



Minutes – Friday, October 25, 2024
Video Conference
9 am to 11 am

Attending: Leon Porter, Rebecca Evans, Bob Howarth, bethany ojalehto mays, Ingrid Zabel, Paul Moore, Brian Eden, Caitlin Tucker, Anne Rhodes, Nick Goldsmith, Carol Chock, Chris Skawski, Aimee Dailey, Dan Lamb, Daniel Keough, Dawn Montanye, Don Haas, Ethan Bodnaruk, Even Kurtz, Gerri Wiley, Guillermo Metz, Christin O’Malley, Irene Weiser, Leigh Miller, Roxanne Marino, David Bradley, Sara Hess, Sarah Culotta, Fernando de Aragon, Anna Kelles, Peter Savio, Sheila Out, Kate Supron, Margaret Johnson, Kimberly Anderson, Ray Burger, Scott Doyle, Janelle Bourgeois, Jennifer Tavares, Jerry Sheng, Sarah Carson, David Kay, Jen Myers, Tom Hirasuna, Marie McRae, Laura Vineyard, Harrison Hensley, Savannah Vega, Peter Bardaglio

A New Direction for Decarbonization – Rebecca Evans

City Sustainability Director Rebecca Evans shared the recent shift in the direction of Ithaca’s climate action plan, explaining how it will reframe the effort to meet the commitments of the Ithaca Green New Deal.

- Rebecca began by providing an overview of her talk:
 1. Human-centering
 2. Hierarchy of needs
 3. IGND sector shift
 4. 2030 goals
 5. What’s next
- Rebecca asked participants to pretend they are talking to Joe about climate change – Joe is struggling with secure housing and finding a stable job. How would you convince Joe to care about climate change?
- Understandably, concerns about climate change have always come down to how they will impact people:
 - Hurricanes
 - Sea Level Rise
 - Droughts
 - Affordability
 - Wildfires
 - Economic Collapse
 - Disease Flooding
 - Air Quality
 - Food Scarcity
 - Power Outages Migration
 - Infrastructure
 - Homelessness

- It's always been about us – if this is true, then why don't our climate goals reflect that? Localities all over the world have climate-related goals and they all put net carbon reduction as their #1 priority.
- Why is this a problem?
 - Inherently nebulous
 - GHG emissions, and therefore progress, cannot be measured by the layperson
 - Impact is slow-moving (positive or negative)
 - Often hard to grasp “future generations”
 - Unrelatable
 - Many don't see themselves represented in the climate movement
 - Many don't consider themselves impacted by climate change until it's too late
 - Trying to induce panic doesn't work
 - Lacks empathy
 - Human priority of need begins now, not when disaster strikes
 - Human experience is diverse
 - Humans respond to emotion before logic
- Most people are struggling with their basic needs
 - Physiological: food, water, shelter, sleep, air
 - Safety & security: health, employment, stability, family
- Focus on climate adaptation connects with these basic needs because it's an immediate threat
- Also climate change is already here so we should be emphasizing climate adaptation
- What does this mean for the IGND? Taking a more human-centered approach
 - Plan to address social and economic problems that have climate outcomes
 - Prioritizes human dignity in climate and urban planning
 - Respects that climate is not #1 priority for most people
 - Prepares for worst impacts of climate change
 - Acknowledges that the climate crisis is multifaceted
- Dignity, toward decarbonization sums up this new approach
 - Labor: good, living wage jobs that are protected from the impacts of climate change
 - Housing: safe, comfortable, and resilient housing for all
 - Racial justice: the undercurrent of IGND
 - Public health: minimizing exposure through preventative care and mitigation
 - Emergency response: rapid response plan for all sectors, for all people
 - Electric reliability: resilient, independent, and decentralized
- Previous approach
 - Racial justice: insuring IGND benefits are shared among all communities
 - EER-TLE: energy efficiency retrofit and thermal load electrification
 - DERS & Grid: decarbonization of grid, fuel mix, and deployment of energy storage
 - Transport: electrification and micromobility
 - Waste: shift to circular economy and source reduction
 - Carbon capture: natural and technological carbon sinks

