

Watertown City Council

Committee on Climate and Energy

Councilor Palomba, Chair, Councilor Bays, Vice Chair, Councilor Airasian, Secretary

Committee Report of March 27 Meeting

The Climate and Energy Committee convened on Monday, March 27th. The meeting was called to order at 5:39 PM by Councilor Palomba. It was offered as hybrid so residents could join on Zoom and was broadcasted on WCA-TV. The purpose of the meeting was to hear updates on the Climate and Energy Plan (C&E Plan).

Present were Councilor Palomba (Chair), Councilor Bays (Vice Chair) and Councilor Airasian (Secretary). Also present in the room were Steve Magoon, Director of the Department of Community Development and Planning and Assistant City Manager, Laurel Schwab, Senior Environmental Planner, Silas Fyler, Energy Manager, Katherine Swan, Environmental Planner/Conservation Agent, and residents, Ernesta Krackiewicz, Deborah Peterson, Pat Rathbone, and Brian Hebeisen. Joining online were Councilor Feltner, Ellen Rothman, and David Bearg.

Councilor Palomba opened the meeting explaining that the Committee had decided at its last meeting in July to reconvene six months after the full City Council approved the Climate and Energy Plan to see how the implementation was progressing.

Ms. Schwab began her presentation (see attachment) noting there has been significant progress in the past several Months. She also noted, in response to Councilor Palomba's concern that at earlier meetings the Committee did not discuss the metrics, baseline data, or target dates of the various action steps, that as time goes on and more baseline data is collected they will be able to measure the progress against the metrics in order to evaluate the success of the action steps.

Ms. Schwab highlighted two specific achievements; the diversion of 230 tons of food waste from landfills thanks to our organic composting program and the diversion of 1,900 pounds of textiles/month from landfills because of partnerships and initiatives.

She went on to say there were 33 actions that they were hoping to be launched in year 1. As of March 2023, 22 are underway (see attached) and 2 are complete (Adoption of Stretch Code and Creating an Organic Recycling Program). All these actions have been given a timeline and will be reviewed annually by staff, WE3C, and other relevant partners. There will also be a more substantial review of the plan every 5 years. Following Ms. Schwab, there were several questions and comments.

- Councilor Bays stated she attended the CIP department budget hearings and was happy to see that many departments not only incorporating aspects of the C&E Plan, but some made it a priority.

-Mr. Fyler explained about Eversource grants and how those will be applied for and if received, would be used for building the infrastructure needed for additional charging stations.

- Mr. Fyler went on to answer a query from Councilor Palomba about battery backup for the solar panels at the Hosmer and Cunniff schools. He explained that battery backup at the Hosmer was necessary because it went over the 500 kW threshold. Whereas the Cunniff did not reach that threshold. However there were plans to look into adding battery backup at Cunniff in the future.

There were a few comments from the attendees.

Pat Rathbone was pleased to see how much has started but also disappointed that the updated draft of the Comprehensive Plan doesn't stress the C&E Plan enough. This concern was shared by Deborah Peterson as well as Brian Hebeisen who felt the wording and language in the Comprehensive Plan wasn't strong enough in regard to the C&E Plan.

Councilor Airasian noted that the Comprehensive Plan is a separate, broader document and that the C&E Plan was brought up frequently during Comprehensive Plan meetings and workshops, and that the Comprehensive Plan draft revealed that the C&E Plan was certainly considered while being crafted. Mr. Magoon stated the Comprehensive Plan is overarching, but it is the goal to incorporate and implement the many strategies of the C&E Plan. Ms. Schwab also pointed to a diagram in her presentation that demonstrated there were many synergies between the two and cited some examples.

Following the public comments, Ms. Schwab wrapped up her presentation noting that The Resilient Watertown website is being updated and will be interactive, with drop down menus, blog posts, status bars to see progress, etc. Also, Councilors Palomba, Bays and Airasian agreed that while the C&E Plan continues to be implemented it is critical to keep the public informed on what can be expected and when, so that all groups can participate and add input as more actions/ordinances evolve.

Committee and others identified some next steps including:

- inclusion of the C&E Plan's action steps into the FY 24 budget
- possible request for ARPA funds to facilitate the implementation of key actions
- expanded public outreach
- meet again in six months for another update
- preparation of a chart that plots the progress of the 22 items already begun and the 10 items to be initiated.

Councilor Bays made a motion to adjourn, second by Councilor Airasian. Motion passed 3-0 in favor. Meeting was adjourned at 7:04 PM.

All the specific items discussed are on the attached presentation.
Minutes were prepared by Councilor Airasian.