

# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE CLIMATE COMMITTEE

JANUARY 9, 2025 | 6:00 – 8:00 P.M.

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY & VIRTUAL ([ZOOM LINK](#))

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## **AGENDA**

6:00 PM Welcome & Approval of Minutes (Committee Chair)

- Approved.

6:05 PM Director's Update (Susanne Rasmussen)

- Solicitation for new members has been live for a few weeks and has had good response.
- Thinking about the next steps in terms of bringing new Committee members with onboarding, training, etc.
- City has reactivated contract with consultant that helped with the Climate Action Plan.
- City will be sending around information about the membership applications for the Committee so the current members can distribute them.

6:09 PM NZAP Report Letter - Final Vote (NZAP Letter Sub-Committee)

- Committee discussed the role of BlocPower in NZAP Letter recommendations. Given pending announcements by the City, the Committee discussed waiting one-two weeks before finalizing the letter. The Committee wants to ensure that any discussion of financing reflects all available information and lends importance to financing as a topic.
- The Committee will do a virtual approval of the Letter.
- The Committee discussed how the letter will be delivered and how it will be viewed/received by the City Manager.
  - o City Response:
    - The letter is usually transmitted to the City Manager and from there is sent to the City Council. The Council holds a hearing.
    - Last year, there was very scant Committee attendance to the hearing.
  - o Committee wants to ensure there's adequate attendance and offered to have some members/sub-committee meet with the City Manager to discuss further to ensure all important points are received. The Committee could also present highlights of the letter to the City Council. There is value in both.

- o City Council hearing has not been scheduled.
- o Later coordination is planned.

6:29 PM Energy Supply Overview - Grid Modernization (Lyn Huckabee)

- Purpose: Learn about actions in the energy supply space in order to inform recommendations.
- Outcome: Committee members are aware of the context as well as planned and completed actions in the energy supply space.
- Process:
  1. Committee member will present background information.
  2. The Committee will ask questions.
- Committee member presented on a range of issues on grid modernization, from the point of view of Eversource's actions.
  - o Grid modernization is looking to optimize system performance and demand across the city, with the aim of reducing overload, better detecting outages, updating to advanced metering infrastructure, etc.
  - o Eversource is looking to improve communication technologies (some of which have been around since 1990s) and meter systems (in place since early 2000s). Updates will modernize these critical elements.
  - o Grid Modernization Plan Highlights were presented, with a discussion of the grid-facing and the customer-facing parts of the proposal. The Plan spans through 2027.
  - o Substation upgrades are planned for Putnam and East Cambridge.
- Committee discussion:
  - o What impact will this have on prices? If, for example, someone's energy usage does not change at all.
    - It's complicated and it depends. It's difficult to say whether the prices would change after the upgrades, all else equal.
  - o Does AMI infrastructure make it more likely that some of the daytime rates would change?
    - Unsure. There's a discussion of general incentives, but not sure.
  - o Committee member expressed concern about how Eversource is planning on expressing changes to customers to ensure that the upgrades/changes are well understood, given the complexity of the issue.
  - o How is data privacy being addressed?
    - Investment does include a large investment in cybersecurity.

- o Who gets to control what's done with a customer's data?
  - Discussions about data access are ongoing, but some structures are already built into law.
- o Do meter replacements require customer contact and is there a role for groups to do outreach for retrofits/education/energy efficiency programs?
  - There's been discussion of having outreach for these issues. There's going to be a need to communicate to customers the value they can get around their new meters, including energy efficiency, etc.
- o What happens to the old meters?
  - No idea. Strict waste management laws in Massachusetts.

7:08 PM Energy Supply Discussion - Geothermal, Community Aggregation, Grid Modernization (Committee Chair)

- Purpose: *Align around committee's recommendations regarding city's energy supply actions.*

- Outcome:

1. *Summarized position of the committee*

- Process:

1. *Review content from December meeting & NZAP energy supply goals*
2. *Facilitated discussion in reaction to action items*
3. *Identification of themes in discussion*
4. *Agree on next steps*

- Committee discussion:

- o Some confusion around the terminology – Is there an accepted nomenclature around all the different solutions that we can align with?
  - Ground-source heat pump is the more accepted term.
  - Can also think of it as “geo-thermal” v. “geo-exchange”
  - Concern that if people are confused about what each terms mean, they may not be as engaged.
- o District energy may become a much larger part of peoples' lives and how we heat our homes.
- o It's impressive that the City is prioritizing using its purchasing power to get green energy. There aren't other cities of Cambridge's size that are doing this to this scale.

