



MEETING NOTES

SUBJECT: SOMERVILLE MOVING FORWARD PUBLIC MEETING #1

DATE & LOCATION: Monday June 26, 6:00-8:00 PM, East Somerville Community School Cafeteria -- 50 Cross St, Somerville, MA 02145

ATTENDING: Mayor Joe Curtatone, Hannah Payne, Oliver Sellers-Garcia, Culley Thomas, Amruta Sudhalkar, Indrani Ghosh, Nathalie Beauvais

Introduction by the Mayor

The Mayor's opening remarks emphasized the need for a fossil fuel-free and resilient future and the local/ regional leadership that Somerville could take in addressing climate change. Somerville Climate Forward is our community's comprehensive strategy for addressing climate change.

Questions & Answers:

- How will Somerville Climate Forward inform re-zoning currently underway?

Answer: It is a separate but parallel and connected process. There are sustainability elements included in the proposed zoning overhaul. If Somerville Climate Forward identifies opportunities for future zoning updates, those can be integrated at a later date, as the structure of the proposed zoning provides a foundation for future updates and refinements. More information on the zoning overhaul can be found at www.somervillezoning.com. All climate baseline studies are available on the Office of Sustainability and Environment (OSE) resources website (www.somervillema.gov/sustainaville).

Introduction to Somerville Climate Forward

(Presentation by Hannah Payne & Nathalie Beauvais)

Baseline Studies

(Presentation by Oliver Sellers –Garcia)

Questions & Answers:

- Where can the background studies pertinent to this project (e.g., the GHG inventory Report, the Carbon Neutrality Pathway Analysis, and the Vulnerability Assessment) be found?

Answer: Please see Sustainaville website (<http://www.somervillema.gov/sustainaville>) under the "Resources & Reports" tab.

- Is Somerville working with other cities on climate mitigation and adaptation planning efforts?

Answer: Yes. For example, the City is part of the Metropolitan Mayors' Coalition, a regional collaborative made of 14 cities in the Boston metropolitan area that has committed to combating and preparing for climate change. More information can be found here: <http://www.mapc.org/14-metro-mayors-commit-combat-prepare-climate-change>

- Approximately 66% of the City's residents are renters. How does the City plan to engage transient populations?

Answer: One of the working groups that will inform this project will focus on education and outreach. One of the outputs of the working group will be the development of ideas to better engage transient populations. Other means that the City plans to use to reach broader audiences is through the use of videos and online surveys. In addition, the City's Energy Efficiency Now (SEEN) Program offers free energy efficiency assessments to renters as well as owners, along with recommendations for no-cost upgrades that can result in energy and cost savings.

- Will there be requirements for new development in the city (e.g. Union Square), to meet net zero energy consumption goals?

Answer: The City will be examining GHG mitigation strategy options addressing both new as well as existing building stock in the community. Net Zero energy consumption requirements for new buildings will be considered as a possible option to help meet the City's GHG reduction goals in this project. However, in Massachusetts, the State has purview over the building code, and the ability of cities to pass ordinances requiring development to exceed the Massachusetts code is limited. The City of Somerville already follows a "stretch" code, which is a more stringent version of the base Massachusetts building code for new development.

- Are additional studies underway which cover topics that may not have been covered in previous studies (e.g., an analysis of emissions sources that were not covered in the GHG Inventory Report)?

Answer: Additional studies may be commissioned depending on the outcomes of Somerville Climate Forward.

Small Groups Discussion

Meeting attendees divided into fourteen small groups to discuss the following question: **"What does a carbon neutral and climate prepared Somerville look like to you?"**

Below is a summary of common issues, ideas, and questions that were raised during the discussions. The comments are organized around topics and themes, rather than the individual groups.

Transportation

There was significant interest in transportation related solutions to reduce carbon emissions. In particular, meeting attendees were interested in seeing expanded bike infrastructure to make biking safer, easier, and more accessible. Similar recommendations were made for improving pedestrian connections between neighborhoods. Several ideas also centered on expanding electric vehicle charging infrastructure and improving vehicle and ride sharing systems. The most common theme was to disincentive driving while making other forms of transportation easier and more reliable. A few groups suggested demonstrating this transition by temporarily closing streets or doing other demonstration projects.

Climate Preparedness

In general, the small groups focused more on ideas for greenhouse gas reductions than on climate preparedness. However, several groups raised concerns about climate impacts and provided ideas to improve emergency preparedness. One group was concerned about having to shelter people from neighboring communities if there is major flooding from a coastal storm. Many groups also offered suggestions, including making sure climate change projections are integrated into emergency planning and setting up neighborhood watch programs to help neighbors respond to heat waves and flooding. Additional ideas included recommendations to move critical equipment higher in flood-prone buildings and, on a larger scale, encouraging low impact development, increasing permeable surfaces, and exploring financing options for stormwater and sewer infrastructure improvements. Finally to prepare for hotter temperatures, there were recommendations to increase awareness about cooling centers and to ensure that more people have air conditioning or efficient ductless mini-splits to stay cool at home.

