



Town of Ashland

M A S S A C H U S E T T S

ASHLAND SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, March 15, 2021

Time: 7:00pm ET

Location: Zoom Video Call

Present:

- Ashwin Ratanchandani - Chair
- Kevin Mullins - Member
- Rob Moolenbeek - Member
- Mark Moniz - Member
- Margy Gassel - Member
- Chuck Lidz - Member
- Margaret Musoke - Associate Member
- Michael Herbert - Town Manager
- Rob Scherer - Select Board
- Steven Mitchell - Select Board
- Frank Nakashian - Ashland Sustainability Coordinator
- Jillian Wilson-Martin - Natick Sustainability Coordinator
- Florence Seidell
- Cara Camerato
- Mark Dassani

Citizen Participation

None

Guest Presentation: Jillian Wilson Martin Sustainability Coordinator Natick

Jillian shared background on Natick's Net Zero plan development. Natick has been a leader in the space but also benefits from collaborating with other towns. She emphasized that we are all in this together when it comes to reaching Net Zero.

She has been working in Natick since 2014. Prior to that Natick had an environmental compliance coordinator. In 2004 they joined ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability. Natick was one of the early towns to achieve the Green Community designation. They have installed solar on all viable public buildings and are now doing solar canopies in locations like their high school. Their newest buildings are not net zero ready but they are looking at other options to

make them as sustainable as possible, including installing battery storage capacity at their middle school.

Their community also ran a very successful solarize challenge.

Shortly after that, their sustainability committee formed. That group led the initiative to pass a non-binding net zero resolution at their 2018 town meeting to achieve net zero emissions by 2050.

They have been very successful at reducing municipal energy use. Reaching a 20% reduction from their baseline. The job description for Jillian was originally municipally focused but over time, it has become clear that a majority of the changes they need to make are in the community.

Since that resolution passed they have been seeking to achieve that goal. They applied for funds from MAPC and worked with Arlington and Melrose to develop a tool to help towns measure emissions at no cost. They were the first towns to pilot to the tool and get access to the data. From that research they saw that the majority of their town's emissions were coming from residents (62%) and businesses (31%). Transportation and buildings were the areas they needed to focus on. Their goal was ambitious but feels less aspirational now that the state and federal government are aligning around the same goal.

To create their draft net zero plan, they advocated and collaborated with other committees. They held "VIP" focus groups with two members of different committees that would be most involved in the changes called for in the plan. They also conducted general community outreach via their e-Newsletter and held an online open house with a survey. The biggest outcome of the public process has been rallying the community to understand what changes are needed.

Jillian was enthusiastic about the grant which Ashland received to work with MAPC on exploring the impacts of certain actions and creating a tool for modeling the greenhouse gas reductions.

Switching to renewable energy is a key part of the Natick plan. 45% of their energy currently comes from fossil fuels. The other 55% is zero carbon. Their energy aggregation contract sources from renewables but the mix of energy on the grid also plays a part. They have a goal of reaching 100% clean energy by 2030.

Vehicle emissions data is somewhat out of date, as it was sourced from a 2014 vehicle census. (The same is true of Ashland's vehicle data.) Emissions sources for Natick vehicles include:

- 88% Resident cars
- 7% Commercial Trucks & Cars
- 2% Municipal Cars & Trucks
- .3% Buses
- 3% Railways

In Natick, 28% of homes are still heated by oil, 50% by natural gas and 21% electric. Natick is currently collaborating with Frank Nakashian and Ashland on a heat pump and solar challenge, with potential for an ongoing program to convert to heat pumps. We are also both signing on to a letter to the state on the Clean Energy Climate Plan for 2030. Rob Scherer asked about the process for signing on to this and suggested it should go to the select board for their approval.

21 major actions in their plan to transition to net zero fall into three categories:

- Changing how they get energy to source from more renewable energy
- Making homes and businesses more efficient and transitioning to electric power
- Changing how they power our vehicles
-
- Electrify Transport
- Include Net Zero planning into planning process for major projects in town

Many of the goals align with the commonwealth, such as a net zero stretch energy code which is being considered as part of the climate plan and the transportation climate initiative which includes public transit and EV charging funding. The state is also considering banning the sale of new gas powered vehicles and trucks by 2035.

