

Town of Brookline

Select Board's Climate Action Committee (SBCAC)

April 27, 2020 Meeting Minutes – held remotely via WebEx platform

Committee Members present: Nancy Heller (co-chair), Werner Lohe (co-chair), Daniel Bennett, James Carr, David Lescohier, Alan Leviton, David Pearlman, Linda Olson Pehlke, Deborah Rivers, Kathleen Scanlon, and Don Weitzman

Committee Members not present: Michael Berger, David Gladstone, Dr. Swannie Jett

Staff: Kara Brewton, Linda Hickey

Public: Guest speaker - Megan Aki, Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)

Materials: Agenda for 4/27/2020 meeting; draft meeting minutes from 2/24/2020; powerpoint presentation by Megan Aki, "Decarbonizing Existing Buildings: Available Incentives & Financing"

Nancy Heller opened the meeting and by roll call vote ensured that all participating Committee members could listen and hear appropriately. Other than one member that also joined by phone for a better audio connection, no other callers joined the meeting.

February 24, 2020 Meeting Minutes – approved, with the following abstentions: David Lescohier, Dan Bennett, Linda Olson Pehlke

MAPC presentation on financial incentives for existing buildings to improve energy efficiency

Megan Aki, Clean Energy Analyst from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council presented information about the Mass Save program, the HeatSmart program, and the Mass Development Pace Program. Many Committee members were familiar with Mass Save & HeatSmart, so Megan gave two quick updates: (i) there are new Mass Save incentives available for heat pumps and mini-splits; and (ii) HeatSmart is now able to conduct virtual assessments during this time – they anticipate another round of marketing funding for municipalities to be open mid-2020.

Most of the discussion with Megan was about MassDevelopment's PACE program. The concept of the PACE program is that financing for clean energy projects could run with the property rather than the current owner, similar to a betterment. MassDevelopment is the sponsoring finance agency. Participating municipalities are asked to reach out to property owners and collect PACE-related assessments on the property. The benefit is that the current owner of a building does not have to pay any out-of-pocket costs, and can make fixed payments over a 20-year period. Hopefully this program will incentive some property owners to make energy savings improvements earlier than they otherwise would through traditional financing mechanisms.

Meanwhile, the net energy savings realized due to the immediate improvements will continue to increase over time.

This program will be open to commercial properties and residential properties with five or more units. There was some discussion about whether and how this program would work for condo buildings, and how bills would be split between any common areas and individual condo tax bills. Also, Committee members wondered whether apartment building owners that pass electricity/heating bills onto residents would be incentivized to use this program.

Megan will get clarification on whether condominium buildings are eligible, and noted that MassDevelopment was still drafting guidance documents and finalizing guidelines, including any caps on amounts that can be borrowed, whether there are any municipal application fees, etc. Megan clarified that PACE financing would be available for new construction as well as existing buildings.

Committee members also wanted to know from our Tax Assessor how this program might positively or negatively affect property tax receipts – generally or impacts to other taxpayers. Megan added that PACE financing is subordinate to property tax receipts.

MassDevelopment has not yet announced when financing for lending will be available. However, municipalities are still able to “opt in” to the program with a vote by the Select Board. Megan will help us connect with the right contact at MassDevelopment to better understand the details of the Town’s liabilities and expected workload if were to do so. More than a dozen Massachusetts municipalities have already opted in, including Lexington, Amesbury, Acton, North Adams, Northampton, and Fall River. Megan believed, but will confirm, that only a vote by the Select Board is required for communities to opt in.

The Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (DOER) is the technical partner for this program, and will review projects. They are also assisting MassDevelopment in developing technical guidelines. MassDevelopment is willing to assist participating municipalities with Information Technology needs.

[At this point in the meeting, David Pearlman joined and Linda Olson Pehlke left for another meeting.]

Megan confirmed that a municipality can opt in without any specific potential property ready to utilize the financing mechanism.

With regards to incentivizing property owners to make buildings more efficient, Megan believed that there was some level of interest at the state level to require energy scorecards for leases and property sales, but she was not aware of any local action that had required this.

After further discussion, the Committee agreed that Alan Leviton would follow up with MassDevelopment & DOER to get more specific information and update the Committee at a future meeting. Nancy Heller also noted that the Small Business Development Committee may be interested once more information is gathered.

Looping back to the Heat Smart program, Megan believed that the first couple rounds were a couple communities each year (two in 2020). Meg Howard at the Clean Energy Center is the contact for this program once applications open up again.

