

CITY OF CAMBRIDGE CLIMATE COMMITTEE

FEBRUARY 13, 2025 | 6:00 – 8:00 P.M.

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

AGENDA

6:09PM Welcome & Approval of Minutes (Committee Chair)

- Minutes approved.

6:10 PM Director's Update (Susanne Rasmussen)

- City Council had a successful meeting on the environment; gave a presentation on the Net Zero Action Plan which was well-received. Committee members spoke about work ongoing with the Committee.
 - o Mentioned a possible change of course with regards to upcoming State list on buildings that will be required to report their energy consumption.
 - o City is considering lowering its reporting threshold to the State level.
- In the process of scheduling the meeting for the City Manager letter.
- The City has begun geothermal feasibility study. A presentation is available online discussing the project.
 - o Member asked question relating to cancelled plan in Lowell, Massachusetts and ensuring that Cambridge does not fall in the same trap with regards to recognizing cost limitations.
 - o Decision has not been made with regards to who would own the system and what the financing would look like.
 - o Member asked about the National Grid pulling out of the geothermal project.
 - Might have been tariffs and material costs playing a role.
 - o When can we expect the first update on the geothermal study?
 - It's a year-long project, so may have update as soon as 6 months.
- Climate Action Leaders program is seeking applications.

6:28 PM Departing Member Recognition (Susanne Rasmussen)

- David and Keith, two long-time members, are departing after many years of service. The Committee thanked them for their contributions, commitment, and dedication to the Climate Committee over the years.

6:30 PM New Member Onboarding Plan

- There's a lot of information that new members will need to be familiar with. A system will be set up to help new members gain access to the information they need while building community across the Committee. Several members of the Committee will facilitate onboarding.
- Received ~30 applications and have been conducting three sets of group interviews.
- There are 8 openings on the Committee.

6:33 PM 2025 Planning (Committee Chair)

- Purpose: *Identify the Committee's approach for 2025*
 - Outcome: *Identification of priority issue areas and actions for the committee to focus on in 2025*
 - Process:
 1. *Review themes from 2024 reflection*
 2. *Review proposed priority issues and actions from officers*
 3. *Finalize 2025 plan by providing input on proposal*
- The Committee continued discussing key areas and actions they want to undertake this year, in accordance with the Committee's official purpose and pressing issues within the City.
 - Major priorities include energy supply, financing, resident educational resources, and community building/engagement.
 - Alternating educational and discussion sessions on particular topics was a helpful way to approach larger topics. The Committee would like to continue with this approach.

6:39 PM Financing Ground-setting & Context

- Purpose: *Align committee on key contextual information regarding financing actions and goals*
 - Outcome:
 1. *Committee is informed of context*
 2. *Committee identifies priority next steps*
 - Process:
 1. *Staff presentation*
 2. *Committee Q&A*
 3. *Committee discussion of next steps*
- City staff described Local Carbon Fund and Aggregation 3.0, a method for financing decarbonization.
 - o A fundamental question for financing decarbonization is the following: *Can we create financial tools/products or an investment organization/department to address "first-cost" issues in decarbonization?* How can we help building owners pay for decarbonization equipment – especially when the up-front costs for the equipment are more expensive than conventional/fossil fuel systems.
 - o Currently, the City is working on the Local Carbon Fund Enhanced Community Aggregation Plan. It would provide funding and financing access (i.e. through State EE and RE funds, green bonds, local banks/credit unions, etc.) to help implement clean energy projects. Upcoming RFP will direct consultants to dig into federal/state funding opportunities.

- o It would function like a climate utility company – a rate-based service that would help people decarbonize, as opposed to leaving residents to figure everything out on their own.
- Member expressed a need for a middle role between opportunities and residents – like Energy Sage and its ability to connect residents looking to electrify with resources and support.
- There are a variety of models available for such support programs; there’s a need to consider a variety of these models.
- What’s available right now?
 - o Current federal/state funding focuses mainly on environmental justice, disadvantaged communities, LMI. (i.e. Massachusetts Solar for All Program, PACE, MA Community Climate Bank, Mass Save HEAT Loan)
 - o Each have specific requirements that must be met to access the financing programs.
- RFP For Strategic Plan will explore what financing options are currently available, expected decarbonization costs in the region, how might these costs vary across building types, etc.
- Member expressed interest in having the RFP look at the economic differences between switching to different kinds of decarbonization technologies from different conventional technologies.
 - o May be useful to have the RFP include a model that would allow the City to look at different factors and combinations when considering program costs.
- Cambridge is very diverse in terms of building stock and building variation, which will complicate the program’s needs.
- Certain levels of detail will be challenging to analyze. There’s also a question of scale – what scale should the program operate on? Just Cambridge? Regionally?
- Member suggested bringing legal minds in to discuss what would need to be done to decarbonize condos, given their unique ownership models.
- City aiming to look at other city-level examples of such programs (i.e. Ann Arbor, MI). These models can help inform how Cambridge support decarbonization equipment financing.
- The City hopes to release the RFP in FY25.

7:36 PM Public Comment and Member Updates

- Member of the public stated (in relation to the National Grid/Lowell thermal project) – the groundwater was higher than expected which derailed the project. Also, asked whether the local carbon fund is still being considered in the RFP due to administrative costs of certifying carbon credits.
 - o City: Administrative costs were so significant that at the scale of Cambridge it would be very hard.
- Member of the public discussed Vermont funds for resiliency and mitigation to be paid by polluters. Urged the Committee to bear these initiatives in mind.
- Member of the public asked about the role of local Universities in Cambridge in contributing to decarbonization efforts.

- o City: We've partnered with Universities on various efforts in the past.
- Member of the public asked about opportunities to present information on geothermal at a future meeting.
- Member of the public noted that there are many ways to reduce carbon footprint for low or no cost. Also, discussed the challenges that current presidential administration is presenting to climate efforts. Finally, urged more work on food waste.

8:00 PM Adjournment

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.*