



Harvard Climate Initiative Committee

Meeting Minutes of February 23, 2023.

The meeting convened at 7:32 pm on Zoom.

Members: Present: Jefferson Burson, Ellen Sachs Leicher, Sharon McCarthy, Deborah O'Rourke, Christiane Turnheim, Jaye Waldron, Brian Smith, Rich Marcello

Staff Present:

Guest: Stacia Donahue, Kara Minar

1 – Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes

Deborah moved to accept the minutes of January 26, 2023. Sharon seconded the Motion. Jefferson moved to accept the minutes of February 9, 2023, with Brian seconding the Motion. Both sets of minutes were approved unanimously.

2 – Implementation Plan Update

Jefferson gave a summary of the Implementation Plan and next steps to take. He stated each Focus Area group should identify the most important action they want to implement first and that each Lead Committee needs to make sure that actions to achieve the goals are followed through. Liaisons for each Focus Area will report back to the HCIC using a status report template still to be developed.

By the April 27 HCIC meeting, each lead committee should meet with their partners to review the actions and set priorities.

Sharon asked whether the HCIC status reports should be done quarterly, to which Jefferson replied that the Committee reports annually to the Town and quarterly to the Select Board. Ellen was not sure whether the reports were to be submitted in writing, and Kara said the reporting should be done in person (or virtually) so that it could be discussed in public during the Select Board meeting.

Discussion ensued amongst the members as to how Focus Group leads can work with the other committees to set priorities and achieve climate-action goals when there are so many other priorities committees are already dealing with. Brian stated that the CAP is a living plan with long-term goals and that everything does not need to be achieved at once. Ellen stressed that

the CAP is a way of getting all the boards and committees to think about climate. Jefferson volunteered to go to some meetings of the boards and committees who are taking the lead on a particular Focus Area to explain the process and that the lead role is really more of a coordination role, not one of dictating to the other boards and committees what they must do.

3 – Events Update

Deborah stated she would lead the Q&A session to follow the screening of the “Biggest Little Farm” to be presented at Volunteers’ Hall on March 10.

Earth Day events now include 13 home sites for demonstration of alternative energy use (solar panels, ground/air source heat pumps), 9 vendors at Hildreth Elementary including those who do ground/air source heat pumps, solar, electric-powered landscaping equipment, and even the Harvard Hybrid Police Cruiser. The land steward from the Tower Hill Botanical Gardens will do a presentation.

Volunteers are still needed to help at the homes and for set-up and break-down at the school. It was suggested the cub scouts or girl scouts or even some high schoolers might be able to help.

4 - Tax Bill Survey Data

Ellen stated that the survey sent with recent real estate tax bills generated 400 responses, which is nearly one quarter of the homes in town. The results will be shared with the Select Board and the Harvard Press. She also thought the information could be shared with the Earth Day vendors. Sharon said the HCIC should stress that without much effort, almost ¼ of town households expressed an interest in reducing their carbon footprint, indicating there is community interest in climate change.

5 - Meeting with Jaime Eldridge

Ellen attended a recent quarterly Green Council meeting, which the Senator holds with communities in his district. He spoke of several bills that he is cosponsoring. Ellen asked HCIC whether we should and how we might support some of the bills he and others are sponsoring. Deborah suggested looking at those bills that would impact Harvard directly and focusing on those first, with Rich and Jefferson adding that a small group of HCIC (not a quorum) could discuss how to structure an approach for advocating particular regulatory proposals and bring the ideas back to the full HCIC. Sharon suggested reaching out to one of the Senator’s staffers to help organize support. Ellen, Rich, Sharon, and Jefferson volunteered to look into this further.

6 – Environmental Assessment Form

HCIC discussed a new proposal for Ayer Road development and how the Environmental Assessment Form could be used to evaluate it. Staci informed the group that Russo had partnered with a developer to present a Citizens’ petition to the Select Board to change the zoning bylaw for an area across from the Dunkin Donuts on Ayer Road. The bylaw was on the Select Board agenda for February 7. It will then be sent to the Planning Board, which needs to post the proposed change for 2 weeks. A Public Hearing will be held in mid-March to discuss

the petition and proposed changes. Staci encouraged the HCIC members to read the proposed bylaw, which will soon be posted on the Planning Board website and attend the Public Hearing. Sharon asked if comments would be accepted electronically to which Stacy responded that they will be. The proposed bylaw change may be brought to Town Meeting in April.

This proposed development [may fall under the “Transportation Adjacent Community” state requirement, which mandates any town bordering a town with public transportation (i.e., commuter rail in Ayer), must have multi-family zoning allowing for 15 units per acre, by right, by December 2025. The current multi-family bylaw (125-9) has not been updated since 1970.

Concerns were raised that the development would add over 200 residential units and could add 10% to the town’s population. This would have a great impact on energy usage, water usage, schools, and emergency preparedness, to name a few concerns. Climate impacts from the development should certainly be thought through. Christiane asked about whether the development could be LEED certified, and that that and the concerns raised above should be discussed when considering a bylaw change.

Staci said that the bylaw needs to be in place before the development proposal could be made and that HCIC should discuss making potential additions to the bylaw to address climate concerns. The bylaw could be written to include addressing climate -related aspects, such as requiring LEED certification. Christiane and Ellen volunteered to review the bylaw and work on adding climate aspect considerations to it.

Another bylaw being worked on is the Open Space Residential bylaw (Cluster Zoning), which may be presented at fall Town Meeting. The Planning Board is taking some of the language written by the previous Town Planner and putting that into the proposed bylaw.

7 – Other Issues

Sharon stated that at the March 23rd Board of Health meeting DEP and people from Ayer will discuss the PFAS situation at Devens.

Ellen stated an Associate member is still needed for HCIC and that some volunteers’ terms may be ending and need to be renewed by June 30.

There is a fundraiser at the Boxborough skating rink on Route 111, March 5 from 2 to 4 for free skating with a donation which funds local food pantries and climate initiatives

Next meeting of HCIC will be held on March 9th at 7:30 pm.

Adjourned: 8:57 pm