



CLIMATE ACTION COMMITTEE

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Climate Action Committee Project Updates

January 10, 2025

Green Communities

Janet responded to DOER's request for clarification after an initial high-level review of Wellesley's Climate Leader Communities program application. A full review of the application should occur in early 2025. DOER published the Program Opportunity Notice for Climate Leader Community technical support (up to \$150,000) and accelerator grants (up to \$1 million). The first accelerator grant application deadline is August 1, 2025.

Outreach

- The Energy Coaching and Outreach Working Groups meet weekly.
- HomeWorks Energy (HWE) continues to schedule a steady stream of home energy assessments through door-to-door canvassing and tabling at the Recycling and Disposal Facility.
 - Roughly 7.4% of residents contacted via door-to-door canvassing sign up for home energy assessments. Marybeth will receive updated canvassing results from HWE before Friday's CAC meeting.
 - In December Marybeth, Chris Chan, Janet Mosley, and Phyllis Theermann took turns shadowing the HWE canvassing effort. All gave positive reports about the canvasser while noting how response rates differed among neighborhoods. Shadowers also noted the absence of door hangers. HWE has promised to resume leaving door hangers for residents who are not home at the time of canvassing.
- Marybeth met with David Wood and Chris Chan of the Municipal Light Plant on December 17 to discuss collaboration and topics of mutual interest.
- Marybeth drafted an outreach consultant scope of work and shared with the Outreach Working Group for feedback.
- On December 10 Marybeth presented to the Wellesley Friendly Aid's Men's Group. The talk was well attended and the audience was highly engaged.
- The Outreach Working Group made plans for a Feb. 11th evening event at the Wellesley Free Library. Tentative title: "6 Climate Actions to Protect our Kids, our Community, and our Planet"

Mobility

From Martha Collins:

Martha shared the following article about congestion pricing in Manhattan that rolled out on January 1, 2025. <https://nyc.streetsblog.org/2025/01/05/congestion-pricing-has-begun-here-is-the-only-explainer-you-need>

Buildings

Municipal Sustainable Building Guidelines Update

Janet and Marybeth met with Joe McDonough (FMD) and Steve Gagosian (PBC) on December 12 to discuss potential updates to the Municipal Sustainable Building Guidelines.

Schools

Marybeth attended a December 4th meeting on a school air conditioning feasibility study.

Energy Coach Program:

- 5 Coaches, 130 Clients
- A few new coaches are in the pipeline
- MLP's new sustainability program coordinator Tess Ruderman is getting up to speed and beginning to take on administrative responsibilities of the Energy Coach program
- Continuing to work on a platform for information sharing across coaches and client data storage
- Updates to the Wellesley decarbonization incentive tables based on the new Mass Save 3-year plan are forthcoming

Waste

Skip the Stuff Initiative

- The Skip the Stuff Working Group met on December 9, 16, and January 6.
- On December 17, the Select Board voted to co-sponsor the STS article. Lisa Gieger and Marybeth attended the meeting.
- On December worked with Gail Sullivan to Skip the Stuff Working Group continues to meet.
- Warrant article submitted?
- On the Advisory agenda for January 8.

Updates from DPW Waste Reduction Coordinators

From Amanda Crowley:

The big priority has been drafting and getting input on what we are calling a "Waste Reduction Roadmap" for Wellesley public schools. This Five-Year Roadmap is designed to guide our work and act as a "living document" that can update and change as we go, and can encompass ideas from all the important stakeholders, including Marybeth Martello, Michelle Foster, Sue Morris, Dave Cohen, FMD/custodial staff, Whitson's and school administrators like Cindy Mahr and school principals. We've been busy sharing and editing the Roadmap, and are getting ready to start in on phase one, which involves conducting an audit of lunchtime waste at WHS and helping principal Jamie Chisum apply for a WEF grant to launch a lunchtime composting and "respect initiative" pilot that we are hoping will

happen fall of 2025, Also in this first phase is meeting with WMS assistant principal Kevin Hoffman and conducting a similar audit at their cafeteria to look for any areas we can help to improve upon right away (low hanging fruit like signage and possibly using better recycling barrels.) We are looking to start work at the elementary level in February.

Gas Transition

From Lise Olney:

Save the date: Next Multi-Town Gas Leaks Initiative meeting will be **Wednesday, February 5, 2025**, 11:00 am to 12:00 pm. [Register here.](#)

Gas Transitions Allies (GTA) meeting, January 2, 2025

GTA is discussing potential legislation for the new session. The filing deadline is January 17. Legislators are likely to refile the “Empowering Municipal Voices” bill that the CAC supported in the last session. This bill included provisions to allow municipalities the authority to require information from the gas companies regarding gas infrastructure, gas pipeline characteristics, pipe repair history, significant environmental impact leaks, purpose of work to be performed, and potentially hazardous conditions. A new version of the bill may include some of the concepts outlined in comments submitted to the DPU by Newton resident Peter Barrer regarding National Grid’s 2025 plan - [Link to Peter’s Comment](#). Peter proposes that the DPU require utilities to specify the actual scope of proposed pipe replacements (they currently don’t) and that the utilities obtain permission from the municipality to repair or replace gas pipes (which the utilities are rarely required to do).

