

Commission for Energy Use and Climate Change

Meeting Minutes

October 16, 2019

Somerville City Hall Annex, 93 Highland Avenue., Somerville, MA

Attendees:

Eliza Johnston – Commissioner

Juliette Rooney-Varga – Commissioner

Julie Wood – Commissioner

Larry Yu – Nominated Commissioner

Oliver Sellers-Garcia – (member ex-officio) Director of Office of Sustainability and Environment

Michael Mecha

Charlie McKenna

Ian Daly

Tim Houde

Johnny Napoli

Monte Allen

Patrick Luckow

Jocelyn Newhouse

Davide Gill Austern

Michel Nasilowski

Ben Abrams

Zoe McAlear

Review and adopt the minutes from the September 11, 2019 meeting

- Approved

2019 Landlord survey

- Summary of responses
 - 36 responses
 - Nearly 78% owned 1 rental unit, 11% 2, 8% 3 and only 1 person owned 5
 - 80% lived in Somerville, 75% lived in the same building as the rental unit
 - Nearly 90% did not pay for heat and/or electricity or oil for tenants
 - Top Priorities
 - 36% said EE e.g. insulation, etc
 - 33% - new heating system
 - 33% said kitchen or bathroom renovation
 - 30% said roof or siding
 - 19% porch repair

- When asked about what improvement have been made – top picks/more than ½ said water saving plumbing, insulation in room and exterior walls, weather stripping on doors, energy efficient windows, nearly half said energy efficient appliances.
- When asked about what they were considering – solar and permeable surfaces followed by energy efficient appliances (nearly 1/3 said)
- When asked about their motivation for making improvements – 53% said they care about climate change, 17% said increased home value, 11% said lower maintenance costs, 8% tenant retention
- In terms of what is holding them back – 74% said financial considerations, 31% said not enough time, 28% said they didn't feel that changes were needed to keep tenants, 25% were unsure where to start
- Largest financial concern was upfront concern (76%) followed by cost of financing (9%)
- 58% have completed MassSave Audit for rental units, of those who hadn't only 39% were aware that by completing a Mass Save® HEA on their tenant unit allowed them as a landlord to access increased incentives for qualified energy upgrades and 0% interest financing.
- Takeaways from the survey
 - Incentives
 - Incentives for landlords to assume tenants' utility costs? That'll incentivize improvements ASAP!
 - Provide tax incentives to landlords that make green improvements to their property
 - Offer a tax deduction for rentals with certain sustainability factors in place
 - Lobby utilities and other vendors to provide subsidies and/or other incentives.
 - Education
 - Programmable window AC units, programmable thermostats and training on how to use them.
 - Workshops on how to make some of these changes held during the day on weekends would be great.
 - Policy
 - We have solar panels, but haven't figured out a good mechanism to share the energy bill credits with tenants. Would be interested in more info on green lease.
 - Have new zoning rules encourage "carless" units, that don't qualify for free resident parking permits -- the city might sell or auction a few permits to tenants/owners of those units, but the aim is to facilitate energy-efficient densification with more car-free households.
 - Financial Support

- Ways of making the longer payback time work for landlords who don't know if they will retain the units long term; incentives to keep rents lower even if expensive energy efficiency improvements are added
 - Improve affordability of solar panels.
- Discussion
 - 25K households, 2/3rd renter population
 - There are thousands of landlords in Somerville. We need to learn more about them. Who are they? Live in building vs not, live in Somerville vs not. Different leavers and incentives
 - How to offset the upfront financial cost and share the risk?
 - Solar array for a rental unit – landlord would get the credits and a certain number of kilowatt hours are covered in the rent, and then anything above that is paid by the renter.
 - Residential ESCO – is there such a thing?
 - Leveraging existing incentives to support low to moderate income – All in Energy
 - Education is key! Vendor list for solar – and MassSave audit info.
 - Greentown starts-ups who want data – connect them to customer base for field testing
 - 2020 initiatives – Energy retrofit financing? PACE for commercial and large residential? Research on innovative financing in terms of what other cities are doing?
 - Energy efficiency and heating electrification are top priorities.

Somerville Community Choice Electricity 2020 program launch

- Working with Good Energy on communication plan – immediately before and after Thanksgiving (before and after winter rate announcement). Event with MOF to announce program. This will include information on how the program has performed (dollars and GHG emissions saved) and the City will announce its own renewable energy procurement.
- 1.6% of accounts have opted up to 100% renewable electricity.
- 50% option – should we consider it?
- Can we do a campaign to educate opt up?
- Need to differentiate Somerville CCE from scam opt-ups
- Our supply rate went down, which is unusual.

Discussion of natural gas restrictions for new construction

- Several municipalities in CA have restricted gas connections in new buildings. Brookline has put out a bill; Cambridge and Wellesley are also considering. In California, the state energy office establishes which buildings can be built without natural gas, and the Berkeley ordinance points to this guidance. MA does not have a 3rd party that is providing this comparable analysis.

- Administration and City Council are exploring this topic for Somerville, balancing climate and housing goals. The City will bring in some legal and technical expertise to understand the cost considerations (it's more expensive to heat water with electrical heaters vs gas).

Central Hill Campus Plan

- Analysis of making the campus net zero is part of the plan.
- There has not been a lot of community interest in net zero at the community meetings.
- Oliver will let us know when the draft plan will be released.

SomerVision 2040

- Stephen is Chair of the sustainability group – draft plan chapters are available online.
- Sustainability Chapter – references the work in Somerville Climate Forward and elsewhere
 - GHG emission metrics
 - Priorities – encourage sustainable consumer behavior (waste), culture of climate action
- Specific sections that touch on topics are elsewhere in the plan, such as transportation, energy use, air quality, storm water.

CEUCC priorities for 2020

- Eliza will facilitate discussion at November meeting
- Review Somerville Climate Forward annual progress report; 2019 priorities

Energy Manager position

- Energy data management and financial processes
- Energy efficiency and renewable energy asset management for City
- Energy for new building projects

Any and all business before the Commission

- None