Natick is hoping to lead by example by:

- Increasing the renewable content in their aggregation contract (set to increase 3% per year) and sourcing their municipal energy from renewables as well
- Adopting net zero ready standards for new buildings.
- Transitioning their fleet to zero emissions. They are currently preparing their maintenance teams with tools to make that transition easier. They currently have some EV passenger vehicles and will be adding a hybrid cruiser and bucket truck as well as a hybrid van.

Natick is considering equity in their plan but still has a ways to go in terms of outreach. They are considering how to include communities that have been impacted but have not participated in co-benefits of climate change mitigation, such as solar programs. They have one precinct which is an environmental justice community but is not well represented at town meeting, with empty seats.

The plan is considered a mandate for the work to be done in the next 5 years. They will be creating a net zero task force including a rep from each key board and committee. (Planning, school, select board etc.). It's not always obvious how climate change will impact the community but it needs to be integrated.

Regional collaboration is an area that Jillian feels is important for our towns. Our towns can have strength and safety in numbers when we work together on these types of initiatives. For example, the net zero stretch code is harder for a town to adopt on its own as developers may say they will take their business to a neighboring town. Energy disclosure is a similar issue. We can also create efficiencies where we all have the same need and want to work on something at

scale. Zoning is an area that many towns are looking at. It is complex and requires some expertise but we could share resources. Having a regional approach could benefit us when looking to do transportation initiatives which impact multiple towns. These could include things like public transportation and grid reliability or the Charles River Climate Compact.

A few near term projects for collaboration include:

- MAPC Tap Program
Natick, Ashland, Framingham and Holliston are already collaborating on a solar challenge, which Frank Nakashian has led the way on. This is a 9 month campaign but the changes we are making are long term. This effort with MAPC would be a longer term engagement to identify 3-5 installers per clean energy technology via an MAPC-led procurement. (Solar, Ground-source heat pumps, Air-source heat pumps, Insulation, Electric bikes etc.) Eventually this could grow to include paid coaches and volunteers, as well as educational materials.
- Climate Justice and Open Space. There are 36,000 residents in Environmental Justice neighborhoods in Natick, Framingham and Ashland. A majority speak English as a second language. Lack access to open space. This would be a partnership with Mass Audubon to reach out to these communities using a community liaison model. (Training volunteers and staff within the community.) The focus would be on open space and using information to inform revisions/updates to the municipalities MVP and net zero efforts.
- Charles River Climate Compact
Regional grant, Natick was the lead community applying for the grant with 15 other communities. The Massachusetts program WEMAT will begin requiring municipalities to use projected flooding instead of historical flooding data. Natick is collaborating with them on this.

The committee and guests then asked a few questions.

- Rob Scherer asked about the CEPC letter and whether this was something the Select Board would have an opportunity to weigh in on.
 - Michael Herbert said they would review the letter in a Select Board meeting.
- Rob also asked if they had considered growth projections for natural gas in their climate plans?
 - The GHG inventory is based on 2017 data, not future use but they are looking at ways to reduce reliance on natural gas. Natick has been involved in their own struggle with Eversource. She would be willing to sign on to a letter indicating their future goals to reduce emissions from fossil fuels.
- Mark Dessoni asked when the plan started in Natick.
 - It is a draft plan and hasn't actually started yet.
- Rob Moolenbeek asked whether Natick uses national wind as part of their renewable energy mix in the energy aggregation contract.
 - They do not use national wind in their plan. They only purchase class 1 renewables local to New England for their regional RECs. They use the 55%

figure because in MA 22% is from the Massachusetts clean energy standard, 13% from a requirement they set with the aggregation contract. The aggregation is only class 1 renewable. They have a proposed policy to increase the mix of renewable 3% every year until 2030. In tandem with states increases that would allow them to reach 100% "clean" electricity.

