CITY OF CAMBRIDGE CLIMATE COMMITTEE MINUTES

MARCH 12, 2026 | 6:00 – 8:00 P.M.

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, 4TH FLOOR & VIRTUAL (ZOOM LINK)

City Staff attendance *(alphabetical order)*: Stephen Early, Lyn Huckabee, Susanne Rasmussen, Julie Wormser

Committee Members attendance: *(alphabetical order)*: Yi Juan, Becky Fearing, Hajar Hyte, Cynthia Hibbard, Megan Lim, Debapriya Mazumdar, Anna Mezheritskaya**,** Joel Nogic, Tom Rawson, Hanan Rhodes, Meredith Stoddard

General & public attendance: Lowry Hemphill (MoF), Diana (Mothers Out Front), Deb Ashman (MoF) Li Susan Murcott, Xuan Tan, Brian Urlab (Salas O'Brien), Lindsey Olsen (Salas O'Brien), Amy Waltz (MoF?), Erina Keefe(?)

MINUTES

6:05 PM ***Welcome –*** *Joel Nogic, Chair of CCCC*
Approval of prior meeting's minutes – approved

6:07 PM **Deputy Climate Chief Update** - Susanne Rasmussen

- Event at the library about the extreme heat on Tuesday April 7: https://www.cambridgema.gov/Departments/cambridgepubliclibrary/calendar/2026/04/07/livingintohottersummershowdoweallstaysafemain
- Requesting help with a grant application – Julie will cover
- BEUDO – review board considering exemption applications. Guidelines & procedures coming out soon. Training sessions underway. Taking up immense time from many people
- Focused on getting organized around addressing heat safety

6:10 PM **Chief Climate Officer Update** - Julie Wormser

- Jan – March is grant application season
- Municipal resiliency grant – Federal – we're requesting one for the water department. Could someone on the committee work with Julie on a letter of support? Cambridge uses rain fed water that is in a small reservoir, Hobbs Brook, then it moves to a larger reservoir, Stony Brook, then to Fresh Pond. Our reservoirs aren't building up properly anymore (big one doesn't fill up, smaller one overflows to Charles River). We would like to explore drilling as an alternative to draining the reservoirs which is incredibly hard on the ecosystem. State grant due March 20th – how we can protect our reservoirs. We made it through the first round of a process. Dam to be shored up. 5 droughts in 10 years
- Social Resilience earmark – HUD grant - Federal
- State grant - Commercial kitchen grant in Cambridge – Cambridge Redevelopment Authority – community centers. Helping them with their physical plant. Buildings (CCC, Margaret Fuller House) are neglected and need to be shored up to

- Unanimous vote supporting these grants
- Cambridge already has notably low water usage per resident (we don't water lawns like other communities). We need to get better at collecting water and preventing runoff.
- Commercial buildings and green building standards can be part of the solution here

6:25 PM **Follow up -** Joel

- NZAP review process – next steps
- Councilor Nolan scheduled a hearing of the Health and Environmental committee on this topic on March 31. Likely 3-5pm
- Putting 5-yearupdate out to bid

6:27 PM **Resilient Cambridge –** Susanne Rasmussen

- Progress being made. Still working through heat emergency processes including notifications, etc.
- Climate Committee's role in this? Focus on marginalized groups, get feedback? It's still early in the process. Extreme Heat protocol should be done by May 1, but it's internally focused in this phase. Phase II will be more externally focused. Still working on incorporating worker safety and other elements. Joel will work it into an upcoming agenda
- Call for committee members to review the resilient Cambridge plan and be prepared to give feedback
- Heat advisory (3 or more consecutive days with a heat index of 90 or higher for at least 2 hours/day or a 1 day of 105 or above, 2 or more days of 95 or higher and overnight temps of 75 or higher, temp increase of 25 degrees or higher at 85 or above) vs Heat emergency

6:45 PM **General updates/discussion**

- Megan Lim attended a number of useful conferences and is willing to share notes
- 12 MIT student
- Ice cream truck to get feedback?
- Amy Waltz – Shared that there is an ongoing Harvard Sq 11th hour climate / Envt Visibility stand out (with music) on the 11th of each month 6-7pm weather permitting). It is at the intersection of Mass Ave & Church St. Music Rehearsal beforehand at 5:30pm in the First Parish UU Church / same intersection. Great band, some singing, bring signs if you wish, all welcome!
- Some Mothers Out Front members of the public are here because they want to learn more about the thermal energy work

6:50 PM **Thermal Energy Updates – Feasibility Study** - Erina Keefe, Lindsey Olsen, Salas O'Brien

- 80% of GHG emissions are from buildings & construction in cambridge,
- ARMA funds secured a year ago for this project

