

2018-05-22

Climate & Environment Working Group #6

Committee Attendees

Maxwell Cohen, Cynthia Hibbard, Zeyneb Magavi, Mike Nakagawa, Julie Newman, Christopher Nielson, Abigail Regitsky, Julianne Sammut, Joanne Scheuble, Juliet Stone, Henry Vandermark

Staff / Consultant Present

Staff: Susanne Rasmussen, Melissa Peters, Seth Federspiel, Wendell Joseph

Committee Members Absent

Maggie Booz, Henrietta Davis, Sophia Emperador, Emily Myron, Steven Nutter, Claire Santoro, Matt Wallace, Jules Williams

Meeting Overview

This was the final meeting of the Climate & Environment Working Group to review the draft implementation plan identifying near-, medium-, and long-term climate & environment actions.

Committee Discussion

General comment

A working group member suggested we identify actions that conflict with each other or work well together.

Strategy: Develop preparedness and resilience plans at the neighborhood and citywide levels

- A working group member proposed revising the action, *serve low-income/high-vulnerability neighborhoods and public housing residents with targeted preparedness and outreach programs*, from “neighborhoods” to “individuals”.

Strategy: Incorporate design strategies and best practices that reduce climate change impacts as part of public and private projects

- Action: *Establish a cool roof requirement for new construction in all zoning districts.*
 - A working group member asked if this action was like solar-ready, cool roofs.
 - This action is about white roofs and green roofs. Solar-ready is happening on a different track under the Net Zero Action Plan, and includes the possibility for on-site solar generation.
- Action: *Study regulatory barriers and identify potential leverage points and sources of incentives for adaptive retrofits for existing buildings (utility placement, floodable ground floors, etc.).*
 - A working group member asked if this would depend on where it’s located in the City. Some areas may be more urgent than others.
 - This is a citywide approach that would incorporate different “triggers” that would allow these incentives and retrofit efforts to happen.

Strategy: Educate the community about climate change vulnerabilities which can be mitigated by private property owners

- Action: *Work with neighborhood groups, especially those that offer services, to develop disaster preparedness plans.*
 - A working group member asked if we are including tornadoes in disaster plans. Tornadoes are less predictable and random, as opposed to flooding, which can be projected.

- The disaster preparedness plan should include any possible natural disaster, which includes tornadoes. Also, the City has a [Flood Viewer](#) to help residents understand the risk of flooding to their property and how to protect against it.

Strategy: Communicate the City's climate and environment initiatives to the community

- Action: *Establish a coordinated outreach and engagement approach regarding environmental programs and issues*
 - A working group member asked if it would include volunteer opportunities.
 - Yes, volunteers could be part of this coordinated approach to outreach and engagement.

Strategy: Expand the city's tree canopy and promote native plantings and biodiversity

- Action: *Expand tree planting programs.*
 - A working group member asked if this includes hiring more staff. The City currently has only one arborist.
 - DPW is working on the Urban Forest Master Plan with the goal of taking actions that will lead to expansion of tree plantings. This may or may not involve hiring more arborists.
 - A working group member asked about utilities. Sometimes utilities cut trees that may or may not interfere with wires.
 - The degree to which we can control the professionalism of the utility companies is limited.
 - A working group member asked about the process to protect large trees.
 - There are requirements for new development to replace trees that have been cut down.
 - A working group member noted that some states have protections for trees of a certain size and asked if Cambridge has such protections.
 - There will be a hearing on the "tree ordinance" on June 21st.
 - A working group member asked what exactly does "expand" mean. Does it mean more trees? Programs?
 - The idea is to expand the canopy, which is distinct from expanding the sheer number of trees.
 - Working group members noted that the most critical thing is heat impact, especially as it pertains to climate change.
 - Members noted that we need to more effectively water trees and ensure their longevity.
 - A working group member asked if we could rewrite the action to say, "implement the recommendations of the Urban Forest Master Plan." Or maybe add some language around expanding their lifespan? Protection?
 - Members asked about increased education on the value of trees, as well as incentives for taking care of them.
 - A working group member asked if the Urban Forest Master Plan would include recommendations or requirements for private property?
 - Yes, the Urban Forest Master Plan is expected to address private property.

Strategy: Preserve and expand green and open spaces, and enhance access to parks

- Action: *Purchase additional land reserved to be used as open space.*
 - A working group member noted that it's not just about opportunities, but setting aside money to be ready for when the opportunities come up.
 - A working group member asked about the connectivity of open space. This seems to be missing here.

- Envision proposed recommendation on improving the open space network. Specific actions are identified in the Urban Form focus area.
- Staff noted that a lot of the city's newer parks and open spaces have been built due to new development.
- A working group member suggested revising the action to say, "*prioritize the purchase or selection of land to connect to existing open space*", or "*acquire additional land in connection with development to be set aside for open space*".
- A working group member noted that one of the indicators we looked at was public space within walking distance, and asked if we can identify places in the city where it would make sense to make it a priority.

