

Watertown Environment and Energy Efficiency Committee, Minutes 3/15/2021

Attendees (19):

Ed Lewis, Jeanne Trubek, Emma Clement, Deborah Peterson, Steve Steadman, Meredith Fields, Varun Saluja, Laurel Schwab, Brian Hebeisen, Pat Rathbone, Helen Soussou, Ellen Menounos, Lauri Murphy, Samatha Vuppala

1. Introductions were made.

2. Minutes of 2/22/21 meeting approved, with one revision. Lauri requested that the following be added: "Working with Peregrine to create door hangers for Watertown Electricity Choice, will have an update in our next meeting."

3. Announcements

Meredith: Tree Summit to be held on Saturday March 20th. TFW is continuing to get the word out about the summit. Speakers will include Laurel Schwab, landscape person from Cambridge, and the Watertown tree warden.

Lauri: Reminder about the petition from Sunrise Watertown to demand Watertown declare a climate emergency and a reminder that the Green Sanctuary Committee will host a virtual screening of the documentary film, The Story of Plastic, with a presentation and discussion about plastic pollution on Tuesday, March 16th at 7:30.

Energy manager report (Ed):

School construction/renovations:

Big news in town: Watertown kids are going back to school. Elementary students will be full-time from April 5th, Middle schoolers from April 12th, High School students from April 26th. Guidance has been changed for pandemic safety: students will stay masked, maintain 3ft distance. No mask will be needed for > 6 ft apart. Teachers are working on getting vaccinated.

Watertown Electricity Choice:

EV charging stations in the library parking lot are up and working. 4 parking spaces are allocated for EV charging only. Users will not be charged for parking, will only be charged for electricity. Overnight charging is allowed. No time-based charging fee at this time. Team is working on getting signage up, and when weather permits, spaces will be painted "EV ONLY". ChargePoint is managing the charging stations. They will be able to tell metrics such as: how many cars used the stations, was there improper use of the stations, etc.

DPW Update:

New director of DPW has been in contact with Black Earth Compost, LLC. 373 households in Watertown currently use their service, goal is to extend that number. If they hit 600 households, the price will go down. Additional marketing is planned to educate and bring on board more users. Town is generally pleased with the service they are providing. They also deliver compost if requested.

5. Environmental Planner Report (Laurel):

Climate & Energy Action Plan: Consultant has been selected. Team has picked KLA (Kim Lundgren Associates). Consultant is a resident of Watertown, which is a plus. An internal kickoff is scheduled for this week. Immediate step will be to setup the Steering Committee, one that is diverse and equitable. Would like to have a sizable group, north

of 20 or so people, with lots of different expertise. KLA wants to hit the ground running, has done some analysis already. They will have material for the SC to react to in the April timeframe.

MVP Action Grant: Starting to lay out a plan. Currently leaning towards the greening of streets, focusing on storm water trenches in areas that need greening. Next steps will be to do some analysis on geographic data for equity purposes, do some outreach, get designs for tree installations and storm water trenches for managing storm water effectively.

Tree Conservation: Staff is aware of the issue with the Arsenal on the Charles proposal. There will be more discussions with the developer on the topic of number of trees that will be lost.

Greenhouse Gas Inventory: Ed has spoken with KLA, they will have the data about greenhouse gases in the Climate Action Plan. Ed will follow up with the student who is interested in the data for a school project on Emissions.

6. Letter to MBTA: draft was sent out by Jeanne for review by WE3C members, in an email dated 3/11.

The Transportation working group (Jeanne, Brian, Lauri, Deb) met with Steve Owens, who recently had a meeting with the MBTA: there is a proposal to replace trolley buses on routes 71 and 73 with overnight-charging (ONC) battery-electric buses. Issue is that batteries do not work well at temperatures below 40 degrees, diesel will be needed to warm up the buses. MBTA plans to replace fully electric buses with hybrid versions that use diesel, which is a step backwards in terms of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, they plan to replace the North Cambridge facility with a charging station for the hybrid buses. WE3C would like to see the plan put on hold, and for them to consider In Motion Charging (IMC) fully-electric buses instead, which will use the overhead catenary wires that are already in place. A public meeting has been called by the MBTA for June, however, since some of the infrastructure changes would have already started by then, Steve had suggested that comments on this issue be submitted prior to the joint meeting between MassDOT and FMCB scheduled for the 22nd of March.

The main ask from WE3C is that the MBTA do a thorough analysis on emissions and take into consideration all the environmental issues before making a decision on the bus replacement. Recommendation is to delay the decision until a thorough analysis is done, particularly since we are in a climate emergency. Also, hasty replacement of current buses with battery-operated ones will involve pulling out of the existing catenary wires – which, once gone, will be gone for good.

Motion made to send letter as it stands. Motion passed.

Proposed recipients of letter: FMCB and MassDOT Board.

Vote taken to CC letter to the following: Town Council, State Senators (William Brownsberger, Sal Domenico), State Reps (Steve Owens, John Lawn), Steve Magoon, Laura Wiener. Resolution passed.

Motion made to send letter to recipients first, then to local newspaper to encourage public attendance at FMCB-MassDOT meeting on March 22nd. Motion passed.

7. Working Group reports:

Trees and Climate: A number of people from WE3C and other organizations like TFW and WFCC attended the public meeting held by Alexandria on development plans for the Athena Health complex on March 11th. Concern was raised on the loss of numerous trees on the property if Alexandria sticks with current design. There are three areas of focus: (1) the sweetgum allée (close to 20 trees) by the Kingsbury Ave entrance, (2) grove of big trees (possibly 100+ year

old) in playground next to 400 Talcott Ave, (3) mature trees in middle of lawn next to Kingsbury Ave garage. Many spoke about how the sweetgums are a part of the iconic Arsenal complex, much admired and enjoyed by the community. There was also worry that really old, mature trees with expansive canopies are planned to be cut down, only to create flat lawn space for use by future bio-lab tenants. Being so close to the river, the trees on the Athena complex are used extensively by wildlife, both local and migratory. They will be a big loss to the natural habitat if taken down.

There were also questions raised about the energy footprint, and the new proposed buildings not being Net Zero. They will be energy efficient, close to Net Zero, but Alexandria did not have an official analysis done on energy intensity and other relevant aspects. Attendees also voiced concerns about transportation matters. Alexandria has 4-5 parcels in the East End planned for development, which is critical mass. The town should be able to ask for more improvements by being proactive.

Alexandria will be going to the planning board next. Laurel will find out date, let group know. 90% of the site is not within Conservation land, hence there are limits on what can be asked of them. However, concerns can be raised with the planning board, who can negotiate on such issues. Decision was made to draft a letter to Alexandria and planning board, to be voted on in next meeting.

There is also opportunity for the WE3C working group tasked with helping review/revise town policies and ordinances to make suggestions around issues of concern such as tree loss, better definition of open space, carbon capture, NetZero requirements, etc. There's room to codify things more clearly, for both developers and residents. The working group (Meredith, Janet, Emma, Samatha) will meet with Laurel, think about how to proceed.

8. Meeting adjourned 8:30 PM. Next meeting: Monday, April 26.