- District Energy is a central energy plant piping out steam, hot water, etc.
- A Thermal Energy Network (TEN) shares out ambient energy flowing from the thermal energy source (can be geothermal, waste thermal,etc), which is then turned into either heating or cooling from the building. Efficient and less energy losses.
- Goals of Cambridge's pilot feasibility study: to understand how we can heat and cool Cambridge neighborhoods efficiently, tapping into steady ground temps and sharing energy across buildings. What would it take to build a pilot project?
- How much energy can a TEN provide in Cambridge? How does it compare with electrification? What would the distribution network look like? What would it cost to build and operate? What are potential other sources of heat?
- Cambridge has been using Geothermal for many years. The City Hall Annex has been using it for 23 years (not without problems as the technology has evolved). More recently: Tobin and VLUS, King Open, MLK, DPW Simard building, River St firehouse (2 wells)
- Site analysis – need at least 1 acre not covered in trees. 40 potential sites from Google earth, then looked at building diversity, anchor tenants, available cooling loads, land viable for geo-exchange, and narrowed it down to 9 sites. Goal was to come up with three that could move forward.
- Technical viability and recent renovations created challenges due to limited appetite for further construction. Major sewer lines, ownership and operating models, open space & water protections created further challenges. Need 2/3 vote to change existing land use in parks if they go that route (did so at Tobin). Even under parking lots is challenging if they're privately owned because of possible development of the lots in the future.
- Internal review on 9/15 to review and determine next steps
- CAN do wells under an existing building, but there is some risk when/if something goes wrong. Can impact access, value, etc. Technology is evolving (smaller drill rigs)
- Had some assumptions (ie. Residential customers would add AC, traditional U-bend heat exchangers drilled to 850', etc)
- Can be difficult in denser areas
- Example site: Pacific Street Park – relatively balanced. 30% residential, 36% MIT housing, 26% MIT investments, 7% commercial. Some sites have too much industrial or residential heat and other challenges). Potential anchor customers (EDGE Gravity, MIT Investment, MIT graduate housing). 169 bores could serve 98% of annual heating and cooling loads (available space for 151 bores)
- A loop of water going around to the buildings – 65/66 degrees, for example, one building could be heating that loop and another could be cooling it when demands vary. In that case, it's pulling from the loop, not the ground. In other cases, you'd pull thermal energy from the ground.
- Fracking breaks the ground up. Boring drills without creating fractures and gets sealed back up with a technical grout to keep it intact. It's similar to a decommissioned drilling site. Aquifers get sealed off where they exist (in MA

most drinking water comes from reservoirs, not wells) to prevent contamination going from bore to bore
- Heat can not be stored from winter to summer and vice versa generally. There is a technique that can create a bit of a “battery storage” like effect where the earth gets charged to a certain temp (rarer).
- Systems are designed to handle a variety of temperature ranges and peaks as temps and climate evolves as well as to deal with more extreme weather events.
- Feasibility of implementation of a standalone pilot project is low at this point due to ownership / operational constraints (most TENs in the US are subsidized utility projects; who maintains and holds risk), scalability and land uses, permitting and financial constraints (article 97 protections require replacement land; requires special state and local legislative action)
- Next steps: Pacific Street Park for conceptual deep dive focus of research; lighter touch analyses (Fresh Pond as a heat source? Compare TEN with direct electrification; school adjacency; alignment with non-pipeline alternatives & electrical infrastructure). Spring 2026 info session and website; focus group with community engagement team
- Julie Wormser – one of the challenges of being an early adopter is problem solving (ie. What’s the sweet spot when it comes to urban density? What are the limits? How would we scale?). Incredibly knowledgeable team helping us to assess. Even though it’s challenging, we’re not giving up on it. I’m proud of Cambridge for trying stuff that might not work in order to find paths towards what would work. All information is good data
- Harvard and MIT were not considered as sites. The study was focused on city controlled areas.

7:50 PM ***Public Comments***

- Susan Murcott – MIT – teaches a thermal energy course. D Lab: 5 projects this year: wastewater as a thermal source; frat houses on Mem Drive (Phi Beta Epsilon) with an ambient loop with adjacent fraternities; Cambridge Water Department – Cambridge Piped Water as a thermal source – building a model in their lab); Study of data centers about comparing technologies on the basis of energy efficiency and water use; Li Xuan’s project – he works with Megan and Susan on TEN projects – nuclear reactor waste heat that is getting dumped to cooling centers – feasibility study.
- Li Xuan - Lots of projects going on overall and it can be hard to connect them all. Opportunity to work together.

8:00 PM **Meeting was adjourned**

Upcoming

March	•

Ideas for future meeting topics - from February meeting:

- Food systems
- BEUDO update
- Climate leaders program – do shorter version of their training
- Presentation on doing climate work at the municipal level
- Building envelope education
- Learn about MassSave programs
- Learn more about Committee members areas of interest, knowledge, and experience in the climate space
- Committee goals and next steps on engagement and equity
- Clarify role of Education(Capacity Building) Sub-committee

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.

Officer Section of Bylaws

Officers will be elected on an annual basis. Elections will take place in September of each year unless the Committee decides otherwise.

Chair
The chair shall be responsible for setting the agenda in coordination with City staff, for facilitating meetings, for organizing Committee work program and subcommittees in coordination with City staff, and for signing Committee correspondence.

Vice Chair
The vice chair shall assist the chair in his/her duties and fill in for the chair in his/her absence.

Secretary
The secretary shall be responsible for meeting minutes and attendance records.