

Minutes

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

Friday, December 6, 2019

at the Olde Stone Building, Oak Bluffs

Present: Alex Elvin (calling in), Rob Hannemann, Joan Malkin, Kathy Newman, Ben Robinson, Bill Straw, Noli Taylor, Kate Warner

I. General discussion prior to agenda items

Members discussed the role of specific sectors, including builders and architects, in regard to greenhouse gas reduction on the Island. Joan Malkin saw builders and architects as knowledgeable and articulate, and a good starting point for that type of outreach. Ben Robinson said a project typically develops with a property owner communicating with an architect, and a builder at some point recommending specific features that reduce emissions. Joan suggested addressing builders and architect as one sector. Rob noted that the Energy Master Plan Committee (EMPC) has put together a presentation for towns, and needs to complete a more in-depth presentation on electric vehicles and buildings. He said involving an architect in that process would be helpful.

Ben clarified that at present the CATF serves primarily to keep the adaptation and mitigation subcommittees informed and connected as they develop their respective plans, and he stressed the importance of knitting those plans together. He noted that the MVC may want to vote on the proposed Climate Crisis Resolution following Phil Duffy's presentation on Dec. 12, but he hoped they wouldn't vote yes without understanding what the resolution means. He said Trip Barnes's enthusiastic comments at the last MVC meeting were important since he carries a lot of weight in the community. Ben also clarified that "increased pollution" in the draft resolution refers to a UN report dealing with the degradation of all kinds of environmental systems.

II. Questions for Phil Duffy, Director of the Woods Hole Research Center (WHRC)

Members then discussed what issues and questions they would like Phil Duffy to address in his presentation to the MVC. There was some confusion as to whether he would discuss policy and the specifics of adaptation, or focus only on larger climate issues; there was agreement that he would discuss the latest science and what actions Martha's Vineyard should be taking. Some suggested that more specific questions related to adaptation be asked off-the-record, or at a later date. Questions and suggested topics for the presentation included the following:

- What are the worst-case scenarios for the Vineyard? Can Phil give us assistance in modeling direct hits from hurricanes of varying intensity?

- What can the WHRC provide to the Vineyard that can be included in modeling scenarios?
- How would buyouts or voluntary relocations work here, given the high price and desirability of real estate, and the low availability of alternate locations?
- How does the “Island factor” affect greenhouse gas footprint estimates? (Solid waste and industry being largely off-Island.)
- How could greenhouse gas reduction and climate change adaptation affect tourism?
- What are some incentives to get the Steamship Authority onboard with mitigation and adaptation planning, especially electric boats?
- Talk about implementation strategies for both greenhouse gas reduction and adaptation plans.
- How to think about planning horizons and scenarios?
- What are the risks in ignoring certain consequences of climate change?
- How accurate are the current projections and timelines?
- What does the current science show globally, and what is happening on the Northeast coast?
- Give specifics on what is happening for us locally, from Maine to New York.
- Tie local changes to tourism and economic impacts.
- Keep it simple: Transfer your understanding to us, let us know what you prescribe as priorities.
- Talk about different parts of the world, and the effects of climate change on fishing and farming communities, etc.
- Draw connections between cause and effect; what will happen and what is needed.
- Advise us on what sea-level rise will be in 2030, specifically in Woods Hole and on the Vineyard.

As part of that discussion, Kate Warner noted observations of more extreme seasonal oscillations on the Island, such as heavier rainfall and greater periods of drought. Ben added that data on those trends could be used to help guide conversations with the Steamship Authority, since changes in the environment will require new boats whether or not they are electric.

Norman Willard encouraged the Task Force to not hold back in letting Phil know what it wants to hear during the talk, and he recommended having a “coaching call” to convey that information to Phil ahead of time. He also urged the Task Force to see Phil’s visit as the beginning of a long-term relationship with WHRC as Island climate initiatives move forward. Alex Elvin agreed to put together a written primer, with background on the MVC and its climate work so far, along with general topics that the Task Force would like Phil to address.

