

Minutes

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

Friday, September 4, 2020

Zoom

CATF members present: Dan Doyle, Liz Durkee, Alex Elvin, Beckie Finn, Island Grown, Rob Hannemann, Tristan Israel, Bob Johnston, Kathy Newman, Noli Taylor, Erik Peckar, Ben Robinson, Richard Toole, Kate Warner

I. Update on FY21–FY22 MVP Action Grant

Ben Robinson reported that the MVC did not receive the FY21–FY22 MVP Action Grant that it had applied for in June. A revised schedule for developing the Climate Resilience Plan will need to be developed, and new funding sources pursued, including foundations and other state or federal grants. The state Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs plans to hold an online feedback session with grant applicants on Oct. 8.

Liz Durkee expressed disappointment, but pressed for continued public education in the meantime, especially for town officials, since public awareness and buy-in will be essential to the Climate Resilience Plan. Kathy Newman added that a future climate change planner at the MVC could take on that type of responsibility. The hiring process for that position has slowed down a bit, but candidates are still being pursued.

II. Update on Vineyard Power activities

Rob Hannemann and Erik Peckar gave an update on their work with Vineyard Power interns this summer, two of whom focused largely on evaluating and improving the CATF energy baseline model. Rob said the interns were about 98% finished with that project and are documenting it for future reference. Working closely with Marc Rosenbaum, the interns found some discrepancies in the CATF energy group's assumptions about where non-taxable diesel actually goes and how it fits into the larger picture, and helped solidify the model so that it can be used more effectively to project the results of various strategies over time. Rob said the energy group is now somewhere between phase 1 (developing an understanding of current conditions and possible futures) and phase 2 (developing specific strategies and a long-term energy transformation plan) of its work.

Vineyard Power has also retained intern and Aquinnah resident Luke Lefebber part-time to continue the project and answer any questions we have going forward. Erik said the goal is to develop a model that can be replicated and passed on to others in the future.

III. Discussion of partnership with Eversource

Following up on the list of questions the CATF sent to Eversource on Aug. 14, members discussed next steps, including establishing contact with the state Department of Public Utilities (DPU) in order to share the energy group's working papers and shed more light on Eversource's position on peak loads and other issues pertaining to climate change resilience on the Island.

Rob said the Cape Light Compact (CLC) and Cape and Vineyard Electric Cooperative (CVEC) have spent a good deal of money negotiating with the DPU over Eversource projects or initiatives they feel may not be in the best interest of consumers. He pressed for tying together the CATF conversations with Eversource, CLC, CVEC, and the DPU so that none of those groups becomes alienated. Rob also mentioned that former DPU chair Ann Berwick, who is on the Vineyard Power board of directors, could be asked for guidance on how to best approach the DPU.

IV. Update on VTA charging station in Edgartown

An Edgartown committee that was formed to review the VTA's Church Street charging station proposal after a vote on the proposal was postponed at the annual town meeting is expected to present its findings to the selectmen, after which the proposal will return for a vote at the next town meeting. Ben said he would contact committee member Alan Strahler to see if any further participation from the CATF is needed. The committee meetings are open to the public and posted on the Edgartown website.

As an aside, Tristan Israel suggested that a small group of CATF members establish contact with the new MVY Airport manager, Geoff Freeman, who has worked at the airport for many years and is familiar with its operations.

V. Discussion of Adaptation Master Plan Committee listening sessions

Members discussed ways to refine the Adaptation Master Plan Committee listening sessions and increase participation. Only two guests had attended the listening session with realtors on Sept. 2, in part because realtors have been preoccupied with the current real estate boom. Another listening session with realtors will need to be scheduled for the fall, but the meeting on Sept. 2 provided some useful insight, including the fact that climate change does not appear to be a priority for homebuyers (even of waterfront properties), and the real estate industry in general would want to steer clear of the "doom and gloom" messaging that might deter buyers.

Ben said the listening sessions so far have revealed a general need for more public education. Members also agreed that providing information ahead of time, and giving a short presentation to start the sessions, would help sharpen the discussions. Alex Elvin said the new adaptation booklets that the MVC has developed for each town could help serve that purpose.

Ben argued that realtors are on the front lines in terms of giving cues to interested buyers and renters. Kate agreed and pressed for having an exit message, or something to leave them with. Liz summarized the realtors' concerns about climate change as being overshadowed by their focus on sales. Rob argued that the underlying issue for everyone is the economy, and the overall message should be about keeping the Island viable. Ben added that the Island is seen as a safe haven in regard to Covid-

19, and the same could be true with climate change, since the Vineyard has milder summers than the mainland and other advantages. There are opportunities to paint a brighter picture. Ben used the metaphor of building a runway on which to land, as opposed to preparing for a crash landing.

To increase turnout, members agreed that the previous approach of confirming people's availability before scheduling a meeting was better. Alex had been on vacation, but agreed to pick up that responsibility again. The next listening session will be with members of town climate committees. A planned session with Island boards of health will be postponed due to the pandemic.

