

2017-05-08

Climate and Environment Working Group Meeting 1

Meeting notes

Committee Attendees

Max Cohen, Jules Williams, Abigail Regitsky, Joanne Scheuble, Emily Myron, Cynthia Hibbard, Henrietta Davis, Steven Nutter, Julianne Sammut, Henry Vandermark, Maggie Booz, Sophia Emperador, Christopher Nielson, Juliet Stone, Julie Newman

Staff / Consultant Present

Staff: Susanne Rasmussen, Wendell Joseph, Seth Federspiel

Utile: John McCartin

BuroHappold: Chris Rhie, Ariella Maron, Rebecca Slocum

Committee Members Absent

Mike Nakagawa, Zayneb Magavi, Claire Santoro,

Three members of the public present.

Meeting overview

Wendell Joseph introduced the consultants, committee members, and the committee process. Chris Rhie reviewed existing conditions. Ariella Maron facilitated a discussion on the draft goals with committee, city staff, and consultants.

Committee Discussion

- Committee members were curious about the ultimate destination of trash and organic waste collected by the City. Trash is sent to a landfill north of the city. [Clarification: The City has a trash disposal contract with Republic Services transfer station in Roxbury, MA; Republic reports that about 60% of the trash goes to Turnkey landfill in Rochester, NH and 40% goes to incinerators (Wheelabrator in Saugus, MA, SEMASS in Rochester, MA and Covanta in Haverhill, MA)]. Organic waste is taken to Rocky Hill Farm in Saugus, MA, and finished compost is available for use by Cambridge residents. The City is also looking into using food waste for energy production via anaerobic digestion.
- Committee members asked about the measure of transportation emissions. Staff clarified Cambridge uses VMT in Cambridge, in order to be measure the impact of local actions. For some variables, the city uses proxies.
- Committee members asked about the meaning of “Energy Industries” in the GHG Emissions Inventory charts. Staff clarified that this refers to district energy systems at MIT, Harvard, and Biogen [Correction: it does not include Veolia].
- Committee members noted 65% of all Cambridge’s emissions did not arise from residential uses.
- Committee members were curious about environmental projections: do they assume the same energy consumption over time? Staff clarified they make some assumptions about building energy use.

- Committee members noted the presentation's lack of information on environmental justice (EJ). They would like to know who is affected by existing and projected conditions. City is currently looking at the EJ impacts of street trees but it hasn't undertaken a full inventory.

Goals Discussion

- Committee members would like to expand the role of Environmental Justice in the goals.
- Committee members would like more consideration of the hierarchy and overlaps between goals.
- Committee members would also like more explicit consideration of civic engagement and transparency, the relationship between people and wildlife, the relationship between people and infrastructure, and the link between environment and health.
- Committee members asked where environmental literacy and urban land use will be addressed in the goals and the overall process.
- Committee members seemed to agree that the goals differed in terms of scale. Additionally there was a desire to be very clear on what is or is not a goal, while acknowledging that all of the content presented was important to address somewhere in the goals-strategies pyramid.

Goal 1: Environmental Protection

- Committee members expressed that environmental protection is perhaps more a mission statement that touched on each goal. This led to a broader discussion of hierarchy. Some suggested visualizing the relationship between these goals and these broader topics as a matrix.
- Committee members suggested that environmental protection could also include protection of people *from* the environment (i.e. disasters), relating it to resilience (addressed in Goal 3)
- Committee members suggested it is not just about protection, but also *remediation*
- Committee members asked to add light, noise, and open space to the list in the goal

Goal 2: Carbon Neutrality by 2050

- Committee members noted the existing goals only discuss operational carbon, and not embodied carbon.
- The committee asked if the existing targets are across the board or vary by sector. Existing targets are community wide, but vary in their trajectories
- Committee members asked to frame the given specific targets in the wider emissions context.
- Committee members asked about targets that have approaching deadlines. City staff noted the emissions reduction target is science-based and necessary. The solar goals were developed and approved by the Net Zero Task Force to support the emissions reduction target. They noted the broader purpose of targets is a matter of debate (setting science-based but aspirational targets vs. achievable but potentially inadequate targets).
- Committee members suggested the City could reframe the carbon problem as a carbon resource, perhaps inviting more innovative solutions.
- Committee members noted that net zero is not just about building systems, but also user behaviors that complement those systems.
- Committee members sought to emphasize not just efficiency, but absolute reductions in emissions (and reductions in consumption).
- Committee members suggested honing the definition of neutrality, as it often means purchasing offsets rather than limiting local emissions.