III. Adaptation update and discussion

The remainder of the meeting focused mostly on the process of developing the mitigation and adaptation master plans. Ben gave an update on the adaptation planning process, announcing

that the MVC will likely receive funding through the Massachusetts Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) program to support the adaptation planning process. But he said the state would need to administer that money through a town (Adam Turner has selected Oak Bluffs) rather than the MVC, which leaves things somewhat up in the air. The grant total is \$140,000, including an MVC match of \$35,000. Ben also reported that Megan Gombos has joined the adaptation master plan committee (AMPC), contributing her experience in marine conservation and community engagement in the Pacific Islands.

Looking ahead, Ben stressed the importance of developing a common framework for both the mitigation and adaptation planning, with the end product being a single planning website, rather than a conventional report, in order to encourage continued engagement in the community. He said a longer-term step will be developing an implementation program, including a governance structure with town representation. Kate said the CATF should form a regional body and outline its responsibilities, then ask the selectmen in each town to appoint a representative. But she pointed out that the CATF will first need to decide what that group is going to do. Ben added that it would be a mistake to invite the towns onboard before specific planning objectives are developed. Alex said he had drafted a timeline for the AMPC that organizes its work into three main phases (preliminary activities, strategy development, and implementation), with implementation strategies developed in phase 2 and an implementation program developed and carried out in phase 3. In response to a question from Joan Malkin, Alex said the timeline allows for the development of specific strategies, to which Joan replied that towns would need to be an integral part of that process. Ben agreed, and said the earlier the towns can be phased in the better.

Rob Hannemann said he thinks of this type of planning in terms of goals and visions on the one hand, and strategies and tactics on the other. He didn't envision the CATF handling tactics in its current state. Using the EMPC as an example, he said the plan will show what the Island energy system will look like in 2030 and 2040. With that vision in place, a set of strategies can then be developed to make it happen. He didn't see the need for a very large document. The next step would be to present the vision and some simple strategies to stakeholders. But he said it was too soon for the EMPC to think beyond that. Noli Taylor asked if the CATF currently has representation from all six towns, which would help in rolling out the plans. Rob argued that much public outreach is needed, since few people understand all the issues. He said the CATF could eventually transition to focus on regional implementation once the plans are in place.

Kate emphasized that implementation should happen only after the plans are developed and the towns vote on the proposed non-binding resolution in the spring. She envisioned an Island climate coordinator helping to lead the process, along with an advisory committee that has representatives from Island towns, Eversource, the hospital and other key groups. She also pointed out that the timelines for the adaptation and master plans are different, with the EMPC having more specific goals. But she saw the viability of both plans as hinging on the fate of the non-binding resolution. Ben agreed with her points, but emphasized that towns need to get onboard at some point in order for the CATF to know where they stand. Kate said that wasn't the case for mitigation, arguing that the facts were indisputable. However, Joan stressed there

would still be choices and alternatives in how to achieve the energy reduction goals. Rob suggested getting different sectors involved starting now, and continuing that process in parallel to the other planning stages.

Kathy Newman noted that towns are run mostly by volunteers, so strategies can take a long time to implement. She asked whether it made sense for the AMPC and EMPC to develop planning frameworks that towns can opt into, as they have in regard to the Green Communities Act—rather than to prescribe a list of actions. But Ben stressed again that the towns would provide feedback along the way. He saw the process as leading to a regional plan for the Island, and an individual plan for each town, ideally with the communities themselves generating ideas that the plans reflect. Kate agreed, but acknowledged that moving forward in that way would require a lot of work. She also emphasized that the present discussion related more to adaptation than mitigation, since the energy plan is more straightforward.

Kate reiterated her interest in creating a position for a climate coordinator, whose responsibilities would include organizing outreach events. Rob said the MVC's budget for FY21 includes funding for such a position, and Ben expected Adam Turner to ask the CATF to draft a job description. Ben saw it as an important position that should be created as soon as possible. Kate also urged the committee to develop the job description in the near future. Ben said the committee will focus on that in January, once Adam provides some initial guidance. Joan suggested discussing the job description at the next CATF meeting in January. Ben said money for the position would be available at the end of January at the latest.