- Ash noted that it will be important to clarify and differentiate how we talk about the class 3 and class 1 RECs.
- Frank noted that when we put together our plan (which is still in draft form) we could either do 100% of wind or plus 5% with class 1 RECs. We went with the wind RECs but included an option to opt-in to a higher level of class 1 RECs.
- Rob Moolenbeek asked about their energy use disclosure policy.
 - Wellesley also has this as an action in their plan and so does Westborough. They are working to identify which businesses they might want to pilot that program with for a year or two. That could be an opportunity for regional collaboration as well.
 - Ash noted that one of the things we struggled with when creating our GHG inventory was not having visibility into what was happening currently in the town. The other large value would be in helping to make the business case.
- Michael Herbert asked if they use a particular company for their energy aggregation procurement.
 - They used Peregrine energy. They are the broker for aggregation, manage the communications and filings. They were able to handle a challenging situation with the timing of their filing very well.
- Michael asked how they handle the reporting structure for Jillian.
 - At town meeting they will be voting to change the reporting structure for her position to a director position. There are many benefits to reporting to the town administrator. She works very closely with the deputy admin in Natick. Working outside of facilities or DPW is helpful because she has more autonomy and perceived authority. People are more willing to collaborate.
- Chuck asked about how they work with other committees in town.
 - They haven't formed the net zero task force. They have presented to different boards in town. They have gotten endorsements over the last month and a half. Then they will go back to the planning board ahead of town meeting in April, sharing the feedback and any other revisions to the plan. Working on a plan but it's not a finalized plan yet. When the net zero task force is created it will include members of the committees and town staff.
- Ashwin asked about how they accounted for financial costs and impacts of the plan.
 - They did not have the resources to do this type of analysis and also knew that many things will change with the state plan that is being created (such as a prohibition on the sale of gas powered vehicles in 2035). Knowing this, they created a 5 year plan to set the town on the right path to net zero. Jillian also expects that there will be significant state and federal funding for these measures.

- Steve Mitchell appreciated their emphasis on equity, which has been a theme in his discussions with Matt Marshquist. He encouraged the committee to put an emphasis on equitable access in all of their programs.
- Chuck asked about solar panels in locations other than rooftops.
 - The West Natick commuter rail is going to be installing a solar canopy. They do have some lessons around weather which she would be willing to discuss further with us. At the new canopy they are taking some measures to prevent water dripping from the canopies onto the parking lot.
- Ashwin discussed Ashland's process for creating a Net Zero plan. We created our greenhouse gas inventory and presented on it last summer. We are now reviewing the MAPC plan and reviewing the action items which our town can take action on in the near future. We have taken four elements of the MAPC plan to begin working on. We will be promoting these but many of them require town staff or other boards to be the lead implementers.
 - Building energy use disclosure
 - Incentivize electrification for building owners
 - Partner on clean energy programs
 - Expand public charging stations
- There may be an opportunity to put out a draft plan and get feedback before we start working on these.
- Rob M. recommended borrowing components of Natick's plan. Matt indicated their high level slide which showed what they are doing currently for each item, what they will do in the near future and what they will be doing long term could be a good view to adopt.
- Matt Marshquist asked how best to collaborate with Jillian going forward on regional initiatives.
 - It would be great to work on the building energy disclosure policy. Ashland may be further along with that, perhaps a member of Natick's sustainability committee could listen in on that presentation. We could form a working group between towns, Westborough and Wellesley are also working on this.
 - It might make sense to create regional working groups on actions we are all taking and get our select boards to sign on to the initiative.
 - Jillian encouraged us to take copy any elements of their plan.
 - There are also great opportunities for regional projects:
 - MVP grant
 - MAPC proposal
 - Letters to CEPC - deadline is Monday
- Rob noted that they have been meeting new solar committee members from Framingham and Hopkinton through their collaboration on the Solar and Heat Pump challenge.
- Rob S. shared that his impression was that the committee would create a plan for Net Zero. This would provide a high level view of what the town is doing and provide rationale for what the town will be doing. He also suggested passing this at town meeting.

- Closing the discussion, Jillian expressed that the thought the towns could accomplish more faster while saving time, money and resources on developing programs. By working together we may also be able to tap into more opportunities for funding with larger regional initiatives.

