



GREEN ADVISORY BOARD MINUTES

TUESDAY, April 9, 2024 - 6:00 pm

HYBRID MEETING

GAB Members Present: Cameren Cousins, Mary Smith, Peter Berry

GAB Members Virtual: Erik Larson

Town Staff Present: Lauren West

Town Staff Virtual: Andrea Becerra

Guests Virtual: Aakarsh Tathachar, Aaron Hong

Mary calls the meeting to order at 6:05pm and reads the hybrid meeting statement. Attendees are advised that the meeting is being recorded.

Cameren makes a motion to elevate Erik Larson to act as a voting member to establish quorum. Mary seconds the motion. The GAB votes unanimously in favor, the motion carries.

Business

Resident Concerns

- Students Aakarsh and Aaron are sophomores from AB High who have come to present on a project they are working on to create a device that filters methane from septic biogas
- They present that many homes in Acton have septic tanks, generating biogas which is released into the atmosphere. To combat this issue, they have created a system to filter the impurities from this biogas with bacteria and capture it for energy use
- They describe the details of their filter design and the role of the included bacteria
- They present data showing results from initial testing. The students note their filter is not yet perfect. Their research shows so far that their filter is effective, but they note they must create a larger filter in order to scale up
- They note they are burning the methane to produce energy, but that this is converted to carbon dioxide and less dangerous than other greenhouse gasses
- The students are seeking support or feedback, endorsement, contacts, information on regulations on septic tanks, and funding
 - Peter asks if the filter sits below ground. The students answer it is partially above ground, but mostly below. They suggest their product would still work with access through the septic tank lid on older tank models

- Peter asks if the Town currently captures methane from the landfill at the Transfer Station
 - The Sustainability Office does not believe the Town captures methane from the landfill, but they do at the landfill where the Town trash goes
- Cameren asks if the students think they can make a bigger environmental impact by fully digesting the emissions instead of combusting them for energy?
 - The students have seen approaches like this. It takes more space but is doable. They note that their model includes energy production
- Cameren notes that looking at larger “neighborhood” septic systems could be a good place to start as the impact could be bigger with a large system
 - She notes the larger system in South Acton may be a good place to investigate
- Mary asks what happens to waste created by the filtration system
 - The students explain the rainwater filtration system will flush out the solid waste produced by the bacteria
- Cameren asks what would happen during drought if the system relies on rainwater
 - They explain the bacteria can still survive without water for an extended period of time, but the system including water requires less maintenance. They could add reverse osmosis filters to remove the solid waste as well
- Mary suggests looking at businesses to expand the project
 - True West brewing may be a good one, they have a large septic system
- Andrea will share the GoFundMe link for the project with the GAB

GAB Updates

- Cameren shares that Select Board member Jim Snyder-Grant has been working on updating the Select Board Sustainability Policy with a sustainability working group. The policy was created around 2018 as a sustainability guiding force for the Select Board and Town
- Debra Simes and Cameren have been working with Jim to come up with an updated draft. Once a draft has been created, Cameren and Andrea will bring it to the GAB to get feedback. Jim will bring it to another Select Board member for additional feedback
- They want the document to have more assertive language and explanations on sustainability and climate topics that are relevant to the Town. It should give clearer orders and be educational
- Mary notes they could add a definition of what Net Zero means in Acton
 - Cameren asks if the Town has identified Net Zero already. Andrea notes it is defined in the Climate Action Plan. In general, you reduce emissions as much as possible and account for the rest with carbon offsets
 - Mary suggests talking to Eric Hudson’s speaker about his definition of Net Zero
- Peter asks if the changes in the GAB charge were approved by the Select Board. Andrea notes the new charge was accepted without any edits from the Board