[“Thermal Energy Networks Are the Next Big Thing,”](#) January 1, 2025 – Volts podcaster David Roberts interviews Zeyneb Magavi of HEET and Eric Bosworth of Eversource about the Framingham networked geothermal pilot, what they are learning from the pilot, and what the implications are for the future and across the country.

I highly recommend listening – but here are some notes:

- What is a thermal energy network – individual ground source heat pumps in individual buildings connected to an underground infrastructure of pipes (which can be owned and managed by utilities), providing heating and cooling via vertical geothermal bore holes. Allows for individual customers to control the temperatures in their own buildings. Networking the system creates tremendous efficiency – much greater than a neighborhood of individual air source heat pumps (ASHPs). Even rural areas may be able to use thermal energy networks in town centers.
- Framingham pilot – One mile loop of single family homes, commercial buildings, low-income multifamily apartments. Same workers who laid the pipe in the Framingham pilot are the ones who lay gas pipe. Retrofitting the buildings was a challenge. Pilot was funded by all ratepayer through bills. Still evaluating operating costs but it looks like customers on the loop will have lower utility costs. Marketing was done door-to-door by Eversource marketers who previously sold gas service. About 80% of eligible customers signed up.
- Work force issues – plastic pipe laying is established skill set, but drilling is a novel skill set. Also gas companies generally not *inside* people’s homes.
- Who pays going forward? MassSave or some other financial structure in the state? Building transition will not happen if the building owners have to bear the full cost. Need financial innovation to address this.
- “Obligation to serve” – question about whether the obligation to serve can be defined as obligation to provide heating and cooling, rather than obligation to deliver gas.

- The recent MA climate bill allows gas companies to become “thermal energy companies” instead of just distributing gas, which would ensure their future as viable entities in a decarbonizing world. Should entities other than gas companies be considered for installation and management of thermal networks? Gas companies are well-positioned to provide workforce, load management, and other system services. Municipalities do not seem to be interested in taking on this role and have well established relationships with gas companies.
- Economies of scale – data from the existing system at [CO Mesa University](#) shows decline in cost as you expand the system with additional loops. Planning to double the size of the Framingham pilot and anticipate significant cost reduction for installation. Spare capacity from first loop can be used in a second loop. Thermal loop itself becomes like a thermal energy storage system, allows for even greater stabilization. Marginal customers can be added without adding more boreholes.
- Outside of MA – Eight states have passed laws allowing gas companies to sell thermal energy: MA, NY, VT, CO, MN, WA, CA, MD. Five more are filing legislation this year. Twenty organizations nationwide working on the issue.
- Can work anywhere – question is the payback period. In a mild climate, infrastructure cost may not make as much sense as in more extreme hot and cold climates. Twenty pilots filed so far for utilities to build, with many more being considered across the country – even in states where climate change is not a concern. Oklahoma has a pilot project. Many states are motivated by profitability, affordability, safety, resilience, reliability, and energy security. The energy source is *the Earth* – so it creates predictability, no import/export issues. Great value to having a local energy source and not having to rely on foreign sources so there is a lot of interest around the world.
- Equity issues – HEET’s goal is to see thermal energy networks deployed first in historically disadvantaged communities who would be most likely to suffer from the “last grandma” situation as the gas system is retired.
- “Thermal opportunity” – There is abundant waste thermal energy from heat sources (other than boreholes) that can provide thermal energy for a networked system: waste thermal energy can be captured from sewer systems (system in CO actually doing this), from bodies of water (e.g. Boston Harbor where temps are rising), snow melt, industrial waste heat (e.g. data centers, breweries). Spare heat and spare cooling is everywhere and can be harnessed.
- Electric grid impact – Electrification of winter heating with ASHPs will create a huge spike in demand on the grid. **Indications from the Framingham pilot are that peak and annual load will be about HALF of what it would be with air-source heat pumps with the same customers.** Makes electrification much easier. Could be used strategically in areas where there is not sufficient grid capacity for conversion to ASHPs. Networked geothermal could be deployed instead of ASHPs in order to avoid the need for increasing electrical supply to that area.

Wellesley Municipal Light Plant (MLP) Sustainability Initiatives

From Chris Chan:

- Discontinued negotiations with Solect Energy on the rooftop lease and power purchase agreements for solar on the Hardy and Hunnewell schools, Library, and MLP Garage
- Will work with designated representatives from Select Board and CAC to initiate formulation of the Energy Transition and Climate Resilience Working Group
- Continuing to transition management of Energy Coach program to WMLP (Tess Ruderman, new Sustainability Program Manager)

Budget

On December 8 Marybeth submitted a response to Select Board questions re: the CAC's FY26 Budget Request. On December 9, Marybeth attended the Select Board's Budget Summit to present on the CAC's FY26 Budget Request.

Human Resources

Following a classification and compensation study presentation by a Human Resources (HR) Department consultant, Marybeth updated Sustainability Director and Analyst job documentation submitted to HR in June and collected information on Sustainability Director, Manager, and Coordinator positions from peer communities to share with HR.