listening sessions is that stakeholders in different towns can hear from each other.

VI. Discussion of state forest manager position

Members discussed the need to fill the state forest manager position, and to what extent the CATF should be involved in that effort. The MVC has formed a subcommittee (Trip Barnes, Christine Todd, and Christina Brown) to address the need to fill the position. Tristan added that the County is also working on the issue. Joan Malkin suggested writing a letter to the Department of Conservation and Recreation that could be signed by multiple boards on the Island, as well as Dylan and Julian, stressing the urgency of having a full-time manager given the prolonged drought this year and the resulting increase in wildfire risk. Tristan pointed out that state legislation may be required to allow a forest manager to live in the house at the state forest. Members endorsed the idea of a unified letter, and agreed to ask Dylan about the current legislative restrictions. They also agreed to assign a point person (at either the MVC or County) to write and distribute the letter. Ben said he would bring this discussion up with Adam. Dan Doyle said Adam has already sent a letter to the DCR commissioner outlining the Island's concerns and requesting a meeting with the DCR. Dylan and Julian were copied on the letter.

Kathy saw the current drought and the wildfires out West as an opportunity to raise awareness and generate support for a new forest manager. Others agreed, but also argued that the CATF may not need to get involved in an issue that the MVC and County are already addressing. Ben suggested an op-ed in the Gazette or Times highlighting why the state forest is critical for climate resilience. Alex suggested approaching MVYRadio about a five-minute climate spot that could air once a month. Tristan said he would bring that up with the MVYRadio board.

VII. Update on carbon sequestration project

Ben recently met with Allie Fish of Island Grown Initiative, who has worked on carbon sequestration projects in the past and is excited to take part in the Island project. Ben also had a follow up discussion with scientists at the Woodwell Climate Research Center, who have outlined what a project on the Island might look like. Woodwell is planning to explore possible funding sources, and Ben said the CATF could do the same. A kickoff meeting with Woodwell, CATF members, and others was expected in the coming days. Norman recommended researching pockets of money that may be available through

unexpected state or federal agencies such as the departments of agriculture or education. Alex said he would look into that the following week.