

Town of Kennebunkport
Climate Action Planning Task Force and Board of Selectmen Workshop
January 18, 2024
6:00 PM
Village Fire Station (32 North Street)

MINUTES

Selectmen attending in person: Mike Weston, Sheila Matthews-Bull, Jon Dykstra, Marybeth Gilbert.

Selectmen attending via Zoom: Allen Daggett.

1. Call To Order.

Chairman Weston called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM, informing the group that Selectman Daggett was attending remotely via Zoom. He then turned the meeting over to Pam Morgan, Chair of the Kennebunkport Climate Action Planning Task Force.

2. [Update from the Kennebunkport Climate Action Planning Taskforce.](https://www.kennebunkportme.gov/climate-action-plan-task-force)

Pam Morgan informed everyone that the slides being presented in the meeting can be found on the town's website. (<https://www.kennebunkportme.gov/climate-action-plan-task-force>). The members of the committee, assigned by the Selectmen in 2022, are: Pam Morgan (chair), Jen Armstrong (vice-chair), Fred Stafford, Harvey Flashen, Ella Boxall, Steve Kaagan, Jon Dykstra & Mike Weston.

The purpose of the Climate Action Plan is to ensure that Kennebunkport will remain economically and environmentally viable in the decades to come, protecting the health and vitality of the Town, positioning the Town to receive state and federal climate grants, and prioritizing existing funds strategically.

The Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission (SMPDC) works with Kennebunkport and three other towns in Southern Maine as a cohort - Biddeford, Kennebunk, and Kittery. Though each town is working on its own plan, they are also working to help each other. Karina Graeter and Abbie Sherwin of SMPDC were present at this meeting.

The Plan is based on the Comprehensive Plan, the 2020 Select Board climate goals, 75 strategies researched by SMPDC, and feedback from hundreds of community members via survey, community meetings at libraries, with high school students & RSU 21, local business owners, and civic groups. The Plan is also based on the Town's Greenhouse Gas Emissions Study (determining what kinds of greenhouse gases we are emitting) and Vulnerability Assessment (determining the specific impacts of climate change to develop strategies to deal with them).

An impact of major concern is sea level rise. The State's Climate Action Plan is committed to manage 1.5 feet of relative sea level rise by 2050, and 3.9 feet by 2100. Pam presented maps available from the State online, which illustrate the level of flooding in various scenarios, to help communities plan ahead. The other biggest concerns were for the natural and built environment, critical infrastructure (water, sewer, power, Internet), the local economy, and the strain on public services to keep our community safe. Our environment/landscape are the basis for the tourist industry and the reason people want to live here. The town should act to protect it by managing and reducing development that threatens dunes, marshland, water sources, and forest. Education and community development is key.

Sample quotes from community feedback indicated concern about preserving natural resources, how best to reduce damage along coastlines, saltwater intrusion into wells and septic system, and the need to change policy soon for 'doable' changes. Businesses are concerned about how long they can continue in their current location and want to understand specific ways to address flooding in Dock Square.

The strategies that were developed include building resiliency, reducing emissions, and enabling action. Building resiliency includes infrastructure changes (e.g. raising low lying roads), planning for disasters, and preservation and protection of marshes, forests & wetlands as natural buffers against extreme wet weather. Reducing emissions includes supporting electric vehicles and helping homeowners and businesses to weatherize. Enabling action includes the creation of a Climate Action Committee to help enable strategies in the Plan and enabling municipal operations and funding to deal with climate change.

The Plan provides recommendations. To implement them, strategies that require Town funding would be submitted for budget review. Those that require ordinance revision would go to the Select Board and voters for approval. The proposed volunteer Climate Action Committee would support public outreach and the implementation process. Next steps are to get Select Board feedback as well as feedback from the public on the Town's website. The goal is for the task force to return with a Climate Action Plan for the Select Board to vote on in March.

Selectman Gilbert asked what the problem is with "hard armoring" with a seawall. Pam responded that vertical walls encourage erosion because the wave energy erodes the sand under and around the sea walls. Selectman Gilbert also expressed her concern that naturalistic efforts to prevent coastline erosion are futile. Selectman Dykstra agreed but added that hardscape might be able to stave off wave action effects for a few decades. However, with rising oceans he agrees that there's nothing that can be done to save Goose Rocks beach in a 50–100-year time frame. Discussion ensued between Pam and the Board regarding hardscaping vs. natural landscaping to counter storm damage.

The Select Board expressed a sense of futility when it comes to protecting private property but thanked Pam for the work done by the Task Force and for bringing to the Board actionable items to increase the resiliency of public infrastructure.