Goal 3: Resilience

- Consultants noted current goal is drawn from parallel process: the Climate Change Preparedness and Resilience Plan.
- Committee members suggested this goal would be more helpful if it explicitly addressed vulnerable populations, habitat, wildlife, and infrastructure resilience.
- Committee members noted that any City is limited in its capacity for action, and true resilience must grow through empowerment of the population and suggested specifically addressing preparedness.
- Committee members asked about role of adaptation and mitigation.

Goal 4: Clean Energy Economy

- Committee members suggested this tied into broader economic goals, that a clean energy economy included a job for everyone.
- Consultant team noted it is also an easier path for engagement with the community. Committee members suggested such an economy would increase environmental literacy.
- Committee members suggested that “catalyze the market...” belongs first in this goal.
- Committee members noted it could also be broader, to account for costs and fiscal impacts and ensure economic viability.
- Committee members noted it could be reframed as an “environmentally sensitive economy”

Goal 5: Integrated Stormwater Management

- The committee disagreed about whether stormwater management rises to the level of a goal. Some saw it as a means to broader goals, while other saw it as a large enough task that it deserved an independent goal.
- Committee members suggested that the goal incorporate the water cycle more holistically, and include focuses on water use reduction at the local and regional scale.
- Committee member asked the goal to be less about management, and more quality and quantity.
- Committee members suggested this is a goal that could incorporate a broader focus on green infrastructure throughout the city (cross-cutting with goal 6).

Goal 5: Tree Canopy

- Committee members suggested that this goal incorporate open space, stormwater, etc. It could be also strategy falling under several goals. Committee members disagreed on this point. Some suggested the canopy’s impact on health and community character meant it deserves its own goal.
- Committee members suggested that trees are also recognizable and understandable by the public at large. They are important for creating an environmental coalition.
- Committee members also noted support for trees is not universal, especially outside Cambridge and in the past. Trees’ need for support should not be discounted.
- Committee members asked the notion of habitat to include corridors.
- Committee members noted canopy must address new ecologies resulting from climate change.

Goal 7: Zero Waste

- Committee members noted that there are big holes in current waste programs, that Cambridge no longer leads the way in its waste programs, and suggested this remain a goal.
- Committee members were curious if the City’s goals would be defined as 90% diversion from landfills (as is standard) or 100% diversion.
- Committee members noted construction and demolition wastes must also be accounted for.

- Committee members asked to emphasize the goal of a circular system, sustainable consumption, and to connect waste to energy consumption and as a potential source of energy generation.

Goal 8: Environmental Justice

- Consultants and city staff noted the difficulty in measuring and setting goals for EJ. Committee members suggested modeling goal after forthcoming UN EJ goals.
- Committee members suggested adding “meaningfully engaged” to the goal. Communities should not just benefit from EJ, but should be at the table. Environmental literacy should be promoted.
- Committee members saw two valuable approaches to addressing EJ—either as a component of each goal or as a standalone goal—and did not decide on a single approach.
- Committee members noted it could be most useful as a check on strategies, to ensure they account for who is impacted by each strategy.

Public comments

- The public submitted comments including concerns for worker protection as an EJ issue, unexpected consequences of local policies (e.g., the use of leaf blowers), the design of municipal buildings, the environmental cost of demolition, and the role of policies to promote non-permeable materials.
- Is there a place where comments can be sent? Working on launching engagement platform. But can also email mpeters@cambridgema.gov or wjoseph@cambridgema.gov

Additional comments from absentee members

- One member pointed out the difficulty in measuring and operationalizing “environmental protection” in Goal 1. Similarly they wanted to further define “resilience from climate change impacts” in Goal 3.
- They asked for a clarification of the role of energy storage in Goal 4, and the role of low-impact green infrastructure in Goal 5.
- They requested further information to act on Goal 7 and specific examples in Goal 8.