Conversation turned to the topic of actually drafting an adaptation plan, and the importance of working with a consultant. Ben asked what specific skills the consultant should have. Alex recommended the book *Climate Action Planning: A Guide to Creating Low-Carbon, Resilient Communities*, as a further resource for the committee, as it lays out specific strategies for both mitigation and adaptation planning at the community level. Rob said that is the process the EMPC has been following in its work. Joan said the book references several Climate Action Plans that the committee could use as guidance. Kate suggested discussing those at a meeting of the AMPC. Ben noted that every plan is flawed, so the committee should read them with an eye for what could be improved. He agreed that a consultant will be necessary in developing the plan. Kathy Newman inquired about whether money might be available to hire an interim consultant for the time it takes to find a primary consultant, but Ben suggested using that time to broaden the conversation. Alex clarified that the \$140,000 MVP grant was intended partly to pay for a consultant for the AMPC. Joan envisioned the consultant as playing a role in identifying specific adaptation strategies that towns can roll out, and asked if he or she should also play a role in implementation. Kathy pointed out that in Aquinnah, at least, the selectmen were already being proactive about implementing certain emissions reduction measures.

Ben pointed to the need for the AMPC to develop a list of adaptation measure that towns cannot avoid taking. He saw completion of the plan by April 2020 as impossible, and wondered when the next window would be. He also looked toward the more distant future, and the process of mapping out what towns will need to do in the next 10 years. In response, Rob

reminded the committee that it still has time to do its work. He acknowledged the crisis, but he called it a slow-moving crisis. He said it was great to see the community getting involved, and acknowledged that the discussion has become more specific. But he emphasized that not everything has to be done immediately. Having gained some traction in the community, he said the committee now needs to bring people along carefully, as participants, and if the current trajectory continues, there will be smoother sailing in the future.

On the topic of a planning website, Kathy asked where such a website would be located. Kate mentioned the Vineyard Energy Project as one possibility, although the organization has been inactive for some time. Ben said the bigger question was who would manage the site, and he highlighted the importance of designing a site that doesn't have to be redone every few years. Kate said the MVC website was not user-friendly enough to serve the purpose, and she drew attention to the fact that the Island Climate Action Network (ICAN) is currently redoing its own website, which takes a lot of time. Joan suggested including web development in the job description for the climate coordinator. She planned to ask Adam to provide an initial description within a week.

Committee members returned to the topic of industry sectors, including builders and architects, with Joan suggesting a meeting to present some ideas to them. She recommended starting with builders and architects, and also energy stakeholders. She said Marc Rosenbaum could think about how to mobilize the building industry, and Kate said the industry is already moving in the right direction. (Ben argued that some builders are and some aren't, and more pressure is needed for them to change their behavior.) Kate recommended that Marc present the plans to the Martha's Vineyard Builders Association once they are complete. Joan again suggested having an initial presentation to get them fired up.

Bill Straw brought up the fact that in order to be designated a Green Community, towns need to develop an energy master plan (along with four other criteria), as is happening in Tisbury. Rob noted that Oak Bluffs and Edgartown are proceeding with Green Communities designation, while Chilmark and Aquinnah are awaiting formal approval from the state after completing the requirements. Bill also drew attention to residential energy audits that have taken place in Tisbury through the Cape and Vineyard Electric Cooperative, which leverages purchasing power. He suggested that other towns do the same. Joan saw a similar potential for solar compatibility, and Ben for community-based solar installations.

IV. Other discussion

Alex said he was not aware of any response from the Steamship Authority following the CATF's letter on Nov. 12, but he planned to check with Adam on Monday.

Ben said that Rob is continuing to work with Eversource on issues related to the electric grid, and pointed to the need to engage MVY Airport as well. To that end, Joan suggested working through the County Commission, which appoints the Airport Commission, although Ben argued

that it would be better to approach the Airport Commission directly, since the airport sees itself as autonomous from the County.

Noli reported that ICAN is working with the League of Women Voters to create a spreadsheet of open government seats on the Island, including at the County, airport and SSA, and in the towns. She said ICAN could advertise the availability of new positions, including at the airport, through its mailing list. Joan said it would be great to see the list, and Noli said ICAN will share it and possibly have a meeting on the topic.

Ben acknowledged that the CATF has now existed for six months, and he thanked everyone for the time they have committed. He added that he and Richard Andre have been speaking with the Tisbury building committee to encourage that the renovated Tisbury School be as close to net-zero energy as possible and serve as an emergency shelter. He said similar discussions were underway in regard to planned renovations at the Vineyard Haven Public Library. However, he noted the limitations of addressing building greenhouse gas emissions case-by-case, pressing instead for energy policies that can be adopted at town meetings.