

The Article 36 Task Force of the Town of Norwich met in special session on Wednesday, July 21, 2021 to receive public comment and provide information about the task force's "initial work plan" which it is charged to present to the Select Board and town manager by August 1.

The meeting was held in person at Tracy Hall and was accessible by Zoom. Jack Cushman, Ernie Ciccotelli, and Robert Gere were present in person and Eva Rosenbloom and Aaron Lamperti attended by Zoom, so all members were present. Several members of the public attended in person or via Zoom. The session was recorded.

Cushman, the chairman, stated at the outset that the only purpose of this meeting was to give the public a chance to review the draft document and comment on it. The draft is expected to be considered further, edited by the task force, and adopted at another meeting on July 29. The document is not to recommend at this time any specific measures for cutting direct purchases and combustion of fossil fuels in town-owned fleets, buildings and other facilities -- that will come later and was not the purpose of this meeting.

The draft document was presented as the sole packet item when public notice was given of this meeting, and all participants had copies available for review.

Cushman said the public could also comment in writing before the editing session on July 29.

Cushman presented the document by summarizing each section in brief and asking for comments.

Cushman noted that the preamble was intended to present the Task Force consensus on the urgent need for the town (and society as a whole) to reduce its consumption of fossil fuels as a way of reaching science-based international, national, state and local goals to reach effectively zero emissions in the decades ahead.

There were no objections to this section. Two members of the public, Doug Wilberding and Linda Gray, suggested inserting material to give a few examples of steps already taken by the town, e.g. the recent decision to purchase a fuel efficient police cruiser. Cushman took note of the idea.

Harry Roberts said the preamble might also mention initial savings that might be available by "more rigorous management of existing infrastructure." Management of the vehicle fleet or turning down thermostats are examples. Cushman said those are valuable suggestions but the TF is not yet at the point of making specific recommendations, but that we certainly intend to address those, and the Aug. 1 report could do a better job of indicating when we plan to address specific actions, always with public comment.

Cushman described the requirements set down by the charging document for this Aug. 1 report. There was no comment on this section of the report.

Cushman noted that the August 1 report might include several attachments, possibly including those working documents stored by the committee in a publicly accessible Google Drive whose URL is included in the draft report.

Cushman gave some examples of possible attachments such as the EEI proposal for Tracy Hall that was developed after Article 36 passed; another example is the greenhouse gas inventory completed by EVA Rosenbloom and the work of the task force to identify specific combustion points of fossil fuels.

Mary Layton, a member of the Select Board in attendance, urged the committee to include as many supplemental documents as is reasonable, so as to provide the fullest possible picture of the work being done by the Task Force. She mentioned the data that was recently presented to the SB about fire equipment.

Cushman said useful documents could be included by attachment or by reference.

Rosenbloom emphasized that the TF calculations of GHG impacts is focused entirely on emissions under direct municipal control, such as vehicles, equipment and buildings. Cushman agreed. We do not focus on economy-wide emissions. We do have flexibility to explore broader ideas.

Cushman said the TF expects to be coordinating with every relevant town body, and that we have representatives on the TF from energy, planning and the SB itself.

Cushman noted the italicized text of the draft definition of policies, plans and programs. There were no comments on this section of the draft, which is required by the charge to the Task Force.

Wilberding mentioned as an aside that the Trustee of Public Funds was examining green lending, low amounts of our own funds at low interest rates. Cushman and Wilberding both noted that this idea was beyond the scope of this meeting but that financing mechanisms should be on the agenda going forward.

Cushman noted that the TF is charged with identifying work done to date on baseline conditions. He said the work is well under way, and that versions of the working papers would be included in the final document.

Cushman said that the data points to the fact that the overwhelming majority of consumption and emissions are from vehicles and equipment ($\frac{2}{3}$) and heating buildings ($\frac{1}{3}$). To some extent, existing technologies are more pertinent to buildings and facilities, where the ones for vehicles and equipment are down the road and require thoughtful staging. We expect a big piece of our work to be trying to set a chronology of when our vehicle and equipment is due to retire and what the state of technology is likely to be.