- Nothing really changing – just different way to connect with people and different narrative
- Not abandoning climate goals – we’ve come this far, why would we drop them?
- Instead, trying to reframe IGND as net benefit scenario
- Our 2030 net-zero goals have not changed and we remain committed to them – our existing programming remains the same, too!
- Because the climate crisis is multi-faceted, our approach must be, too
- That means we must prepare for what’s happening now and in the near- and far-term future
- Our responsibility is to both future and current generations – maximizing net-benefit of programming
- Society was not built to grapple with the challenges of climate change
- Two possibilities:
 - We can spend time rebuilding system now
 - We can alter our approach to work within and around system we have to align with the existing priorities, while pushing for systemic change
- Priorities align with:
 - Council Legislative Priorities
 - Comprehensive Plan
 - Resident Priorities of all Income Levels
 - External Department Priorities
 - Economic Priorities
 - Public Safety
- New approach is strategic in terms of narrative forming and also strategic in terms of getting necessary buy in from people who make decisions so funding can be allocated to get proposed projects off the ground
- What’s next for IGND?
 - Listening sessions
 - Listening to community members about concerns, hopes, networks, and resources
 - How do we get more resident engagement in process?
 - Hearing about this issue more than anything else – people want to participate in shaping IGND
 - Will carry out focus groups at many different levels: resident, city staff, city and county leadership
 - Hope to better understand what people need and what do they want to see from IGND – also come up with new, crowdsourced solutions
 - Risk assessments
 - Assessing how climate change impacts each sector of climate action plan
 - Mapping solutions
 - Identifying and mapping multi-sector solutions that provide opportunities for residents to thrive
- Returning to roots of IGND: grassroots, community-led effort based on trying to serve this community here and now
- IGND may not be scalable but still some learnings to tease out of our experience here

Discussion/Q&A (picked up after Anna's session)

- Ingrid Zabel: What should we say if we're asked whether Ithaca is giving up on its 2030 climate goals?
- Rebecca: No we're not giving up on our 2030 goals but we're also planning on our goals for 2025 – adding in a narrative about climate adaptation
- Peter: What happened in Asheville is instructive – we thought it was a safe haven and it turned out not to be – can't just assume Ithaca is a safe haven
- David Kay: There was a time when we could possibly think we didn't have to deal with climate adaptation questions, but not true now – Asheville just one example of how we need to grapple with adaptation
- We're not just changing narratives, we're adding new work so there will have to be tradeoffs
- We need to mobilize more people outside of City Hall to engage in IGND work
- Sheila Out: What about dredging the flood control channel?
- Rebecca: My understanding is that project is stuck at state level with DEC – I'm not involved with that work – falls more in the wheelhouse of Public Works
- Clearly, dredging would create more space for flood waters to drain
- As part of drafting new climate action plan, I'll be interviewing staff members to make sure I'm working with up-to-date information
- Irene Weiser: How would you attempt people who are struggling to make ends meet that they should care about climate change?
- Rebecca: I'd say I'm not trying to change your priorities because I think the solutions to your priorities are also the solutions to climate change
- As of last night's budget meeting, City officially met Justice 50 goals, allocating 50.2% of capital funds to climate justice communities – worked exactly as envisioned

Climate & Clean Energy Priorities in the Upcoming Legislative Session – Anna Kelles
Assemblymember Anna Kelles (D -125th District) discussed some of the key bills regarding climate and clean energy to be taken up in the next legislative session, which will get underway in January.

- Want to share some of things I'm working on and want to prioritize because I've been working on them for years
- Two really important pieces of legislation in NYS right now
 - Climate Change Superfund – requires polluters to pay for damage they've already inflicted – backwards looking
 - Cap & Invest – forward looking
 - Anna sponsoring bill that outlines version of Cap & Invest has guardrails included
 - Have to be cautious about energy-intensive industries that might leave state if too much pressure exerted – need, however, to put cap on number of years they get to make energy transition
 - State will create credits that industries using a lot of energy will have to buy to stay under allowed GHG emissions