Equity & Community

Many of the groups highlighted the need to keep equity central as Somerville Climate Forward is developed. Some common questions on this theme included, “How do we ensure everyone is benefitting equally from climate action?” and “How do we maintain affordable housing as we adapt?” Maintaining affordable housing and minimizing displacement were common themes among the groups. In addition, some focused on the need for equitable engagement and to involve a representative and diverse segment of the Somerville community in this process, including young people, seniors, immigrants, people of color, and people new to environmental and climate movements. One idea was to create an ambassador program to reach more residents. Furthermore, many groups stressed the role that community cohesion plays in resilience and the opportunities to educate, support, empower the Somerville community to take action.

Zoning and development

There were many suggestions related to zoning, such as limiting parking spaces, enabling electric vehicle charging, and incentivizing carbon and resilient building through zoning and permitting. Many of the suggestions mentioned, such as requiring LEED-certifiability and green space and permeable surface requirements are included in the proposed zoning code update. (Visit www.somervillezoning.com to find out more.)

Consumption & Waste

One common theme was the need to focus on the impact of consumption even though emissions from consumption are not calculated as part of the community greenhouse gas inventory. Some suggestions related to minimizing consumption were to expand the sharing economy (car sharing, bike sharing, tool libraries, etc.) and to encourage people to donate and buy used. Others suggested supporting the local food economy through more local markets and urban agriculture as a way to minimize emissions associated with food production and distribution.

Many were also interested in ways to minimize solid waste. There was interest from groups in establishing a municipal composting program, implementing pay as you throw policies, holding recycling competitions, and using biodigesters as ways to minimize the amount of trash generated in Somerville.

Natural Systems



A common theme across groups was improving the tree canopy and green space to provide cooling and other benefits through natural processes. One common suggestion was to incentivize green roofs and on-site stormwater management through permeable surfaces and green infrastructure. Others identified the need to improve green space in environmental justice neighborhoods. Other creative ideas for carbon reduction included using biochar to sequester carbon and encouraging the inclusion of green or living walls on buildings.

Energy

Most groups had ideas and suggestions for increasing renewable energy and improving energy efficiency in Somerville's buildings. Solar energy came up frequently, with ideas ranging from solar canopies in parking lots, to programs to lower the cost of solar and making it more accessible to all residents. Many groups highlighted the need to couple solar with storage capabilities. There was some enthusiasm for moving to 100 percent renewable energy quickly. In addition, some groups brought up district energy and microgrids as solutions for both resilience and efficiency. Finally, a few groups mentioned that working with utilities to fix gas leaks would be an important action for achieving carbon neutrality.

Buildings

Many groups focused on how buildings in Somerville can be climate prepared and net-zero. There were suggestions to make sure buildings are livable, aesthetically pleasing, resilient, net-zero, and functional. In order to achieve this, there was acknowledgement that deep retrofits will be necessary to improve efficiency of existing buildings. Several groups recommended creating new policies that incentivize taking advantage of roof space for solar, green roofs, or white roofs for cooling. There were creative ideas for energy reduction competitions and demand response programs to manage energy usage. Several groups highlighted the need for education and outreach to encourage homeowners, landlords, and tenants to take advantage of Mass Save programs and other incentives to improve energy efficiency. Similarly, some groups acknowledged the need to phase home heating off of natural gas and oil to renewable sources and highlighted the need for education on electrification of heating as a pathway to net-zero heating.

Many attendees raised concerns about the split incentive between renters and landlords when it comes to clean energy and energy efficiency retrofits. Renters typically pay utility bills and would most benefit from cost savings of improvements, but building owners are required to make the upfront investment. Due to the high percentage of renters in Somerville, this will be an important challenge to tackle in order to improve the resilience and reduce energy consumption in rented units.

Incentivizing Change

One common question from groups was, "How do we require or enforce change to ensure it happens?" Several groups provided ideas on how this could be addressed. Many groups suggested creating financial incentives for positive actions that reduce emissions or improve resilience, while making sure benefits of incentives are distributed fairly. There was a focus on using incentives to foster the necessary transitions away from fossil fuels. One other idea to change behavior that came up is to make true environmental costs more transparent by implementing an internal carbon price. Other groups highlighted the opportunities to change social norms and using non-financial incentives to change behavior.



Outcome of Somerville Climate Forward

Groups suggested that the outcome of Somerville Climate Forward should include detailed milestones with an actionable implementation plan. This might require having capital and capacity to implement projects and programs or integrating strategies into policies and ordinances within the City. Another group wanted to see metrics to measure progress. One table affirmed the draft vision statement and endorsed the positive tone for taking action. In addition, there was a suggestion to make sure that each working group considers all elements of the vision. A couple of groups encouraged even more aggressive action by suggesting that Somerville should aim to be carbon negative, not just carbon neutral. Finally, there was a call to educate residents on how they can take action today to help work towards Somerville’s climate goals.

The suggestions, ideas, and questions that were raised during these discussions will inform the prioritization criteria and will be considered by the project team and working groups as strategies are analyzed.

Next Steps and how to stay involved

(Please see slides 49 to 55)

APPENDIX A – PRESENTATION SLIDES