

Climate Coalition of Somerville Presentation
Board of Aldermen - Thursday, 9/27/18

Thank you for the opportunity to be here in conversation with you this evening. My name's Leigh, and I'm speaking tonight on behalf of the member groups of the Climate Coalition of Somerville, or CCS for short. We're incredibly grateful for this invitation and for your considering us a resource on climate change and sustainability efforts. This is also timely because, as some may not know, this week's actually the Boston area's first ever Climate Preparedness Week.

On Tuesday, I was at a community meditation and the woman leading the group shared something simple, yet profound. She said, "Pay attention. This is life. In this moment, we are alive." That was Tuesday, and now it's Thursday, and we are here, together. And, in this moment, we are alive. And, what does it mean to be alive right now? September 27, 2018, in Somerville, Massachusetts. Well, it means a lot of things if we are in fact paying attention.

It means this (Photos of HonkFest and Fluff Fest)... and this (Photos of One Somerville and rally)... and this (Photos of Story Time and South Street).

Intentional decisions and actions created these environments, and that's awesome. But there are also decisions and actions (and sometimes lack thereof) that have created:

this environment (flooding in Union Square in 2010)...

and this environment (Amelia Earhart Dam and Draw 7 Park in March 2018)...

and this environment (Temp reads on different surfaces at locations where children play -

Right = Surface is artificial turf. Temp difference is almost 50 degrees!

Left = Surface is poured rubber. Temp difference is 90 degrees.

And, this environment, our city.. (Four maps of Somerville)- all to convey connection between lack of open, green space, abundant pavement, extreme heat exposure, and our fellow residents of communities of color and low-income communities who currently endure this environment.

Everything we're looking at here can either be attributed to, exacerbated by, or a serious contributor to climate change, all of which have serious impacts and costs, and all of which, without thoughtful, comprehensive decision-making by you, the Board of Aldermen, will certainly grow, and all I showed you before relating to culture, community, and our youth will no longer be possible, because our city will be uninhabitable.

Some of the predicted impacts of climate change vary, and we don't know everything. We're human, and we can't know everything. But, we can listen and learn. And, on the topics of sustainability and climate change, we know more than enough to do much more than what we've been doing so far.

We know sustainability and equity are shared values of Somerville's residents, as clearly laid out in the 2010 comprehensive plan SomerVision.

We know our contributions to climate change (Slide w/ GHG chart) as laid out in the 2016 GHG Inventory, and we know our vulnerabilities (Slide w/ CCVA chart) as indicated in the 2017 Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment.

Our Mayor, this city, set a target goal of carbon neutrality by 2050 back in 2014, and we know a way forward, as initially prescribed in the Carbon Neutrality Pathways Assessment (Slide w/ CNP chart). Starting in 2014 and looking ahead to 2050, this chart identifies the strategies we need to pursue to effectively reduce emissions. It's 2018, four years in, and the carbon emissions curve has barely budged. It was just reported today that the upcoming UN report on climate and emissions reduction concludes that the world is "nowhere near on track" to meet emissions reduction goals.

Having participated in the City's Somerville Climate Forward working groups this past year, CCS knows that the about-to-be-released Climate Forward Plan will provide "a set of implementable actions that will reduce Somerville's contribution to climate change and prepare the city for the unavoidable impacts of climate change."

The groundwork has been set, and we know there are people throughout this city who serve as allies in creating a more sustainable, resilient, and prepared city, such as the City's Office of Sustainability and Environment, the Commission on Energy Use & Climate Change, the newly forming Urban Forestry Committee, and us, the Climate Coalition of Somerville, who formed in 2017 to more cohesively and effectively drive sustainability and climate efforts forward here.

How we choose to work together, the decisions we make, and the approaches we pursue now can lock us in for decades. We can react, driven by fear and ignorance, or respond, driven by compassion and curiosity.

So, let's choose to respond. On addressing climate change, how can the City of Somerville and you, the Board of Aldermen, support the approaches of adaptation, mitigation, and restoration, and be actual leaders, both in the community and world, by being responsive?

At the request of the Board of Aldermen, CCS member organizations have compiled some of many responsive actions into an organized doc, which we'll gladly submit after tonight's meeting. As we have your attention here, we'd like to lift up some of these actions as examples...

ADAPTATION

On adaptation, which focuses on reducing Somerville's vulnerability to sudden changes, like flooding and extreme heat, actions we strongly advocate for include...

1. Request that the Planning Department provide an incremental plan that ensures 125 acres of additional open space (ideally green because it benefits public health and climate change adaptation) is actually achieved by 2030, as specified in SomerVision.
2. Monitor development plans for Draw 7 Park and other low-lying areas for their flood mitigation potential, including green space, especially along the waterfront, to reduce flooding impacts.

3. Support and, as opportunities arise, collaborate with the Office of Sustainability, other city departments, and community groups on the Climate Forward plan's Healthy and Resilient Communities preparedness education and communication planning.
4. As will also be outlined in the Climate Forward plan, approve the creation of a Stormwater Task Force, as well as a Stormwater Enterprise Fund that will, through a fee-for-use approach, help separate out stormwater costs from sewer.

What's possible if you take these adaptation actions?

