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Report of the Cambridge Climate Emergency Action Group on 2011 Climate Change Week and Findings and Recommendations from Activities Since the 2009-2010 Climate Congress

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1. Background of Climate Change Week.

September 2009. Cambridge City Council hearing on Climate Emergency.

2009-2010. The Cambridge Climate Congress was convened by Mayor Denise Simmons, continued by Mayor Davis Maher, and endorsed by seven former Cambridge mayors. Delegates met on three Saturdays and developed proposals covering energy efficiency, transportation, education, natural resources, and citizen awareness and action.

April 2010. The Cambridge Climate Emergency Action Group (CCEAG) was formed to promote awareness and action and implement the proposals of the Congress. To begin planning, the Action Group convened representatives of environmental, neighborhood, business, religious groups and community schools who discussed elements of an awareness/action campaign.

May-June 2010. At a five session roundtable, seven Action Group delegates met with the City Manager, Assistant Manager, Mayor, Vice Mayor, and staff from Community Development and Public Works. to discuss suggestions from the Climate Congress and how the City and civic sectors might best work together. There were side discussions on goals & measurement, messaging, and the 29 proposals of the Climate Congress. Notes of these meetings were prepared by Ona Ferguson of Consensus Building Institute. (Best formatted, but unofficial, version of review of 29 proposals and notes on the fifth meeting will be submitted separately in electronic format.)

Summer-Fall 2010. Action Group members were present at many farmers' markets and community events, collecting 1400 signatures on a pledge reading: "I understand that there is a climate emergency. I support efforts at all levels, personal, local, regional, national, and global to respond to it ..." Nearly half of the pledge signers requested a monthly email update.

Fall-Winter 2010. The Climate Emergency Action Group initiated a monthly open forum, inviting participation of all community groups in building an awareness/action campaign. Attendance ranged from 10 to 30 over 8 months. Most environmental and several religious groups were represented. Here plans were launched for Climate Change Week, which was seen as an opportunity for these groups to work together, publicize their efforts, and celebrate their common purpose.

2. Climate Change Week--May 13-21, 2011.

Community groups were invited to plan events to be part of the Climate Week program and/or to observe the week in their own way. Volunteers planning events were Cambridge Energy Alliance, Home Energy Efficiency Team, Swissnex (with Vice Mayor's Office), Climate Justice Task Force and Pastor Fred Small of the First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church, Friends of Alewife Reservation, Elena Saporta of CREATE (Cambridge Renewable Energy Action Team---created at the Climate Congress), Ileana Jones of The Climate Project, City Sprouts, and Green Streets Initiative. The Action Group took responsibility for a kick-off event in cooperation with the First Parish Church Climate Justice Task Force (a Cambridge Forum). The Action Group also planned the 'Witnesses of Climate Change' event, with testimony from farmers and fishermen worldwide, and the final 'ActionFest' with dozens of displays on energy efficiency, political action, conservation, and community efforts for sustainability.

The Cambridge Community Foundation, Green Decade Cambridge, Relay Rides, and individual organizers contributed financial support. Eastern (formerly Wainwright) Bank and Harvard University provided venues for events and meetings respectively.

Success of Climate Change Week could be evaluated by various measures:

- 1) numbers in attendance at events, including assessment of whether or not they were new faces,
- 2) progress in building relationships and understanding among community groups,
- 3) consideration of the impact on the community in general of exposure to public notices relating to climate change, including more appealing graphics,
- 4) personal change occasioned by the Climate Week program as measured by numbers signing up to be involved with groups at the ActionFest (a respectable number) or signing into the Action Group's cceag.org website to pledge specific actions (only 10 at the ActionFest),
- 5) innovative content on current impacts of climate changes on people around the world in the Climate Witnesses event (video recording of testimony available for viewing from website: www.cceag.org).

The best attended event of Climate Change Week was the Swissnex '2000 Watt Society' presentation on May 17th. with well over 100 attendees. The Cambridge Forum/kickoff on May 13 attracted about 75. The ActionFest on May 21 had respectable attendance by 1 pm, but many more visitors could have been accommodated. Most attendees have given good reports as to the quality of the events and the networking opportunities they occasioned. However, a good proportion of attendees may well have been the 'usual suspects'.

Numbers and variety of attendees might have been improved by more outreach and publicity (if the Action Group had access to more resources and volunteers). Action Group volunteers who initially hoped to make personal contact with hundreds of community groups and churches soon turned from outreach activities to publicity--writing newspaper articles, calendar entries, press releases, posting flyers, and sending out emails.

3. Findings and Recommendations

3.1. Awareness

Finding: Climate change is on people's minds. Reinforced by news of tornadoes, floods, wildfires, drought, and rising food prices, awareness of climate change is high. A great majority of people understand that climate change is caused by human activity. (74 % of Massachusetts residents in the February 2011 MassInc survey *The 80 Percent Challenge: A Survey of Climate Change Opinion and Action in Massachusetts*) Only about half of these people are aware that the impacts of climate change are and will be severe, and many are ill-informed about its exact causes.

Recommendation: There is no need for a local effort to raise awareness about climate change but there is a need for public education about its causes with specific attention to local and locally caused emissions, likely consequences and current impacts of climate change locally and around the world, and the importance of rapidly and substantially reducing emissions with the aim of stabilizing the climate.