Working Team & Staff Updates

1) Brookline Green Electricity Working Team:

Kara reviewed changes that GoodEnergy had made to the Town's electricity aggregation program, including more immediate access to data, easier forms for people to Opt Up, and immediate email confirmation once customers had opted up.

Committee members noted that it would be easier for customers to verify which product they had signed up for if the Eversource bill could include the product selection next to the name of the supplier. Kara Brewton did not think the Department of Public Utilities would be willing to require this from Eversource, but would double-check with Good Energy. Customers can check by looking at their electricity supply rate and comparing that to information posted on the town website (brooklinegreen.com)

One committee member also reported that although they signed up for the 100% green product, they did not automatically receive tax deduction information. They will email Kara specific information about how long they waited before directly contacting Green Energy Consumers Alliance, as well as their current bill so this issue can be double-checked.

2) Solar Panels on Municipal Buildings – Kara gave a brief update, noting that Town Counsel and Solec were on a call weekly, fine-tuning contract language.

3) Next Committee Meeting Agenda – After further discussion about the various municipal sustainability standards discussed in February, the Committee generally agreed that this subject was likely to best be dealt with once a new staff person is in place. Kara Brewton noted that the consultants conducting the study for the sustainability staff had started interviews, and were waiting for some staff to respond with availability with one-on-one conversations.

The Committee agreed that right now, working on the PACE initiative would be the most efficient use of the Committee's focus. Alan Leviton will see if MassDevelopment and perhaps DOER could follow up with Q&A at the Committee's next meeting.

4) Private Buildings Working Team – Werner Lohe will coordinate with Diane Sokal, as they may also be interested in working on the PACE initiative and could with Alan work out a meeting agenda for the next meeting. In the meantime, Kara Brewton noted that the Attorney General had asked for a 180-day extension (end of May) in reviewing the Town's fossil fuel-free warrant article.

5) Other Committee member updates:

Alan Leviton reported that he had replaced his condensing electric clothes dryer with a heat pump electric dryer – and his electricity consumption electric bill has gone down 18% from \$95/mo to \$70-75/mo from a year ago, most of which is attributable to the new clothes dryer.

James Carr wondered whether any climate scientists had yet published data on the effect of the COVID-related shut-down – specifically, whether the Earth’s global temperature had moved at all. Others noted newspaper stories about reduced air pollution. James noted that he wondered whether such data could be used to prove out any climate modeling; Nancy suggested perhaps the Union of Concerned Scientists could be a resource.

Don Weitzman wondered whether the impacts of COVID would affect Town budgets, and whether that would affect positively or negatively on any sustainability or climate action efforts. Werner Lohe noted that it was the Committee’s role to remind people that the reason we have this pandemic is because people didn’t plan ahead.

6) Driscoll & Pierce School Updates

Building Commissioner Dan Bennett noted that the designs for the Driscoll School were moving forward. There was a sustainability update last week that some Committee members participated in. The design team is moving forward with geothermal well testing and representatives were in front of the Select Board last week to get permission to do testing over a 48 hour period. This work may be done in later May. He also noted that the planned solar panels would generate approximately 25% of the building’s overall energy use. The Planning Board is holding a design review meeting on May 21st, and then it will go to the Zoning Board of Appeals.

The Massachusetts School ~~Board Association~~ Building Authority accepted the Pierce School as a partnered project in mid-April. The Town is looking to hire an Owner’s Project Manager (OPM), which is a process that is very proscriptively set through, and with, the MSBA. Once an OPM is in place, they will seek a design team or architect to begin feasibility studies in early 2021.

Dan added that both schools’ funding was tied to the commitment of a fossil fuel free school.

In response to a question by David Leschier, Dan noted that the 50% design update is scheduled for May 15th for the Driscoll School. Life cycle costs will be looked at after the geowell testing is complete.

7) Town Meeting – The only environmental-related warrant article for the Annual Town Meeting would be the set of articles regarding the former Newbury College/ Welltower redevelopment. Nancy noted that Welltower has already committed to construction fossil fuel free buildings. The Advisory Subcommittee will be hearing the related warrant articles on Advisory subcommittee hearing it Wednesday the 29th.

Due to the timing of Memorial Day weekend, the Committee agreed to hold the next meeting on June 1st. Through unanimous roll call vote, the meeting was adjourned.

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