

Minutes

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

Friday, November 15, 2019

at the Olde Stone Building, Oak Bluffs

Members and staff: Dan Doyle, Rob Doyle, Alex Elvin, Rob Hannemann, Joan Malkin, Lucy Morrison, Erik Peckar, Ben Robinson, Curt Schroeder, Bill Straw, Kate Warner

Members of the public: Woody Filley, Bob Johnston

- I. Discussion topics
 - a. County Commissioner meeting review

Ben Robinson and Kate Warner reported on their recent meeting with the Dukes County Commissioners, at which they described the projected impacts of climate change on the Island, focusing mostly on adaptation. Ben relayed that the County Commissioners planned to ask the Steamship Authority in writing for additional data on its energy use. The discussion with County Commissioners also involved potential funding sources for an Islandwide climate coordinator, the concept of a joint climate change committee akin to the MVC Joint Transportation Committee, and the importance of considering climate change in regard to Islandwide topics such as public beaches and the MVY Airport. Ben said he did not envision the County setting aside climate change funding in its annual budget, and emphasized the need to approach the towns as well. He said the County Commissioners were receptive to the idea of a joint climate change committee. Kate said the Commissioners also liked the idea of discussing climate change when interviewing for County appointments. Ben noted that the County will appoint a new Vineyard Steamship Authority governor next year, and Joan Malkin mentioned that Jim Malkin would be applying for the post.

- b. All-Island Selectmen meeting review

Kate reported on a similar presentation she gave at a recent meeting of the All-Island Board of Selectmen, at which she stressed the need for an Islandwide response to climate change. She said selectmen Jim Malkin (Chimark) and Jim Newman (Aquinnah) voiced support for the MVC handling the Islandwide role, while selectman Melinda Loberg (Tisbury) spoke of adaptation efforts in her town that will require regional support. Kate said selectmen Brian Packish and Greg Coogan (Oak Bluffs) both emphasized that the All-Island Selectmen only share information among each other and do not make decisions.

Rob Hannemann cautioned against expecting too much from Island selectmen in general, and argued that such discussions should have happened months ago. He said he felt the all-Island board had been “respectfully receptive” at the meeting, and he didn’t expect more.

Kate said that CATF members have also presented to each of the Island boards of selectmen separately, and that members of the CATF would like the MVC to include funding for a climate coordinator in its annual budget. Rob agreed that MVC Director Adam Turner should put such funding in the budget, as a separate position. MVC Chief Fiscal Officer Curt Schroeder said the MVC budget would be submitted on the third Thursday of January. Joan argued that the CATF should wait until Adam was present to discuss funding for the position. Ben added that the full Commission’s vote on a proposed climate change resolution could further encourage Adam to allocate funding for the coordinator position.

c. CATF mission statement language

Members discussed a new draft of the CATF mission statement, which Ben and Kate had recently revised. The statement laid out the three main goals of becoming resilient, developing adaptation and mitigation master plans, and establishing an ongoing structure to carry out the Island’s response to climate change. Concerns focused mostly on the third point, which was further revised to clarify language surrounding the desired structure. Rob pointed out that the structure would need to be in place for the next 20 years, and extend far beyond any one position. The new wording as indicated by CATF members was as follows:

To be *resilient* to the impacts of the climate crisis on our Island.

- Develop both an adaptation and a mitigation master plan to limit disruption and eliminate our greenhouse gas emissions.
- Support the establishment of a formal structure to carry out the Island’s ongoing response to the climate crisis.

MVC Executive Assistant Lucy Morrison agreed to put the final statement on the MVC website.

f. Correspondence sent: SSA, Eversource

Ben reported that CATF letters to the SSA and Eversource (both seeking an ongoing partnership in regard to CATF initiatives), were sent this week. He noted some hesitation in reaching out to Eversource, since the MVC is currently reviewing the company’s proposal to build an energy storage system in Oak Bluffs. He also emphasized opportunities to build partnerships related to emergency shelter, energy storage and other relevant projects. Kate inquired as to why the CATF couldn’t rely on Vineyard Power instead, and Ben replied that both could be involved but that Eversource was an important player. Rob stressed that there was no other way to achieve the Task Force goals, which he said will amount to \$1 billion of investment on the Island. He saw an opportunity for the Vineyard to serve as a test bed for technology that Eversource will have to install across the state. Ben agreed that the Vineyard could be on the cutting edge.

The letter to the SSA invited General Manager Bob Davis to attend a CATF meeting on either Dec. 6 or Jan. 3, although Ben said Dec. 6 would likely be too soon. He asked members to think of any further questions prior to the meeting, which should be relayed to the SSA in the next couple of weeks. Joan noted a need to develop a consensus on what that meeting should address. Ben suggested putting that on the agenda for Dec. 6.

