Town of Brookline

Select Board’s Climate Action Committee (SBCAC)

October 28, 2019 Meeting Minutes

Attendees: Nancy Heller (co-chair), Werner Lohe (co-chair), David Lescohier, James Carr, Alan Leviton, Deborah Rivers, Don Weitzman, Kathleen Scanlon, Swannie Jett, and David Pearlman

Staff: Kara Brewton

Public: Tom Kilday and John VanScoyoc

Minutes of the September 23, 2019 Meeting

Minutes of September 23, 2019 were reviewed and approved.

Other business

Werner suggested that as a precursor to discussing the future role of the Select Board’s Climate Action Committee (SBCAC), the Committee members could first update each other about things going on in Town, including working teams and how various warrant articles are progressing this Town Meeting season.

Working Team Updates, as reported by SBCAC members

Education & Communications Working Team

- The contest for the new sustainability logo is underway

Public Buildings Working Team

- Two members of the Team went to the first Pierce School Building Committee meeting
- Has not been that active recently, but individuals have been asked to help work on Warrant Article 21

Non-Public Buildings Working Team

- Prioritized the summer and fall to focus on WA 21, which many on the CAC noted was moving along well.
- Alan Leviton noted that following Town Meeting, he would like the group to focus on programs/initiatives that could help existing buildings
become more energy efficient as well as convert heating systems over to all-electric.

**Green Space + Working Team**

- Will likely meet following Town Meeting; Arlene Mattison of the Greenspace Alliance is also very interested in this group starting up.
- Kara Brewton also added that Erin Gallentine, the Director of Parks & Recreation, is submitting a Municipal Vulnerability Program grant to assist with the Town’s upcoming Urban Forestry Master Plan.

**General Notes on Working Teams:** Deborah Rivers wondered whether the number of warrant articles was too many, and she didn’t know what the answer was – since she recognized that warrant articles are often citizen-petitioned, but thought that the number of **working teams could be reduced.** Many noted that Zoe Lynn was working too much. Later in the meeting, Nancy Heller asked whether there was consensus that there were too many working teams, but there was not a response. Deborah Rivers asked that the working team model be discussed further at a future meeting; she wanted to figure out how they could not spend so much time on warrant articles being filed, and how to keep the working teams limited to knowledgeable citizens. She wants to figure out a symbiotic relationship between the SBCAC and the efforts of the working teams, so that they are more braided together.

**Warrant Article review process**

**Sustainability Subcommittee at Advisory**

Werner Lohe reported that Advisory will be starting a Sustainability Subcommittee, which will presumably develop some expertise and be a little more focused. David Lescohier added that the membership will include Amy Hummel, Claire Stampfer, and Carlos Rídrujo, and one more person to be determined. This idea came out of Advisory’s desire to have a better understanding of Climate initiatives as a whole, wanting to better understand the financial risks, the Town’s ability to confront sustainability, etc. Nancy Heller noted that a third of the Warrant Articles this fall are related to sustainability, and that this Subcommittee would likely relieve other Subcommittees like Planning & Regulation. James Carr added that the Planning Board has also been taking up and discussing many of the sustainability articles.

**Warrant Article Best Practices**

- Dr. Swannie Jett asked how the warrant articles were being vetted for **financial impacts.** Nancy Heller agreed that was a concern – with regards to some citizen-
petition warrant articles being filed prior to being fully vetted. She thought that WA 21 was a good example of being vetted prior to the filing deadline. Later in the discussion, several SBCAC members noted that this was Advisory Committee’s role, and that the SBCAC should be focused on the impacts to *greenhouse gases and climate resiliency issues*.

- Alan Leviton noted it was the first time he had worked on a warrant article, and it had taken significant volunteer time. He recently went to a City of Cambridge meeting, and noted that a City model was very different – but that there was several staff available to the group to do significant research and report on the policy impacts of various ideas presented. Alan wonders whether Brookline could use a consultant to help analyze those articles. Several SBCAC members were not sure if hiring a consultant would necessarily help:

  - Nancy Heller noted the governance structure of a Town is different (any citizen petitioned articles can move forward)
  - Nancy Heller noted that the tax structure of Cambridge allows for more resources generally than Brookline has.
  - David Lescohier added that Cambridge was a much larger community.
  - Dr. Jett noted that he has repeatedly asked for additional funding to add an Environmental Policy Analyst, to analyze evidence-based policy recommendations and to understand the fiduciary responsibility of the Town. This proposal is now being replaced with a proposal for an additional staff person to be added to be a Brookline Village liaison related to marijuana.

- Don Weitzman stated that we were in a new phase of sustainability for the Town – with 11 or more warrant articles being filed this fall. He suggested that perhaps there could be a mini-handbook of how to develop a good sustainability warrant article.