3.2. Building a Movement

Finding: We see no prospect of building a mass popular movement to stop climate change in the foreseeable future. In our conversations with hundreds of Cambridge residents we observed pessimism and avoidance to be much more common obstacles to action than denial, and the MassInc survey found that people who are convinced that global warming is a serious problem are no more likely to be taking personal action than those people who dismiss the issue.

Recommendation: A strategy for climate security should not rely on or expect a popular mandate or public demand for government actions and policies to stabilize the climate.

3.3. Public Support for Government Action

Finding: At the same time, there is broad public support for government actions to fight climate change, evidenced in both responses to our awareness campaign and confirmed by the MassInc Survey. It is hard to find anyone who believes that climate change is a serious problem (32% in the survey) and who does not also support stronger public action to stop it. Those who dismiss the problem are a small minority. An example is the acceptance of the increase of the resident parking permit fee as a source for funding for traffic reduction initiative (useful for but not explicitly connected to climate protection).

Recommendation: The City can and should proceed confidently to enact well-reasoned policies and take practical actions to cut local greenhouse gas emissions to effect climate stability. We say "should" because the scientific reports and climate news since the City Council recognized a climate emergency two years ago indicate that the situation has become more urgent.

It is not clear from either our campaign or the MassInc survey how deep this support is for actions and policies that would be costly or seen as disruptive changes, but we are confident that the public would accept far more action involving substantial changes for climate protection than they have yet seen at any level of government, including the municipal. This acceptance can be greatly increased and solidified if the policies are coordinated with a program of public education about the serious human impacts of climate change. (Only about half of those Massachusetts residents who are aware of climate change are ~~not~~ aware that it is a serious problem.)

A public gathering with diverse and broad representation of the community, perhaps modeled on the 2009-2010 Climate Congress, would be a useful sounding board for gauging opinions about specific potential actions by the City and voluntary organizations. (The Climate Protection Action Committee is not properly constituted to perform this function.)

3.4. Recommended Actions

Finding: There is no shortage of proposals for action by the City. See both the 29 proposals of the Climate Congress and the notes of the May-June 2010 City-CCEAG round table meetings prepared by Ona Ferguson of the Consensus Building Institute. Work on goals & measurement was referred to the Climate Protection Action Committee. Inclusion of climate information in City View was suggested (and since accomplished).

Recommendation: Recognize the need and urgency for deep cuts in emissions, take more action and leadership in multiple areas, and be open to innovative solutions which may require changes at the state level. Change the emphasis from planning to accelerated action.

Among City intentions expressed at the May-June 2010 roundtable, but not yet accomplished,

Providing structures for peer-to-peer education, guidance and promotion of energy efficiency in the commercial/industrial sector, such as a "Business Climate Emergency Congress" .

Redesign of City website to show what City is currently doing. Important information is buried in committee reports and applications for funding.

Noted at the roundtable:

Staff dealing with climate protection have been tasked with promoting change within other departments of the City as well as outside. Since City employees all have the potential to be agents for needed change, measures taken to engage their participation are valuable.

Ideas discussed at the Climate Congress also include:

Appoint someone to oversee efforts in municipal, business, and institutional sectors.

More aggressive water conservation measures (water uses 13% of municipal energy), such as more alerts for water leaks, reformatting bills for comparisons, promoting waterless urinals, storage of water for gardening.

Enforcement of existing ordinances related to vehicle idling and recycling, which is mandatory for parks, schools, businesses, and large apartment buildings.

Promotion of projects such as student-advocated efforts to compost food scraps and ban styrofoam in school lunchrooms.

Support projects involving citizen volunteers in caring for common welfare together via energy efficiency projects, tree maintenance,, and even neighborhood cleanups.

Multiply building energy efficiency via workshops for public and negotiate with utility company for more effective program and information design.

Seek opportunities for city programs related to youth, employment, and economic development to advance climate protection goals and help prepare youth to engage in a livable future.

Consider more boldly advancing the many excellent ideas relating to transportation (e.g. dedicated bus lanes) which have been awaiting more perceived public support.

Revisit previously considered ideas, such as a ban on 2-cycle leaf blowers.

Consider projects which the City hasn't felt are in its realm (although other cities do), such as acknowledging the effect of food choices on climate. (e.g. "Meatless Mondays").

3.5. Citizen Engagement and Voluntary Action

Finding: Increasing numbers of residents are participating in targeted direct actions related to climate protection, energy efficiency, and reduction of greenhouse emissions, such as building weatherization "barnraisings," walk-bike days, efficient light bulb exchanges, electricity use monitoring, re-use of goods, recycling of materials, and natural conservation. The size of some of these efforts is limited by the capacity of organizers, who are themselves committed volunteers, and not by the number of willing participants.

Recommendation: Support voluntary and nonprofit organizations that further municipal climate protection goals, policies, and programs. These goals should include protection of natural resources and the ecosystems on which other species depend.

4. CCEAG Agenda

CCEAG is re-evaluating its mission and priorities going forward from Climate Change Week and in view of its partnership with a reconstituted Green Decade Cambridge. Summer actions will probably include outreach to build awareness and action through tables at farmers markets and other events. We will invite residents to contribute to our on-line community inventory of actions for climate protection and security at our website:

<http://www.cceag.org/user/me/edit/Take%20Action> (registration required). We invite every City Councilor to participate in this community project.