

New Green Marblehead Committee to map path to sustainability

By Leigh Blander / marblehead@wickedlocal.com

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Eileen Mathieu says with climate change predictions becoming more and more dire, the time to act is now. And the place to act is right here in Marblehead.

“We’re at a unique juncture,” said Mathieu, who lives in town. “The news is getting worse. The ice is melting faster. It compels action.”

Mathieu is a member of the newly formed Green Marblehead Committee, which is partnering with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) for the next nine months to set goals and priorities to increase sustainability in town. The committee’s first step is to “analyze the energy baseline for the town,” said Brooks Winner with MAPC. It will determine how much energy -- and what kinds (vehicle fuel, natural gas, heating oil, propane, electricity) -- is being used in each town department. That step should be complete by February.

In early spring, the committee will reach out for community input with an online survey and public meetings.

“We want to hear from people about what they want to see in a transition to a carbon-free Marblehead,” Winner said.

Then in late June, the Green Marblehead Committee will present its findings.

“We’ll be delivering a climate visioning document that summarizes community conversations and input and starts to map out how the community can move forward in the direction of ambitious action,” Winner explained.

Along with Mathieu, Green Marblehead Committee members include several town officials, including Town Administrator Jason Silva, Health Director Andrew Petty, Selectman Judy Jacobi, and leaders from the Marblehead Municipal Light Department (MMLD).

A Carbon-Free Marblehead

In 2018, Town Meeting approved an article setting a goal for Marblehead to use 100 percent carbon-free energy. And the local nonprofit Sustainable Marblehead recently released its own Climate Action Plan Framework giving that goal a 2040 deadline.

“Everything we love is at risk - our town, our families, our livelihood, our very survival,” said John Livermore of Sustainable Marblehead, who also sits on the Green Marblehead Committee. “The citizens and leaders of Marblehead have a moral imperative to do everything in our power to make the bold changes necessary to ensure a healthy and sustainable world for ourselves and future generations.” Winner believes going carbon-free by 2040 is a reasonable goal. “It aligns with what the science is telling us right now,” he said.

What’s Happening Now

Marblehead has already taken several steps to address climate change, including receiving a \$93,000 grant to prepare for rising sea levels. The town also received grants to buy and install seven electric vehicle charging stations and a municipal electric vehicle. Marblehead Municipal Light Department is heated by geo-thermal energy and Abbot Hall will be once renovations are complete. The Light Department is working with the Department of Energy to conduct a study of all Marblehead public buildings and open spaces for a community solar project. It’s also working with Marblehead schools to explore solar power in the new school being built. The Water and Sewer Commission owns a 70-acre plot in Salem (off Swampscott Road) that it may develop as a solar farm, according to Michael Hull, chair of Marblehead Municipal Light.

There are a lot of good things happening, Mathieu said, “but we’ve discovered that there’s not a whole lot of coordination.” She hopes the Green Committee will be able to streamline environmental efforts. Marblehead is leading the way among other Boston-area cities and towns in addressing climate change, Winner said.

“We’re excited to see communities like Marblehead working on this,” he added. “The entire state needs to be working in this direction.”