Sustainability Coordinator Update

- Solar + Clean Heat Challenge
 - RFP has been posted, we notified vendors of the RFP opportunity. Receipts of visiting bid page allow us to see who has visited.
 - 8 solar vendors
 - 3 ground source vendors
 - Frank sent another reminder to vendors today
 - Jillian reached out to Metro-West Daily News, MassCEC, others for outreach
 - The MassCEC program which the solarize challenge is based on is not running this year.
 - Rob S. asked how are we able to offer lower than market rates?
 - Vendor offers \$ per watt for a solar or heat pump system and list out common cost adders
 - Frank can track if rates are lower than average
 - The vendor will be pre-qualified and also do some of the outreach for us
 - Benefit that vendors will get is a greater customer base
 - This will include Ashland, Framingham, Hopkinton, Holliston and Natick
 - Great opportunity for the town, streamlines the process for people purchasing
 - We can also take advantage of guest speakers from other towns
- Design Review Committee
 - Presented on sustainable parking lots to the Design Review Committee on 3/4/2021. Topics covered inc. natural drainage strategies, on-site EVCS, on-site solar, and community aesthetics
 - - Follow up: will be sending Design Review recommendations on these strategies
 - Also expressed interest for future conversations between Sustainability Committee/myself and Planning Board on zoning incentives for electrification & solar
- Sustainability Initiatives at Ashland High School
 - Spoke with students, AHS Principal, and Nutrition Director on student presented idea for student run community garden and on-site composting
 - Trying to identify staff who could champion it
 - Rob M willing to help, he has talked with Lisa B in the past about this
- Community Aggregation Update
 - DPU held a hearing on Ashland's amended plan
 - Colonial Power indicated DPU then needs to issue a Discovery, where they will ask questions on Plan and then issue an Order. This is an ongoing process until our "Optional Product" of Class 1 RECs can go live

- MAPC Indicated our Planning Assistance Grant to identify and quantify climate mitigation strategies will start around late May.
 - Process will start with MAPC working with Ashland and Framingham. Waiting on Framingham to have an official Sustainability Committee for this by May 2021.

Mitigation measures

- Building energy disclosure policy
 - Matt shared his research on Building Energy Disclosure policies.
 - The policy would involve large building owners submitting a report once a year on their energy use using the EPA's building portfolio tool.
 - The town would then use that data to create a building energy benchmarking report.
 - Just the act of doing benchmarking can have an impact on efficiency, as it shows building owners where they can make improvements.
 - This policy has been implemented by other cities in the state, although examples from towns are harder to come by.
 - One key question is about the size of buildings in town and how many would be included based on the threshold we set.
 - Good outreach to the building owners will be key to the program's success before and during the program.
 - Ash noted that this policy will likely be an ordinance or bylaw in the future and require assistance from the town to implement.
- Incentivizing electrification of buildings
 - Margy investigated incentives that are available for building owners to switch to electric heat.
 - Many programs have run out of funding at this time.
 - Some funding is still available from Mass Save
 - One challenge is that the web sites are not kept up to date and the info is multiple years old
 - Rob M. mentioned that a lady from CEC told them that there is a new program coming soon with heat pump rebates.
 - Many of these things will take active engagement
- Creating more EV parking
 - Frank has identified several sources of funding
 - Chuck has talked to 3 different commercial companies that do this
 - They have very different approaches
 - A building owner can buy into this and pay into it with a reasonable fee over time
 - Funding released in January for public charging, can cover 100% costs (it is important to know if this includes the cost of software, which can be a large part of the expense)
 - Eversource pays for site work
 - Mass EVP also covers business and private locations

- One site could be the commuter rail station - Rob S. is Ashland rep on MVP advisory group. The station is controlled by Kiolis. Frank will follow up with Rob on the options for the commuter rail.
- Natick station may be owned by Natick, ours is owned by the T
- Someone also noted that the lights are on all night at the station and there could be some areas for improvement

Progress updates on NetZero planning

- Chuck noted that it is hard to plan without knowing what the federal plan is.
- Ash suggested we could choose to adopt those portions of MAPC plan that make sense for Ashland. We could indicate who we think might be the board to implement each piece.
- Matt noted that the current research has the group diverging to investigate different mitigation measures but it would make sense to align around one document which could be shared with other boards and committees.
- Ash suggested it doesn't need to be a detailed plan. It could be 10 pages not 45.
- Ash - doesn't need to be a high level plan, could be 10 pages, not 45
- The plan should include some additional measures beyond the four we are focused on in the near term, building electrification as a broad category. Chuck noted that some changes, like preventing new natural gas hookups are dependent on the state for action.
- Ash asked Cara for her perspective as a new visitor to the committee. Cara told the committee she has experience in buildings and real estate. Many people when buying a new home don't know their options. She took energy auditing classes. It is hard to incentivize businesses and home-owners to incur costs. It helps to let them know that there are rebates available and show them the projected savings over time.

Approve Meeting Minutes: Minutes from March 1, 2021 approved by Committee members.

Meeting adjourned at 9:00pm ET