Meeting Minutes
For APRIL 18th, 2014
RI DEM • Room 300

Climate Change Policies in Other States

In attendance: Janet Coit, DEM, Council Chair
Jamia McDonald, EMA
Bob Vanderslice (for Dr. Michael Fine) DOH
Jared Rhodes, DOA/Planning
Grover Fugate, CRMC
Danny Musher (for Marion Gold) DOA/OER
Michael Lewis, DOT
Richard Licht, DOA
Marcel Valois, CommerceRI
Vladimir A. Ibarra, Lt. Governor's Office

Guest presenter: Sonia Hamel

Director Coit opened the meeting at 11:01 a.m.

Director Coit presented a template for state agencies to use when submitting recommendations to be considered in the final report. (Council members had asked for such a template.) She asked the agencies to submit recommendations by Tuesday, April 22, so they could be included in the draft report. Also distributed to the council were: 1. a handout on recommended goals that had been offered by Council members throughout previous meetings and 2. graphics of greenhouse gas emissions as a follow-up to a previous meeting. Director Coit noted that the Council will meet the May 1st deadline and submit a preliminary report to the Governor, with recommendations developed as of that date, but that the final report will probably be completed later in the month, so the Council can consider recommendations and comments that are still coming in. She also reminded the Council and others in attendance that this report is limited in scope, i.e. it will focus on what state government should do in the short term, to allow longer-term strategies to be developed and implemented. One of its recommendations will be to develop a broader strategic plan for Rhode Island by the end of the year.

Director Licht distributed a recent New York Times article about climate and water-related issues and approaches in the Netherlands for the Council members' consideration.

Director Coit introduced the meeting's sole presenter, Sonia Hamel, a Massachusetts-based Climate Protection Consultant. Ms. Hamel introduced herself as having some 30 years of experience in Massachusetts state government, including serving as Director of Air Policy and Planning. She has consulted for several states around the country and for the United Kingdom. She explained she hoped to present information on climate polices and projects that have had varying levels of success in other places, but wanted to provide some context first. Rhode Island is not alone. Twenty-nine states currently have programs aimed at reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. A smaller number, sixteen, are also working on adaptation, with not one being clearly in the lead in this area. From her initial observations, Rhode Island is doing well and is positioned well to do better. She also noted that it

has been possible for states to implement programs without (much) new money and without adding bureaucracy.

Ms. Hamel emphasized the importance of interagency coordination, sharing her experience with the integration of several key agencies into a sustainable development cabinet under Governor Romney. Rhode Island's effort to coordinate through this council and other mechanisms, and the approach reflected in its draft State Energy Plan, are good examples, as well.

Ms. Hamel explained that, of the one hundred top CO_2 producing political entities in the world, thirty-four are states within the US. For a number of reasons, including economic ones, many states are managing to close in on 2020 GHG emission reduction targets, but it is still uncertain at present how they will reach longer term 2050 goals. The states that are doing well tend to have adopted new management systems, outcome-oriented, transparent metrics, and cross-agency governance structures. The strategies or measures offering the greatest emission reduction benefits appear to be energy efficiency, renewable portfolio standards and federal fuel economy standards.

Ms. Hamel noted that many successful state polices include incentives of various types for communities that have take action; for example, communities that meet certain goals are given priority when they apply for state grants. Overall, states use a wide range of large and small measures to meet GHG emission reduction goals, with 85 different sets of measures being an average number. Ms. Hamel used the NY State Climate Smart Communities as a model of a state program being used to engage municipalities. A consistent message is that these programs require multi-agency staff coordination at all levels, as well as transparent processes, also to promote public awareness. Importantly, this is a voluntary program.

Ms. Hamel provided a brief overview of best management practices across the Northeast. Within this context she noted that increasing fuel efficiency results in fewer dollars leaving the region, which now amounts to some 85% of fuel costs. Thus, fuel efficiency can be an economic driver by keeping wealth in a region or state.

Regarding adaptation, Ms. Hamel discussed mapping efforts, noting the leadership roles of Maryland and Rhode Island. She also noted in a slide that Massachusetts developed a set of observed and predicted changes, key adaptation strategies, and an assessment of vulnerabilities and strategies that include such measures as: establishing redundant supply routes and sources, plans for developing local and renewable sources of energy, working with the insurance industry to market policies that better capture future climate-related risks; assessing facilities and cultural sites that are particularly vulnerable to flooding and sea level rise; revising bank finance formulas and working with Emergency Management to a much greater extent than before.

Director Coit asked about studies of impacts to jobs. Ms. Hamel said that she was unaware of any study that indicates a net loss in jobs from climate change related adaptation or mitigation efforts. She again noted how energy efficiency in all sectors can keep more economic wealth within a region, since we as a region don't have local fossil energy sources. Both energy efficiency and renewable energy programs create business opportunity and jobs. She offered to research the matter of job impacts in more detail. Director Coit noted that job data might be an important metric for policy recommendations.

Director Licht left the meeting at 11:55 a.m.

Director Fugate and Ms. Hamel discussed "retreat" efforts in the United Kingdom.

Director Lewis asked about " bad ideas" we should try to avoid based on other states' experiences. Ms. Hamel responded that the least effective policies and programs are those with poor measurement provisions, so that a great amount of effort could be spent on a measure that produced very small reductions. She also noted that prioritization is important in this regard, as effort is best placed into reduction strategies with the greatest yield of emission reductions and public benefits of other kinds. Director McDonald further inquired about the failure of states to evaluate the effectiveness of their policies and programs. Ms. Hamel said that California and Massachusetts both provide helpful models of "ground-truthing" effectiveness and efficiency.

Director Coit summarized the discussion and noted:

1. The benefit of having specific information on the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of particular policies and programs tried in other states, and the need to keep getting updated information;
2. The need for further discussion of how we best move forward with greenhouse gas emission reduction in Rhode Island and the region; and
3. The importance of developing a proposal for coordinating climate change related programs and activities within state government.

Directors Coit and McDonald asked for examples of business communities engaging on climate issues. Ms. Hamel mentioned industries in Silicon Valley (Sustainable Silicon Valley) in California as a good example. She noted business opportunities from new methods to gather, process, store, communicate and use data as an example of markets benefiting from policy development.

Director Coit opened the meeting to the public.

Caroline Karp of Brown University commented on carbon source information in a flow diagram used in Ms. Hamel's presentation, which she thought had been updated to include carbon sinks as well as other energy flows. She also noted that students at Brown can build on prior work and be available to examine tax subsidies, etc., to encourage green sustainability. She also commented on changing consumer behavior related to energy use. Director Coit noted that the topic of energy was discussed at length at a previous Council meeting. Mr. Musher followed up with information related to energy consumption measurements. Dr. Karp also commented that the science was fairly well settled but that there was a need for a policy advisory body in Rhode Island.

Director Fugate announced that a homeowner's guide for coastal areas that will be released soon.

Director Coit reviewed the schedule of next meetings.

With no further business, Director Lewis motioned to adjourn the meeting. Director McDonald seconded the motion. With all members voting in favor, the meeting adjourned at 11:35 a.m.