  - Deborah Rivers thought that any financial analysis should be a triple bottom line – direct financial impacts, monetizing impacts to the environment, etc. David Lescohier added as an example that the Cape Cod Consortium is able now to quantify the cost of climate change as sea level rise affects their reliance on septic systems.
  - Swannie Jett noted the advice he gives petitioners: articles should be based on evidence-based, environmental/town impact, and financial impact including the end user. This should be the criteria set forth for any warrant article proposed. However, the Town doesn’t have the staff resources to show whether any individual warrant article has the impact that it was intended to have.
o Other members noted that the guidelines could be mailed to all Town Meeting Members, and could be further developed for zoning articles in addition to climate-related articles.

o Kara Brewton stated that in addition to any guidelines, the Boards needed to be willing to say that articles needed more time for development, based on those guidelines. Nancy Heller added that in the past, many warrant articles have been referred to Committee when they weren’t ready. Other members were not sure that referring articles to various committees was particularly helpful, and also added work for volunteers and staff.

o James Carr added that just because you hire consultants or assign staff, it doesn’t mean that there will be a good quality of analysis. He therefore liked the idea of creating good checklists and guidelines. Boards could then state which warrant articles have submitted a full package, signed on to by staff. Alan Leviton agreed.

o **NEXT STEP:** Nancy Heller asked for everyone to get to her and Werner Lohe what should be on the guidelines for warrant articles in general, and at the next meeting that could be discussed further.

**Continued discussion on the future role of the SBCAC**

Don Weitzman asked that the discussion move back to the future role of the SBCAC.

- Nancy Heller thought one of SBCAC’s roles could be a **community forum** to learn more about what’s going on in the Town as a convening role. She noted that tonight we have two visitors, but usually we have more than that. James Carr thought the SBCAC could serve as an **oversight** of how things are being done in Town – they could review agendas of other Boards to **track items**, could **develop checklists**, etc. But, the SBCAC did not need to serve as “working groups” or the Committee that writes the articles; they could **review efforts** (staff, Boards, or citizens) to opine on whether the various initiatives would be successful.

- Deborah Rivers noted that she wanted the SBCAC to spend more time on **adaptation**.

- **Voting on submitted Warrant Articles**

  o David Pearlman asked whether after the warrant article deadline closes, should the SBCAC weigh in on these warrant articles as well? He noted that even for this Town Meeting season, it was not too late - Nov. 13th is the deadline for printing the Combined Reports. Kathleen Scanlon noted that it was late in the game for this Town Meeting season, and
wondered whether the SBCAC should be starting to look ahead at the next Town Meeting season to help shape future articles.

- Don Weitzman stated it was a very large struggle to hold public hearings on more than 2-3 warrant articles per meeting.
- Deborah Rivers stated that the SBCAC should vote at least on the warrant articles that are the most baked. Werner Lohe countered that the past process hasn’t always worked well. Maybe the SBCAC should focus time on “the worst” articles that are submitted, because it’s rather obvious that the SBCAC would be in favor of sustainability articles – what might be helpful to Select Board, other Boards, and Town Meeting is to point out which articles are not ready to be implemented.
- Nancy Heller stated that the focus should be based on what the potential impact is on greenhouse gas emissions. Werner Lohe agreed, and thought that maybe that’s the only lens that they could focus on. Deborah Rivers added that in addition to greenhouse gas emissions, she didn’t want to leave out climate resilience issues.

- **Creating/shaping upcoming Warrant Articles**
  - Citizen–petitioned articles. Deborah Rivers noted that the working teams were very active, but she was concerned that they included people that were not professionals in this field. Kathleen Scanlon countered that she thinks many citizens are working as fast as they can to get the Town to a 2030 climate neutrality goal because they do not feel we’re not going to make it otherwise.

- **SBCAC Membership**
  - Werner Lohe thought perhaps the number of members on the Committee was too large. James Carr added that on other Boards he serves on, he thought eight seemed about right for a kind of Board of Directors.
  - Kathleen Scanlon liked the idea of the SBCAC being a technical board to help shape new efforts each town meeting cycle. Nancy Heller and James Carr discussed whether instead of having a Committee of Committee representatives, the SBCAC could have members that have that interest (e.g., Transportation) and expertise in that topic – to raise issues at other Boards.

- Don Weitzman wondered whether the members should correlate their thoughts on suggested guidelines with thinking about a revised committee charge. James Carr added that Committee members could be deployed to other ongoing activities in the Town to discuss sustainability – for example, the Hancock
Village revised plan that came in front of the Planning Board recently did not spend much time at all about sustainability efforts generally - bicycle paths, solar canopies, etc.

Werner suggested that the SBCAC should reflect on this discussion, regroup and set one more meeting for the end of the calendar year. The SBCAC members checked their calendars and agreed the next SBCAC meeting should be on December 16th. They requested that the agenda also include an informal update from staff on all the working teams’ efforts.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 7:30 pm.