This allows coordinating emissions with long term capital and other plans.

Roberts repeated the importance of fleet management to reduce consumption. "We don't have that in this town," he asserted.

Cushman called this a subject that we are bound to address in the months ahead.

Cushman called attention to the draft document numerical table of fuel consumption and emissions, prepared by Rosenbloom. We are also aware of gaps in the data.

Rosenbloom expanded on this: our data has a baseline of FY 2019, the most up to date we have. Data gaps are usage per vehicle which we cannot generate for 2019. Moving forward we might be able to see which vehicle uses what amount of fuel.

Cushman noted that the SB wants us to help establish better baselines, tracking, and evidence in the future. It is not in our initial work plan to present comprehensive data and lock it down. Rosenbloom agreed.

Moving on to coordination, Cushman noted the active program of engagement would come in September, October and November. Lamperti drafted a working timeline which is incorporated in this draft. It culminates at the end of the year, in time for presenting possible unspecified warrant articles should that be an outcome of the process. An initial draft of the task force final report would be presented in October for comment, with a final report in time for the December meeting of the Select Board. He noted that the TF does not have decision making authority. He expressed the task force commitment to consensus.

Pamela Smith asked what we are referring to in regard to warrants.

"We don't know," said Cushman, as we have not discussed specific measures.

If any recommendations were to require a warrant article, we would not want to spring any surprises -- we would want to have public discussion. We have not had any discussions of possible warrant articles. If there are to be warrant articles they need to come before the Select Board well in advance of town meeting.

Smith said that the capital plan process occurs as early as September and that the deadline for warrant articles in January might not mesh with the capital plan previously endorsed by the Select Board.

Cushman said that there might conceivably be warrant articles that did not involve capital spending, such as planning provisions; or that he could imagine a warrant article that would affect capital planning in future fiscal years. He said Smith's comments were very helpful and illuminated an issue that should probably be addressed in the initial work plan and in conversations with town officials and committees.

Smith said the town has continued to make decisions to purchase vehicles and equipment that use fossil fuels without incorporating these capital expenditures in a capital plan.

Cushman asked that we focus our work on the draft Aug. 1 report. He repeated that Smith's comments on meshing Task Force recommendations with capital planning process are significant and could be addressed in further drafting of the document.

Roberts asked whether the possible action list contained in committee working document folders was a priority listing or was in "random" order. Cushman noted that this list was not included in the initial work plan document, although it might be incorporated by insertion, by reference or by attachment during further editing. He asked Lamperti to comment on the order of the list, which Lamperti had prepared and is updating. Lamperti said the list order was "absolutely not" a priority listing but rather was written down as ideas came to his mind or were suggested to him by others.

Cushman opened discussion of the scope of work, a requirement of the TF charge.

He called for public comment on the scope of work, now or in future correspondence. There was no comment.

Cushman asked for any broad comment on future expectations -- meshing Norwich progress with Vermont aspirations, using Federal infrastructure funding, etc. "We have a feeling that there is a long way to go," he said.

He called for comment on the thought that the Select Board should make the climate crisis a high priority, or on considering it when hiring a new public works manager. He emphasized that this is a chairman's draft, and that the public comment process would inform his future work and the final action on July 29.

Ciccotelli said the best line in the document was the one urging the Select Board to prioritize climate change.

Ciccotelli said he had a number of comments which he could make in this meeting or in writing. Cushman said they might be heard on the spot; Ciccotelli began by discussing indirect emissions. Lamperti suggested that this meeting might best be used to hear from the public and that the committee could proceed with individual members at the next meeting. Ciccotelli accepted this and said again that he could provide his insights later.

There were no further substantive public comments. The committee adjourned.