- No indications so far whether governor will sign superfund bill, which made it through both houses at end of last session – need to keep up pressure on governor to make sure she signs it
- Tends to hold off signing more controversial bills until after elections take place
- Will be one of most important environmental bills signed into law in long time
- We've passed lot of environmental bills in past few years, but governor has largely disregarded them – backing off on congested pricing is one of more recent examples
- Need to hold governor accountable and not let her back off the way she has recently – need to hold her feet to fire
- Cap & Invest was supposed to be in place by end of this year but we don't even have draft proposal yet
- We have to hold ourselves accountable for legislation that's already been passed – have to make sure they get implemented, such as CLCPA
- Need to put floor under allowances in Cap & Invest so they push change, not just make it cost of doing business as usual
- Have to keep it from simply becoming cap & trade that creates secondary market for allowances
- Need to avoid designing system that generates even greater corporate consolidation
- Part of problem with NY HEAT Act is that there are lot of pieces that are pretty confusing – without changing it's primary purpose it could be rewritten so it's less convoluted
- Lot of new assembly members so there will be lots of reshuffling when it comes to sponsoring bills and chairing committees
- Another important piece is the Just Energy Transition Act (JETA) – Anna is chief sponsor of that bill – hasn't received as much public attention as NY HEAT or Climate Change Superfund
- Because advocacy groups haven't been pushing JETA, hasn't received much attention from assembly leadership
- Bill creates blueprint for retiring 6GW of fossil fuel peaker plants – Anna modified bill so that it pulls in 29 power plants already retired to take advantage of fact that they are already tied into grid to build out renewable energy projects at these sites
- Could then take peaker plants offline as renewable energy infrastructure is developed on site of retired power plants
- Can't just focus on peaker plants and take them offline all at once because it would destabilize grid – bill designed to take sidestep, then forward step
- Two retired power plant sites where renewable energy projects have been developed: Danskammer and Ravenswood – so we've already developed model and demonstrated its feasibility
- Can use solar and wind to carry out electrolysis for production of hydrogen, which then becomes a kind of energy storage
- Next important priority is GAP Fund Act – would fund foundational upgrades such as new roof or black mold removal for LMI households that would then allow them to qualify for EmPower+ program to fund tightening envelope, adding insulation, replacing windows, etc.
- Program intended to help remove barrier to entry into existing electrification programs

- Will be focus of much outreach and advocacy in upcoming legislative session – Anna has been working closely with Lisa Marshall and Jessica Azulay on this bill
- Hope Climate Superfund and Cap & Invest could help finance this effort – perhaps also some IRA funding
- Fashion Act is another important bill – got very close to getting it passed in last session but thrown off track by congested pricing controversy right at end of session
- Very few other industries as unregulated globally as fashion industry and are also among greatest contributors to GHG emissions
- Although legislation would be confined to NY, it would create mechanism for global regulation
- Stipulates that if you want to sell your fashion products in NYS, you have to map out your supply chain and GHG emissions using international GHG protocols
- Have to directly measure rather than just estimate emissions and have to establish baseline for both emissions and chemical inputs and outputs
- Seeks to mitigate both climate and water impacts – need to demonstrate substantive and consistent improvements over time – if not, can be fined up to 2% of your gross global income
- NY one of most important fashion capitols in world and eighth largest economy – no major actor in fashion industry would say we just won't sell in NY
- EU just put in place due diligence regulation much like that being proposed in Anna's Fashion Act, so makes it more likely that NYS legislature will pass it in upcoming session – now NY will be playing catchup rather than leading pack
- Fashion industry responsible for up to 8% of all global GHG emissions – could double or even triple by 2050
- Amount of slave labor used in fast fashion is shocking
- Anna also working on issue of circular economy in construction – only 16 years left of available landfill space in NY
- Will have to either lower standards of landfill operations with ensuing environmental harm or export most of our waste at tremendous cost to taxpayers
- Wants to start development of circular economy with building sector – has been working with Cornell Circular Economy Lab and CROWD for last couple of years
- Deconstruction rather than demolition key to this approach
- Will be introducing bill in upcoming session with Sen. Kavanaugh as sponsor in other chamber
- First piece of legislation provides model ordinance for local municipalities to adopt – will provide grants to municipalities that adopt the ordinance
- Grants could be used to establish hubs for storage of deconstructed materials and to developers to offset additional cost of using these materials
- Second piece of bill will create a state certification through Dept of Labor to certify contractors who've attained the training to carry out deconstruction v. demolition
- Third part of bill is to modernize current process DEC has in place for reporting waste that goes to landfills or recycling centers – would create data base that requires standard measures for reporting
- Way for people to identify what deconstruction materials are available around state for their projects to help create marketplace
- Creating robust circular economy would help stabilize our supply chain and overall economy and create jobs

Discussion/Q&A

- Peter: One of key barriers to building utility-scale renewable energy projects is siting issue – can avoid issue by placing these projects on sites of retired power plants – makes complete sense
- Also makes sense to fund basic upgrades for LMI homes so they can qualify for NYSERDA's energy efficiency and electrification programs
- Similarly, deconstruction as a step towards building a circular economy makes total sense
- Sarah Carson: Do you think state agencies are adequately resourced to carry out their implementation and oversight duties to ensure state meets its CLCPA duties?
- Anna: No, their not – one of greatest challenges in state – we have not provided enough funding for agencies like DEC and PSC for adequate personnel
- Really impressed with work they do carry out with the limited resources they have available – people think agencies have so much more power than they really do