Sustainability Updates

Nature-Based Solutions

- Lauren began looking at what other municipalities have done regarding nature-based solutions. Overall, it was included as a future goal but not a specific metric-based action
 - Boston's climate action plan said they would take steps to reduce consumption - emissions and explore embodied carbon. They hope to expand their tree canopy
 - New York has a series of educational sheets on carbon capture and sequestration.
 - Concord's Climate Action Plan discusses tree cover and increasing tree canopy
- Lauren created a new i-tree analysis for 2024. She notes there may be some changes due to methodology as the previous analysis was completed around 2018. Overall, it shows tree cover has increased, but this may be due to how certain categories were counted. She also notes wetlands were not an included category in the previous analysis. She considers creating a 2018 and 2024 i-tree analysis including wetlands
 - Cameren thinks it would be important to include wetlands because they have an important ecological impact
- Andrea notes the only tree policy the Town has is a public shade tree policy
 - Green Acton was proposing a tree bylaw but it was dropped for this year
- Tree City USA only requires an Arbor Day event and a certain amount of funding for tree planting

GAB Goals

- Acton is working on becoming a Climate Leader Community
 - DOER announced program within Green Communities, called Climate Leaders that makes communities eligible for additional funding after completing set of required tasks
 - We have done most of the tasks, but we need to get the schools on board because we have a regional school district
 - Will be helpful to check in with GAB on progress
 - Erik Larson shares his knowledge from Climate Leaders application in Sommerville
 - Much larger grants than what exist now will be available
 - He asks Andrea about the Town's plan to create the decarbonization roadmap
 - She notes we have one through a facilities study on electrification
 - Acton is working with DOER and AB schools to reformat & fill in information gaps
- Greening the Red House
 - About to send out RFQ, Andrea can share with GAB if they want to get involved
 - Will be electrifying the Red House later
 - We will provide updates on where we are in the process
- Nature-Based solutions assessment

- Lauren is working on this, we will continue to provide updates and add wetlands to i-tree
- GAB providing input on HMP and MVP processes
 - There will be community feedback opportunities for both projects. We will ask for the GABs input
- Goal of 750 APC green accounts by end of 2024
 - We were at 399 now at 421
 - We have seen some progress but need to amp up promo
 - Peter shared Audubon hill signed up for APC and suggests emphasizing promotional materials for businesses
- Cameren suggests that the GAB can help with doing some of the work for these goals and can always provide input
- Mary says the Town can identify issues and ask for expertise, input, and research from the GAB

Earth Week

- Events will be posted on Town Social media and in Sustainability Newsletter
- Acton Clean Up Week sponsored by Green Acton will start on Monday April 22nd. Also encouraging people to pick up invasive garlic mustard
 - Cameren asks DPW how to get rid of it. Mary says you can bag it as trash
 - Lauren will ask about standard process for getting rid of invasives in Town
- Tuesday will be a storytime event
- Cameren suggests moving the storytime to Wednesday as it is an early release on Wednesday at 12:50pm
 - Andrea says we can do an event with food and seeds on Wednesday in addition to Tuesday's storytime
 - Cameren suggests using PTO newsletter for schools to promote events
- Wednesday is the meet with a Clean Energy Coach event
- Energize Acton is hosting a Gardening for Climate Resilience event Wednesday night
- Friday is Acton Arbor Day at NARA park
- Saturday is the Energize Acton Clean Energy Home Tour of the month

Town Meeting Update

- Andrea gives a heads up that there is a citizen's petition for banning gas-powered leaf blowers at this year's Town meeting

Approve Minutes: March 2024

- Cameren asks about the wording stating that Erik nominated himself to be made a full member at the last meeting. Andrea confirms that this process is fine as is
- Erik makes motion to accept the March meeting minutes, Cameren seconds the motion, all vote in favor, the motion passes

Additional Comments

- Peter notes that the Board of Health held a meeting regarding the Battery Storage

- Andrea has not heard any results from this meeting

Cameren makes a motion to close the meeting at 7:04. Erik seconds the motion. By a unanimous roll call vote; meeting adjourned.