Laurie Smith, Town Manager, stated that the Town can invest in different plans and models that we think will work for the situation. The strategies that are listed may be a bit narrow in focus and could be made broader.

Selectman Matthews-Bull stressed that there should be recommendations and not requirements. She, the Selectmen, and the Committee also discussed solar, electric buses, and electricity for heating & cooling buildings.

It was agreed that the next step is to take the strategies presented and determine which ones could be implemented that would be most effective and lowest cost. Chairman Weston said it was difficult for the Board to approve the document overall without first naming a few priority items from the list that could be acted on. Karina informed everyone that Biddeford had selected priority strategies based on public input to ensure community support, also considering impact and cost. Selectman Gilbert stated that the nine areas put forward by the committee were too many and we need to winnow it down. She pointed out that some of the areas we're already working on, e.g. a plan to trim tree limbs that could fall on power lines.

Laurie stressed the importance of the plan as a document that can be relied on to provide long-term direction as to what the Town wants to accomplish, independent of Town staff (e.g. Town Manager) and current Select Board members' priorities. She and the Board take their responsibilities and commitment very seriously, and in view of the recent storm damage they've seen, recognize that they have much work to do. What she is hearing from the Board is that they don't want to have a lot of visionary ideas that they can't bring to fruition.

Pam pointed out, and Karina agreed, that having items listed in the plan is a very important justification for getting grants and funding. Karina continued that the plan is a guidance document for staff, the community and partner organization to find things that we can act on. It's proof of community support and engagement to aid in getting Federal grants and provides a record of work that has already been done when there is a turnover in staff. While there is overlap in the stated goals, comprehensive plans relate to the state level. Climate action plans are a free-standing document appealing to the Federal level for funding.

Selectman Daggett, via Zoom, stated that he opposed the document proposing regulations or changing policy. Carol Morris, committee member, responded that the committee had examined a change in policy that would allow citizens to improve their resiliency in ways that are currently prohibited. An example is the current building height restriction. If that regulation were relaxed, a homeowner could raise their house to make it more resilient to rising waters. With the current regulation, however, they would not be permitted to do this. Selectman Dykstra added that any proposed change in regulation would require Select Board and public referendum approval.

Discussion continued regarding the scope of the document and how many items it proposes. Karina suggested adding context for items that are immediately achievable.

As the Select Board members had no more questions, Chairman Weston opened the meeting to members of the public with questions. Melinda Anderson, via Zoom, suggested that we have a Town transfer station with clean cardboard drop off in lieu of the current single stream recycling program, which she feels is less effective.

No motion was necessary. No motion was taken.

3. Storm recovery update and other business.

Laurie thanked the staff who worked round the clock and over the weekend to deal with the aftermath of the second storm of the week. Staff were able to get down the water level at the west end of King's Highway at Goose Rocks Beach. Efforts continue in dealing with the sand cleanup and other issues. Ocean Avenue sustained damage that staff have proposed remediating temporarily with gravel only, though Laurie is concerned that the next storm could wash that out. We are also concerned about the road in sections of Ocean Avenue and Dock Square as well as supports underneath the pilings and businesses in Dock Square. Engineers are scheduled to look at these roads and infrastructure tomorrow and devise a plan to remediate that spends our money wisely. The DEP and Army Corps of Engineers gave approval today for the Town to proceed with the efforts we had proposed last summer to deal with the damage to the parking area at Colony Beach. Considering the additional damage from the recent storms, we're not planning to move forward with that at this time. Colony Beach continues to be closed to vehicular traffic, though pedestrians can continue to go there.

Maine State Emergency Management is taking damage estimate declarations from counties for both the January 10th & 13th storms. The Governor will request a disaster declaration from the Federal Government (FEMA). There are two types of declarations: public and private. It is recommended that individuals report damages to their homeowner's insurance company, whether or not they think they are covered by the policy. Individuals can also go to the Governor's website, Flood Resources and Assistance Hub (<https://www.maine.gov/governor/mills/flood>), and take a survey that will inform the state as to how many uninsured properties were affected, their density, and the estimated amount of damages. This information is used to determine if the Federal Government will aid individuals as well as provide public assistance. This is a survey, not an application. If and when it is determined that help to individuals will be provided, they will need to make a separate application. Documentation is extremely important. Take pictures before, during and after, and keep all receipts.

4. Adjournment.

Motion by Selectman Matthews-Bull, seconded by Selectman Gilbert, to adjourn.
Voted: 5-0. **Motion passed.** Meeting adjourned at 7:49 PM.

Submitted by,
Dave Powell,
Technology Specialist