II. Next steps and upcoming events and tasks

g. MVC meeting on the climate crisis, with Phil Duffy

CATF members discussed the upcoming meeting with Phil Duffy, director of the Woods Hole Research Center, who will speak with the MVC about the current state of the climate crisis on Dec. 12 at the Katherine Cornell Theater. Kate suggested starting the meeting early enough for the MVC to have time for other agenda items. Ben said he would like Dr. Duffy to stay after the Q and A, for a discussion of the MVC's role in climate change response. Among the items to discuss would be staffing, the CATF mission statement, planning and regional issues, the MVC resolution, and the mitigation and adaptation plans. Ben said he would like to start the meeting at 6 p.m. Members offered various suggestions for how to improve a flyer to promote the event. Ben hoped that Dr. Duffy in his talk would discuss the current science, highlight the urgency of action, and offer advice for how the Island should proceed. Joan said she didn't want to hear about other places, only Martha's Vineyard. Ben suggested sending Dr. Duffy the draft resolution for his comments, but Rob advised against it. Erik Peckar added that the Commission wouldn't want global issues to overshadowing the local. Kate said she hoped that Dr. Duffy would offer specific advice about what the CATF and MVC should be doing.

III. Further discussion: Energy presentation preview and feedback

Rob ran through a presentation he plans to give to Island selectmen and others, about transitioning the Vineyard to 100-percent renewable energy. He stressed that Islanders are becoming more familiar with the initiative, but that it can't be overcommunicated. Erik inquired about efforts to collaborate with Island newspapers, and Rob noted that in addition to his own op-eds, Liz Durkee is producing a series on climate change for the Vineyard Gazette, and the MV Times has covered recent climate-related events on the Island.

The presentation sought to frame mitigation as a positive change to our energy ecosystem, in the face of growing climate disruption. It highlighted the nonbinding town meeting warrant articles sponsored by the CATF and Vineyard Sustainable Energy Committee, which would establish fossil fuel reduction goals for each town and the Island. The goals are to reduce fossil fuel emissions 50 percent by 2030 and 100 percent by 2040, compared to 2018 levels. Doing so will involve an increase in renewable energy, as well as carbon capture in the form of new or protected trees and vegetation. Rob noted statewide initiatives that have either been established or proposed, including the 2008 Global Warming Solutions Act and the renewable portfolio standard. The presentation included graphs to illustrate the use of energy and fossil

fuels across three sectors (electricity, transportation and building HVAC), and outlined a simple strategy for lowering those figures through electric transportation, electric heating and cooling for buildings, and decarbonizing the supply of electricity. He stressed that no new technology is required to meet the stated goals, but also pointed to societal inertia and the power held by utilities as significant barriers. Looking ahead, he noted the importance of being able to measure progress, and developing a list of top-consuming buildings on the Island. He said the benefits of moving toward 100-percent renewable energy include more jobs and more resilient energy infrastructure. But he also acknowledged that some businesses would not fare as well. The presentation concluded by laying out the next steps, including the development of the mitigation and adaptation master plans, town and regional five-year energy roadmaps, and annual progress assessments.

CATF members provided feedback on the presentation. Joan said she liked the term “energy transformation plan” more than “master plan,” and Rob agreed, adding that “mitigation” was too abstract. Joan also asked about how to get buy-in from up-Island towns, which likely do not have any of the top-consuming buildings on the Island, and may see themselves as exempt from the initiative. Ben said that kind of thinking related to people in general, not just up-Island. Rob said he could tailor the presentation to each town.

Ben commented that the Island was in relatively good shape in terms of per-capita energy use, compared to the nation, although Kate noted that a lack of local industry affects the numbers. She emphasized that Islanders still rely on industry elsewhere. Kate also suggested that Rob explain terms such as “renewable portfolio standard” to the audiences.

Members sought clarity on some of the data, including how it was collected, with Rob explaining that additional SSA data would still be useful, and that some of the data is tricky, such as when people fill their gas tanks in Falmouth before boarding the ferry. However, he said he had a good handle on other data, including the amount of energy carried by the undersea cables, and what portion of the total need is provided by on-Island solar. MVC special projects planner Dan Doyle expressed an interest in developing protocols to streamline the data collection process going forward, to prevent redundant efforts among Task Force members and MVC staff.

Kate asked how Island towns will measure the behavior of their individual residents, which Bob agreed would be a challenge, such as when residents transition to electric HVAC systems. He suggested that towns could conduct surveys in those cases.