

Minutes

MVC Climate Action Task Force

Friday, October 16, 2020

Zoom

CATF members present: Liz Durkee, Adam Turner, Alex Elvin, Tristan Israel, Ben Robinson, Joan Malkin, Richard Toole, Rob Hanneman, Kathy Newman, Dan Doyle, Noli Taylor, Erik Peckar

I. Welcome Liz Durkee, as new Climate Change Coordinator for MVC (beginning 12/15)

Adam announced he was thrilled that Liz had been chosen for the coordinator position and that her capacity would be a big asset to both the Commission and this climate planning work. Liz noted her excitement and the support she felt from all of the members. The group roundly agreed she would be a tremendous asset and a great fit for the work ahead.

II. Presentation by Megan Amsler, Executive Director of the Cape & Island Self-Reliance Corp

Ben informed the group that Self Reliance is a non profit, and then introduced Megan. He added they have a key focus on community solar projects and solar aggregation – and that he is hopeful she will help us find a pathway to scale up these projects on the Vineyard.

Megan provided some background on herself and thanked the group for welcoming her. She has worked in this field since 1996; in 2002, her and Kate Warner worked together to secure a grant to begin solar implementation. Megan added that a range of talents will be necessary to make a big transition in the economy, along with our energy supply.

At Self Reliance, Megan work also works on off shore wind projects, while also helping to improve the Environmental Safety program at MA Maritime Academy. Megan alerted the group that the U.S. exited out of the Paris Accord the day before and inquired about whether the island towns' 100% renewable resolution was limited to municipal energy use or all energy users. Rob assured it was for all users across the island.

Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) legislation – whether you want to own solar on roof or lease out the space, it offers an exciting avenue for ownership for non profits and multi-family; PACE is a tool for development of 5 or more units; PACE can also fund deep energy retrofits in businesses, non profits and MF units (not for SF homes)

MA Development in partner with Dept of Energy Resources (DoER) has created a funding mechanism to apply to MA Dev. for a 20 year loan at low interest rate; once application is completed, the town takes on the collection role, and property owners pay back the loan to the town. The town serves in an intermediary role; this model has been used in other states; MA Dev. is actively promoting it to towns.

MA Development website provides a chart to see other towns to have adopted the legislation (on Cape: Falmouth, Barnstable, Yarmouth). Each town can adopt PACE with a vote of the select board (town meeting not required); it passed in that format in Falmouth.

Kathy followed up the presentation by asking if there are any downsides to pursuing the PACE application. Megan conceded there was a software interoperability issue between towns, MA Development, and DoER for some time, but that it has been resolved.

Joan inquired about the rate of sign up in other towns, out of concern for administrative constraints limited JM is wondering what rate of sign up is in other towns to understand the administrative lift involved with the towns

Ben wondered if there are entities to assist with the paperwork. Megan was not certain, but Self Reliance does not presently serve in this capacity.

Erik asked what PACE does that the market is not already doing; his understanding was that passage needs to take place at town meeting; Megan double checked and verified that BOS passage is sufficient.

Megan indicated that non profits struggle financially to make a heat loan work, and that many barriers exist; she's spoken with Philippe Jordi and perhaps IHT can use PACE as a vehicle to achieve community solar. Joan was encouraged that for this program the payback is tied to the property as opposed to the individual. This may prove decisive towards strong uptake.

A discussion ensued about the process of community shared solar. The average discount for most ratepayers is 10%. This presents an opportunity to reduce rates by 20% and can be coupled with the R2 rate (with Eversource); if someone is struggling financially they can qualify for a 36% discount (Eversource website outlines who qualifies).

In Massachusetts, a contract is signed through Self Reliance and it targets a particular project. With this, you sign up for X number of kw hours on an annual basis; it appears as a dollar credit on your Eversource bill; Self Reliance bills for \$80 if a 20 percent discount is applied to a \$100 bill. Renters can participate as well. It's also noted that an account can be moved to a different if the person changes residences.

Richard asked Erik if Vineyard Power is considering these projects; Erik assured him they are.

III. DCR update

Dan updated that the Commissioner Jim Montgomery brought a cadre of staff to meet with MVC, Representative Fernandes, Edgartown Fire Chief, and the Airport Director on Thursday Oct. 29th. The Commissioner shared our views that a Superintendent is a critical post that needs to be filled. The position is formally posted. Rep. Fernandes indicated he will draft legislation to resolve the inability of DCR to use the house for residential purposes. This home will be key to attracting a stable presence in the Forest given the modest salary.

The October meeting also featured a discussion about countywide wildfire planning and the RFQ that is presently posted to secure a planning group with expertise in this preparedness effort. There was notable support for previous wildfire consortium efforts throughout the northeast. These partnerships have been noticed by states out west, as well.

Ben inquired whether MCSF had been discussed as a critical carbon sink. Dan and Adam responded we hadn't spoke in specifics about that. Tristan asked that the County be kept apprised in the wildfire planning work with DCR, moving forward.

IV. FEMA Building Resilient Infrastructure Communities (BRIC) program

Alex updated the group that MVC's Letter of Interest had been selected as worthy for a full project proposal. Dan added we should figure out how to differentiate the Climate Action Plan from a more conventional Hazard Mitigation Plan given the BRIC planning funds seem focused on funding HMPs. Liz, Alex, Dan and Adam will decide whether to pursue next round of MVP or the BRIC proram.

He spoke with Courtney Rocha recently as well, and asked why the 1st part of the Adaptation plan was funded but not the second. She laments that MVP program doesn't do enough to help communities implement their action plans.

V. Other Business

Jay Grossman was elected as a write in candidate for Chilmark for MVC. He and his wife are members of the Island Climate Action Network.

Adam added that he is a member of the Democratic National C'tee and that they've recently indicated an infrastructure bill may be cobbled together; this could omen well for those communities putting together these sorts of adaptation plans.