VI. Discussion of carbon sequestration baseline

Ben gave a brief update on conversations with the Woodwell Climate Research Center regarding efforts to establish a carbon sequestration baseline for the Island. He said Woodwell scientists were interested in the idea, but would need to look into funding. Woodwell is also conducting a pilot study for Dukes County, looking at detailed climate change modeling on a decadal scale. Ben has also been communicating with Harvard Forest Manager David Foster and others for input.

VII. Review of calls with ACKclimate and Cape Cod Climate Action Network

Noli Taylor summarized her recent call with AKClimate, a group started by the University of Florida that comes to Nantucket every summer to address climate change through the lens of historic preservation. Their work has involved terrestrial laser scanning to model sea-level rise, with a focus on downtown Nantucket, which includes many low-lying businesses. The project is funded partly by Community Preservation Act and Coastal Zone Management funds. Noli also mentioned a new project to develop visions of what Nantucket will look like in 2100, with the final visions expected to be unveiled next summer. Nantucket's approach to adaptation has been more top-down than on the Vineyard, with the town having recently hired a climate change planner, and more focused on historic preservation. Kate pointed out that the town commercial area is one large historic district that storm surges already affect. Nantucket business owners in general have a clearer and more immediate stake in adaptation projects. Richard Andre added that Nantucket is encountering salt water intrusion in its aquifers, which might indicate what Katama could face in the future. A list of climate activists on Nantucket that Richard provided to the CATF is available on the MVC website.

Noli also summarized her recent call with Barry Margolin of the Cape Cod Climate Action Network (CCCAN), which has been trying to organize support across the Cape, leading to the establishment of Climate Action Network groups in many towns. All of those groups come under the umbrella of the Massachusetts Climate Action Network. MassCEC used to offer grants for towns to pursue marketing efforts, but that funding has been cut, so CCCAN has turned to Cape Light Compact, which has shown support for administering a program to promote CLC incentives for energy reduction, and the Drive Green initiative, across the Cape and Vineyard if we are interested. CCCAN has looked to the Island Climate Action Network to help with that promotion. Noli said she also saw the potential for collaboration in regard to SSA issues, emergency preparedness, EV charging stations, and state legislation down the road.

Kate noted that CLC has struggled to certify any heat pump installers on the Vineyard, and she questioned how likely it was for that aspect of the program to succeed here. Noli said she would expect CLC to find installers on the Cape and our role would be mostly to promote the program. Richard Toole suggested involving South Mountain, which has certified heat pump installers.

VIII. Discussion of community solar arrays

Richard Andre confirmed that Vineyard Power plans to establish a number of community solar projects with battery energy storage on the Island, although funding depends on the Vineyard Wind project being permitted. He said Vineyard Wind has committed about \$7.5 million to the Island, which could be at least doubled by leveraging and debt. Over 15 years, that could fund about 12 solar projects around the Island. Richard said the biggest obstacle for solar arrays in general is getting interconnection agreements from Eversource, which can take more than a year. In general, that process has greatly constrained the solar industry. Members suggested that the idea of establishing a special agreement with Eversource to allow solar projects to move forward more quickly could be brought up with the DPU. Shorter-term, funding for solar projects can be pursued through private investors who can benefit from the tax credits. Richard offered to share figures for the estimated capacity that community solar projects would bring to the Island.

IX. Further discussion of Cape Light Compact

Richard encouraged the CATF to communicate regularly with the Island's CLC delegates to help get our message across. He pointed out that the Island makes up 6–7 of the CLC's 22 members, so it holds considerable sway. Richard Toole pointed out that Tisbury currently has no representative, and the Aquinnah representative rarely attends meetings. Noli said Aquinnah has a new member that will attend more regularly. Richard said it had been a goal for each Island town to have representative on both the CLC and CVEC boards. Tristan suggested having a meeting with all of those representatives. Ben agreed to find out why Tisbury does not have a CLC representative.

X. Discussion of open space preservation with Dan Doyle

Following up on a suggestion at the CATF meeting on July 17, members discussed initial ideas related to open space planning in regard to climate change with MVC special projects manager Dan Doyle. Dan shared some initial ideas, including a joint meeting with Island conservation groups to determine their current approach to land acquisitions in regard to climate change. Richard Toole mentioned the MV Land Bank's practice of removing some houses in vulnerable areas near the shore, and Dan noted recent discussions with Liz about how salt marsh advancement will affect properties. He said former MVC intern Tony Lima has expressed an interest in participating in MVC planning efforts around land management and carbon sequestration. Ben highlighted the need for a coordinated approach to land preservation on the Island, where property rights are balanced with preservation goals, which will likely be a touchy subject, especially in regard to managed retreat and unbuilding. He added that carbon sequestration relates not only to open space preservation, but also Island character and economic viability. Richard Toole mentioned Tom Chase's involvement in efforts to restore parts of the Vineyard to their pre-forested state, and suggested inviting him to take part in future discussions. Ben

mentioned the importance of better understanding the ecology of the state forest and what Vineyard ecosystems will look like in 30 years as a result of climate change. Alex noted that a revised timeline for the CRP, based on alternate funding sources, would help determine how the carbon sequestration and open space efforts might fit in to the overall planning process. Members agreed to continue the discussion at an Adaptation Master Plan Committee meeting.