- o The Eversource-Framingham pilot of ground-source heat has been well-publicized and it's good that the City is getting designs/recommendations.
  - There is some concern about the economic viability; the Committee does not want a long-term pilot that is very expensive only to be cancelled at the last minute due to cost.
- o Street construction could be integrated into making energy upgrades – doing the work simultaneously to reduce public impact.
- o Is there a discussion of removing gas infrastructure over the longer term?
  - Committee decided to save this question for another meeting.
- o There is a need for local clean power, not just electrons being brought in to meet the City's need.
- o Lack of pricing tools makes it difficult to put forward proposals to introduce different time pricing mechanisms.
- o How big a part of future plans is energy storage for the City? And do we need to think about land use?
- o Committee member expressed belief that district energy may play an increasing role in future energy systems.
- o Member Discussion Themes:
  - New energy technologies will be part of our future
  - VPPAs are very impressive for a city of our size
  - The committee should continue monitoring networked ground source heat pump work, monitoring economic viability and construction coordination
  - identification of similar retrofit trend, where big decisions can be made (e.g., VPPAs), but we also need to impact individual decisions (e.g., correctly leveraging new meters)
- o Potential Future Committee Topics:
  - District Energy
  - Gas Infrastructure

7:42 PM 2025 Committee Reflection & Lessons Learned

- Purpose: Identify opportunities to improve the Committee's approach for 2025
- Outcome: Committee members identify what worked well in 2024 and what can be improved upon in 2025 so that officers and staff can make adjustments in 2025.
- Process:

1. *Group discussion on overall objectives and goals of the committee for 2024*
  2. *Group discussion of what worked well to achieve these goals in 2024*
  3. *Group discussion of what could have been improved to achieve these goals in 2024*
  4. *As time allows: Group discussion of overall objectives and goals for 2025 (including any progress tracking mechanisms)*
  5. *Summary of themes from discussion*
- Worked Well:
    - o Spent a lot of time learning and building up knowledge among people who were new to the committee.
    - o Good job staying informed of new developments as they happened.
    - o Structure from the leadership team of having two different meetings on a topic (one for education, one for discussion) was helpful. Good model for learning and digestion.
    - o Recruiting was very strong this past cycle.
    - o The meeting with City management and the department heads was very helpful and engaging – helped promote climate and sustainability within their departments.
    - o More attendance and engagement in meetings than in the past.
    - o Subcommittees were very helpful in organizing tasks and information
  - Room for improvement:
    - o Consistent organization – agenda sending out, minutes, etc.
    - o Sharing information with the community – we should have a discussion about the best way to go about this as a Committee.
      - Could we do outings into the community in pairs to talk about what the City is doing?
      - Numerous committee members emphasized this bullet point – the need for community engagement and for allocating time for this action at each meeting.
      - Doing a follow up on environmental justice.
    - o Engaging with the City – we can be a bit more vocal with this.
    - o Find ways to hear more directly from the staff on what they need/what would be helpful from the Committee to ensure that the feedback is useful.
    - o *Topic idea:* Consider making time for the committee to discuss the role of climate in the city's new zoning proposals.
    - o Trying to get a better understanding of what the community really needs, what resources are available, and where the gaps lie.
    - o *Topic idea:* Growing AI energy needs and whether the City/state is considering this topic
    - o Broader participation in tasks – administrative, letter writing, etc. – among Committee members.
    - o Making clear goals and clear metrics to see if the Committee is meeting their goals

7:55 PM Public Comment and Member Updates

- Member updates –
  - o The City is working on a plan to improve linear park (North Cambridge) that involves planting trees, pedestrian zones, etc.; would like to look further into it as a Committee.
- Public Comment –
  - o Member of the public stated that they were excited to see the next year of the committee.
  - o Member of the public provided a statement on the importance of the public to continue working towards climate action given the incoming presidential administration. The new zoning plan would provide an extreme growth in construction and would not include climate considerations. It is going to be passed next month. They expressed concern that it would undo the work that's been underway to improve climate outcomes in the City. Also, they asked for responses for a survey on Zero Waste Master Plan and stated the need for clear goals on food waste and composting.

8:09 PM Adjournment



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**For Reference:**

***What is the role of the Climate Committee?***

*The Climate Committee has three roles that help the City reduce climate change impacts, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, increase equity, and serve as a partner to and example for other communities:*

- 1. Provide feedback and ideas to the City on ways to reduce and live with climate change while prioritizing the needs of the most at-risk populations.*
- 2. Share information about City climate programs with community members, listen to community concerns, and raise feedback with City staff so programs effectively serve all community members.*

*3. Stay informed about the City's climate goals and provide accountability and feedback on barriers and opportunities to improve effectiveness.*