Strategy: Reduce building energy consumption

- Action: *Offer a density bonus incentive through zoning for net zero projects.*
 - A working group member noted that this action is competing with the desire to offer density bonuses for housing but is critical to achieve net zero projects.
 - A working group member asked if Cambridge has a goal for population and jobs.
 - The City has projections, but part of the purpose of Envision Cambridge is to answer the questions of "how much growth", "where to grow", and "what should growth look like."
 - A working group member asked if net zero include off-site production or virtual net metering. If so, then the incentives should be more towards the efficiency side?
 - TBD. The City does not have the ability to tell developers what their energy efficiency standards should be. We do what we can through the City's Green Building Ordinance, but we cannot mandate specific energy requirements as it would preempt the State's Building Code.

Strategy: Transition away from fossil fuels

- Action: *Address regulatory barriers to energy storage by participating in statewide working groups to develop safety and performance codes and standards for energy storage systems, adopting safety and performance codes and standards as they develop for safe deployment of energy storage, and establishing demonstration projects for safety of energy storage systems.*
 - A member noted that Massachusetts has an energy storage mandate and the best place to put them tends to be dense, urban spaces. They asked if the city has reached out to Eversource to do a project like this in Cambridge.
 - The City has a grant from the state to do energy storage at the water treatment plant. Everything is in place, but we are waiting for the State to sign off on it.
 - A working group member suggested changing the verb to "analyze" rather than "address."
 - The action is about participating in statewide working groups, so we looking to address the problem.
- Action: *Establish a solar or green roof requirement for new construction.*
 - A member noted that as we create new buildings and take up space for plants, we are taking away space for green infrastructure which could address the heating concerns.
- Action: *Require EV charging infrastructure in new buildings.*
 - A working group member asked if there is a study about EV infrastructure.
 - The City has received funding to conduct an assessment to establish specific requirements for this.

Strategy: Reduce landfilled waste and divert recyclable and organic waste

- Action: *Study the feasibility of different programs to incentivize trash reduction that does not have a disparate impact on low-income communities*

- A working group member asked if there was a requirement for recycling in commercial and institutional buildings?
 - The city confirmed it is a requirement.
- A member asked if there are any incentives for those who deliver or create waste? For example, Amazon delivering less cardboard to your house.
 - Yes, it's called "extended consumer responsibility". We are looking to expand our Climate Action Plan to address this issue so that packaging is accounted for (how it's created and how it goes back to the producer/manufacturer).

Strategy: Remediate hazardous waste

- Action: *Monitor hazardous waste reporting and remediation*
 - A member asked what the city is doing about lead in soil?
 - The city no longer runs a lead safe program, but still does education.
- A member suggested we create an action focusing on off-gassing and heat from rubberized surfaces (crumb rubber infill but, especially, rubberized safety surfacing in playgrounds).

Actions Considered but Not Recommended

- *Work with major institutions and employers to have each commit to GHG emissions reductions via the Community Compact.*
 - The Compact has a 3-year workplan developed jointly by members. All are working to reduce GHG emissions and many have specific targets. It didn't seem appropriate for Envision Cambridge to dictate what a membership organization ought to do.
- *Renovate and expand the DPW facility as a Resource Recovery Center*
 - DPW is exploring other opportunities for waste exchange, given the uncertainties regarding the long-term location of the DPW facility.
- *Administer an annual bird count with community volunteers*
 - This would be better implemented by an environmental nonprofit organization. The City has not yet reached out to nonprofit organizations regarding this.
- *Institute competitions in which participants bid to test new building technologies in Cambridge municipal buildings.*
 - There are concerns about introducing untested, new building technologies in City facilities, especially where are existing issues that must be addressed.
- *Provide reusable shopping bags, water bottles, mugs, etc. in exchange for a pledge to use them.*
 - The City already distributes shopping bags, water bottles, etc. at outreach events. Adding a pledge is expected to have very low impact.
- *Study the feasibility of implementing a stormwater fee, where property owners are charged based on impervious surface area and collected revenue is directed to green infrastructure (stormwater utility)*
 - Anticipated revenues are not matched with regulatory and administrative burden of creating fee structure
- *Quantify carbon sequestration potential of the City's tree canopy/ground cover*
 - Canopy sequestration potential is already being assessed, but not possible to include ground cover
- *Ban pesticide sales through passage of an ordinance.*
 - The control of pesticide sales is more appropriately handled on a state level. A Cambridge ordinance would impact the few small hardware stores, but would do little to change the overall use of pesticides.
- *Develop a native plantings ordinance, requiring a portion of private open space groundcover to be reserved for native plantings.*
 - Native tree species and recommended species that will thrive in changing environmental conditions will be evaluated as part of the Urban Forestry Master Plan.

- *Develop an action plan to enhance habitat for local fauna on public and private properties in Cambridge*
 - This is already a management priority for the Fresh Pond Reservation, and the applicability in other more developed areas of the city are unknown.
- *Institute consumer-facing food waste reduction campaigns, including ugly produce, small plates, trayless dining, food waste app*
 - The city already does extensive outreach and education around waste reduction.