

Natick Sustainability Committee Meeting

January 17, 2023

Meeting Minutes

In Attendance:

- Members: Leo Ryan, David Mogolov, Devon Long-Lytle, David Landman, Matt Ellis, Nick Pandolfo, Roger Luckmann, Alfredo Vargas
- Town staff: Jillian Wilson-Martin
- Guests: Rick Devereux, Debby Marion, Ganesh Ramachandran, Mark Ralston, Robert Kearns, Zeus Smith

Meeting called to order at 7:35, adjourned at 9:13

Citizen concerns

- Rick raised upcoming Earth Day (April 29 & 30) sponsored again by EcoNatick, inviting Committee and other town organizations to take part, possibly on Common, which wasn't available last year.
- Rick also raised recent meeting on optional building stretch code and expressed hope that the Committee would stay engaged with the work and have a POV on it. Roger spoke to ongoing work he and Jillian have been doing, with upcoming opportunity for the full Committee to weigh in, and encouraged individuals to study the issue and bring informed perspective.
- Debby raised concern over the removal of 3 giant oak trees on Speen Street. Disappointed in the decision to remove mature trees instead of continued pruning, or without some sort of sequestration plan. If such removals aren't part of the Committee's purview, hopes we could work with the Tree Warden and others to come to a policy on it. There also appears to be tree damage from unrepaired gas leaks.
- Alfredo raised that notifications are typically posted on trees in 30-day period before removal, inviting public comment. Unsure if it's a set town policy.
- Leo will follow up with Tree Warden on clarification of policy. Select Board might review plans for removal of shade trees. Committee might be in a position to advocate for specific policy updates based on what we learn.

CPA and NSC update from Ganesh Ramachandran

- Ganesh presented a successful Community Preservation Act campaign, which resulted in the Natick community voting for passage of the CPA in the November election.
- Ganesh is an architect, the chair of the Natick Public Housing Trust, and comes to the CPA issue from a housing perspective
- CPA's intent is to fund historic preservation, affordable housing, and inclusive open space & recreation capabilities from public funds built from a surcharge on property taxes. Funds can go to capacity building (including staffing), land acquisition, direct financial assistance and other uses. In Natick, affordable housing and historic preservation opportunities could overlap (Sawin House, Eliot School, for example).

Projects can also improve accessibility and historic preservation planning. Acquisitions of new outdoor spaces could be considered, as well as parcel additions to land already owned by the town. Funds may also be used as a match for grants, rather than as a sole funding source for projects.

- CPA surcharge begins July 1, 2023, provided Town Meeting passes bylaw change. Community Preservation Committee would be established, and would create plan in partnership with Town Administrator. That plan would be built on a lot of public input, and all are invited. CPC will include representatives from Planning, Open Space, Housing Trust, and Historical Preservation, plus 4 at-large members.
- Jillian raises interest in working with CPC on building toward energy efficiency goals of Net Zero Plan through CPA projects

Watertown Dam and Natick Dam - Learnings from CRWA (Robert Kearns and Zeus Smith in attendance)

- Robert and Zeus to share CRWA-identified opportunities for building climate resilience in Natick
- CRWA focuses on restoration, protection, and advocacy for the Charles River and its watershed.
- Identified threats: extreme storms and flooding (71% increase in precipitation, though not evenly distributed); droughts & heat waves; climate change
- Tree canopy creates protection against heat islands, which exacerbate impact of drought
- Developed landscapes create substantially more runoff into the river without treatment. *Redevelopment can create opportunities for resilience.* High correlation between blacktop areas and flood risk.
- Phosphorus in water creates cyanobacteria blooms. Phosphorus comes predominantly from lawn and pavement runoff. Dams also harm water quality and contribute to destruction of the river ecosystem.
- Environmental Justice Neighborhoods also strongly overlap with areas of concern (heat islands, flooding risk)
- CRWA is concerned about impact of Watertown dam, which doesn't have means to control flooding, and restricts fish access elsewhere in the river. Removal of the Watertown dam could be economically beneficial, as well as ecologically, as inspection and maintenance costs can be very high, with little external support, compared to funds available to support removal. Natick's advocacy could help with Watertown dam removal.
- Goals for Natick from CRWA include stormwater utility study, updated wetlands bylaw for climate change, tree bylaws that include private property protections, and acquisition of protected conservation land for flood mitigation.
- Jillian asks if Committee should advocate not just for the Watertown dam removal, but contact the DCR, recommending a review of all dams. Robert is not averse to it, as many of the downstream dams don't enable fish passage, but sees momentum with Watertown because there's been an assessment and there's an active campaign.

Energy Assistance Fair

- Electricity bills under the new rates have come out, and people are concerned about the new, higher rates.
- Next Monday from 4-7, and Jan. 31st in Framingham, there are events to share opportunities and programs for energy savings
- Part-time energy advocate, shared with Framingham, is near hiring (this is with through the Community First Partnership program). This will help with our outreach to lower-income residents.

Plant the Future

- Matt presents on progress with Natick High School Earth Club to connect residents with trees available from Tree Warden. The list has begun! Over 20 identified projects.
- Next step is students taking door hangers to neighborhoods identified as the best places to plant, with information and easy link to apply for a tree.
- Jillian shares that we got an MAPC grant for 50 plantings in a year, separate from Art's budget and planting activity. We'll need help, but the community engagement costs can be paid from the grant. The same grant will cover the Tiny Forest project at the high school. Grant is through Framingham State's heat island measurement program, using NOAA funds.
- Debby suggests tying some aspect of the planting with Earth Day.

Committee Future

- Leo raises that in June, his term concludes, and after 6 years, he thinks it's time to change committee leadership
- In parallel, he asks how the committee structure and mission might be reconsidered, less oriented around monthly meetings, but around ongoing campaigns driven by active, ongoing work of members. Teams working toward specific goals in support of themes identified by Committee and Jillian as priorities.
- Roger raises the example of electrification/stretch code work, which he's deeply involved in, and Jillian agrees it's a perfect example of things she can't get to fully as a town employee. Alfredo is similarly working on nature-based solutions to sustainability issues around Lake Cochituate.
- Questions of long-term & short-term goals arise, as well as some ongoing work like tracking progress toward Net Zero plan, and administrative items like annual reports, posting of agendas & minutes, etc.
- We'll need to follow up in the meetings going toward June to determine what changes we'll make and how.

Other Business

- Jillian is sending out newsletter this week
- Applying for grant for dam and seawall grant for removal
- Applying for grant for electrification at BenHem (DOE/Renew America grant). Heat pump & capture-based, it has climate resilience aspects, as the school lacks planned air-conditioning

- Emergency preparedness grant for Environmental Justice communities. 6-month grant for materials on multi-language emergency preparedness.
- Received grant on stormwater management planning.
- Applying for a grant to help share what's available through the Inflation Reduction Act.
- Applying for EV school bus infrastructure technical assistance grant with 23 communities
- Dam soil testing has happened, and work is proceeding on necessary steps to plan the removal.
- Roger says we're supposed to put 100,000 heat pumps in per year in the state, and there's a ton of work to be done. Invites members to reach out to him to get involved in electrification planning and outreach. Jillian's asked for \$10k budget to support residential consulting.
- Planning Board would need to be a sponsor for adopting specialized stretch code. David L and Roger could take point on this.

Next meeting date: Tuesday, February 7