1. More equitable funding of infrastructure improvements.
2. We'll have social and biological systems that are flexible and can respond (there's that word again) instead of react to flooding and heat fluctuations.
3. More coordinated and collaborative communication between city entities and the communities they serve.

MITIGATION

On climate change mitigation, which focuses on actually reducing our emissions and contribution to warming, we strongly advocate for actions that help us actually achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. Some actions include...

1. While reviewing the zoning overhaul, prioritize building energy performance requirements. This includes examining mandates and incentives for new development and pushing for greener retrofits over time. The latter could start by considering an ordinance to require rental licenses, an idea explained in the Climate Forward plan and a first step in enforcing rental energy requirements.
2. Ask City negotiators who'll be working on the next Community Choice Aggregation (CCA) bulk purchase of electricity to push the default amount of renewables from 5% above state mandated levels to 25% above (per Brookline) or even 40% above (per Newton, pending). And, to optimize outreach to the community on CCA, approve designating marketing funds in the budget.
3. Also there many sources of climate mitigation knowledge right in our own city... Contact Meredith Elbaum, who's currently president of the Massachusetts Chapter of the U.S. Green Building Council and also happens to be a Somerville resident. Ask her to share the report that's due out this fall from the US GBC that covers how municipalities can implement net zero energy initiatives.

So, what's possible if you take these mitigation actions?

1. Reach carbon neutrality by 2050 and, ideally, much sooner.
4. Renters, who occupy almost $\frac{2}{3}$ of housing units in Somerville, will empowered and more invested in where they live, and housing owners will transition to renewable energy sources.
5. And here we have photos of what's possible regarding development... (**PHOTOS: Net zero house; Maxwell's Green development**)

RESTORATION

What about restoration? In many ways, restoration here really means returning Somerville to its natural ecosystem, an ecosystem that's spent decades being disrupted, covered and destroyed by

construction and paving. Uncovering nature and restoring our ecosystem serves not just adaptation and mitigation purposes, but supports healing and resilience on so many levels, which'll be crucial in emergent, stressful situations induced by climate change.

1. Support residential depavings:
 - a. Remove financial barriers and permitting issues when residents want to depave properties
 - i. City-driven fees and street cleaning fines
 - ii. Waive dumpster permits for depaving
 - b. Support a budget line in city funds for purchasing tools, safety gear, and creating a storage facility
 - c. Attend a depaving party - Sat, Sept 29th at 11 Glenwood Road
2. Pass the Minimum Green Space and Native Plant ordinances currently with the Open Space, Energy, & Environment Committee.
3. Through OSEE Committee, continue inquiry and request of Mayor to establish an open green space acquisition fund.

So what's possible when we restore our natural ecosystem?

1. Critical pollinators supported, which are essential for plant life.
2. Health and wellness of residents improve. People and the environment begin to heal.
3. City saves money because decreased need for fertilizers, watering, and healthcare.
4. Critical environmental justice issues related to accessibility to open and unpaved, green space, and extreme heat exposure are addressed.
5. And here we have photos that show what restoration looks like when residents and the City feel empowered... (PHOTOS: Depaving- Boston Street and Maple Ave; Quincy Street Pocket Park)

LEADERSHIP

So, what about that leadership piece? How can you be leaders on climate change responsively within this community, and how can Somerville serve as a model for other municipalities in ways that connect, educate, and empower residents? We have some ideas...

1. As with the styrofoam and plastic bag bans, continue chipping away at the single-use materials economy by passing a plastic straw ban ordinance. This is already being pursued in other cities, like Seattle.
2. Support holding utilities accountable for gas leak repairs by participating in regional meetings where officials from other cities and Mothers Out Front members are putting pressure on the DPU and utilities to fix the large volume leaks.
3. In continuing the BOA's unanimous support in early 2018 on divestment, request public testimony from the mayor's office, Somerville retirement board, state reps and senators on how they intend to proceed with divesting the pension fund from the fossil fuel industry.
4. Your comms with residents in the wards you serve -- Use channels such as your newsletters and interactions at block parties, public events, and community meetings to empower and educate constituents on sustainable steps they can take and help address climate. Some ideas:

- a. How to decrease use of plastic straws
- b. Suggestions on sharing economy ideas and forums
- c. Connections to low-impact development and permaculture resources
 - i. Rain barrels (installers, free/discounted barrel programs)
 - ii. Depaving property (Somerville Climate Action)
 - iii. Tree and native plant sales
- d. Encouragement to opt up to 100% renewable energy for their electricity

Which raises some important questions here about leadership, about being not only responsive, but responsible. And, responsible leaders, they lead by example. I'd be curious to know how many of you have opted up to 100% renewable energy?

CCS really appreciates being a resource for you all. But it's really important you know that, for many residents, you are the primary resource on climate and sustainability. Counter to what the BOA website says, your power and responsibility extend far beyond passing ordinances and approving budgets. You are in constant relationship with residents. You need to be reporting to your constituents on sustainability and climate, giving these at least the same weight as you do other city affairs, if not more.

So, let's make sure we're paying attention. In Somerville, September 27, 2018, this is life (quick scroll through photos while speaking). In this moment, we are alive. In this moment, we need each other, and we need you, the BOA, to take action so that our city can build relationships, resilience, and attain its carbon neutrality goals well in advance of 2050. Thank you!

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