

Select Board Climate Action Committee Minutes

February 22, 2021, 6 pm.

Meeting held remotely on Zoom due to COVID-19

SBCAC Members (in attendance noted by Y/N)

Nancy Heller, Co-Chair	Y	James Carr	N	Alan Leviton	Y	Kathleen Scanlon	Y
Werner Lohe, Co-Chair	Y	David Gladstone	N	David Pearlman	Y	Don Weitzman	Y
Dan Bennett	N	Dr. Swannie Jett	N	Linda Olson Pehlke	Y*	(vacancy)	~
Michael Berger	Y	David Lescohier	N	Deborah Rivers	Y		

*Linda Olson Pehlke left early as noted below.

Staff: Kara Brewton

Guests in attendance included: Andy Martineau, Clint Richmond, Diane Sokal, John Harris, Maiyim Baron, Olivia Fischer Fox, Roslyn Feldberg, Lisa Cunningham

Materials provided ahead of time: January 25, 2021 draft meeting minutes

Materials presented: “HEET GeoMicro Grid Pilots”, 2/25/2021, A. Schulman, HEET; “Single-Use Plastics”, 2/25/2021, C. Richmond

After making sure that Committee members could fully participate in the remote meeting, Werner Lohe opened the meeting.

HEET presentation

Nancy Heller welcomed Audrey Schulman and gave an overview of the regional efforts that are underway related to combatting gas leaks, including the Gas Leaks Allies, which now has 25 organizational members; HEET has been leading these conversations.

Audrey Schulman presented a summary of how geo micro grids could work in Massachusetts, especially in medium density mixed use areas. Converting from gas to geo micro grids could allow gas utility companies to convert their mission from building and maintaining a natural gas system to building and maintaining a connected system of geothermal wells (aka ground source heat pumps) for heating and cooling needs. HEET’s research indicates that in addition to 60% less building emissions, these microdistricts can result in lower energy bills. Additionally, these systems are safer than gas systems and are able to attenuate peak demand spikes in electricity use.

Utility companies are not required to administer a micro grid; they can be privately constructed and maintained such as some universities and the recently approved Merrimack Valley pilot program.

The Department of Public Utilities (DPU) has approved a pilot program with Eversource (service area does not include Brookline), and National Grid has submitted an application with DPU to do a pilot program in the region they serve including Brookline. The National Grid proposal would pay for heat pumps and customers' monthly bills would be set for 2 years as follows: residential - \$150, low income residential - \$112, and commercial - \$225. Audrey also noted that customers would need to pay for all other new appliances needed to replace gas appliances.

[However, following the meeting, Audrey amended this information – National Grid's proposal DOES include providing replacement appliances and will pay up to \$5,000 per unit for efficiency and retrofits.]

Audrey invited people to comment on National Grid's application, known as "DPU 21-24."

If approved, National Grid will be looking for potential pilot sites. Audrey invited everyone to email her ideas for a site at info@HEET.org. Factors that will be desirable include:

- Environmental Justice designated areas or serving low-income populations
- Communities prone to existing gas leaks
- Combination of residential and commercial or institutional sources
- Ideally around 100 households
- Willingness for the property owners to pay a flat monthly bill (one for residential; one for commercial) rather than a variable bill based on metering at each demand source

[Linda Olson Pehlke had to leave for another meeting.]

Minutes

The SBCAC VOTED by roll call vote to approve the 1/25/2021 meeting minutes (in favor: NH, WL, MB, AL, KS, DR, DP; abstained: DW).

Anticipated Warrant Articles

Clint Richmond summarized a warrant article regarding single-use plastics in products, which the Solid Waste Advisory Committee may file in the Spring or combined with a warrant article related to prohibiting PFAS (Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) in the Fall. In summary, the single-use plastics article would ban the following products: plastic ear swabs, single-use floss picks with plastic handles, microbeads (including nylon, polypropylene, polystyrene, acrylic & polyethylene terephthalate PET) or plastic glitter in over-the-counter cosmetic or health and beauty aid products, plastic wet wipes (other than used for medical applications), plastic balloon sticks, plastic alcoholic beverage bottles that are 100 ml or less in volume ("nips"). In response to questions about how this article would impact the climate, Clint noted that these products are linked to fossil fuel development. Alan Leviton also suggested that in future presentations, Clint not include a statement about benzene rings or styrene as being carcinogenic – that polyester may not be toxic due to containing a benzene ring – it depends on the application. Michael

Berger noted that benzene rings do accumulate toxins in organisms, and that's the characteristic that can be very dangerous. Deborah Rivers also thought building insulation would be an important product to talk about in the future, and will follow up with Clint separately.

Other warrant articles that Committee members were aware that might be filed, included: a climate emergency declaration, a broad article that would require fossil fuel free construction for any special permit, and a proposal to discount building fees to encourage fossil fuel free construction, and possibly leaf blowers. Kathleen noted that she will be filing a warrant article that would require fossil fuel free construction in order to utilize the zoning incentives of the Emerald Isle Special Overlay District (the properties between Brookline Avenue and River Road); her proposal is to exclude the hotel site to not create any barriers to the finance or refinancing of that property, but she is waiting for Town Counsel review. She also noted that she will need to conduct some property owner outreach, and will do that following Town Counsel review.

Staff & Committee Member Updates

Kara Brewton updated the Committee that no decision had been made with regards to the Assistant Director for Sustainability. She thanked Committee members for the outreach efforts they were making recently, as there was a recent bump of applications. Unfortunately many applicants to date are not meeting the minimum requirement of experience and/or did not have any policy or public process experience. A round of three hopeful interviews was wrapping up this week.

Nancy Heller noted that the online gas leak map that's been talked about for three years is anticipated to be released soon.

Werner Lohe noted that the Driscoll School, although it will be all-electric, is not going to spend the up front capital cost to install geothermal wells.

Don Weitzman shared that, although a bit tangential, he is excited about learning more about Somerville's process they took when rewriting the entire zoning bylaw.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:30 p.m.