

Sustainability Committee Meeting Minutes

October 21, 2015

9:30 am, Lang Center Keith Room

In attendance: Ben Berger, Carr Everbach, Deb Kardon-Brown Eric Wagner, Giovanna Di Chiro, Mark Davis, Maurice Eldridge, Melissa Tier (notetaker), Nathan Graf, Sibelan Forrester, Ralph Thayer, Rebecca Griest, Sheila Magee, Tao Wang

Guests: Betsy Bolton, Steve Golub

Carbon Tax Proposal

Review from Carbon Tax Group (Steve, Betsy, Tao, Melissa)

- Project started out as a reading group over the summer of 2015 in response to divestment decisions and general concerns about carbon emissions
- At the end of the summer, group was a little unsure what to do next – Betsy spearheaded writing of the initial proposal, which we are discussing today
- Two basic approaches of an internal carbon tax (based on a white paper from Vassar):
 - o Yale approach ('Redistributive Model'): establish a set price that different branches of the university face
 - Very challenging to measure at a small school because we do not have as distinct entities
 - Requires sophisticated monitoring, which we do not currently have in place
 - o Princeton approach ('Shadow Pricing Model'): more centralized model
 - Details of this approach still vague; interestingly, Val not aware of any further information from Princeton
 - No new monitoring required
 - Working under the assumption that at some point in the future the government may put a price on carbon
 - Senior staff seem more amenable to this model
 - Stu has suggested that had we had such a model in place in the past, some of our new construction decisions may have been quite different
 - o There is also a hybrid model
- The price associated with carbon would increase over time as our behavior changes

SusCom Questions & Commentary

- *How much should we fund monitoring?*
 - o We can either put money into monitoring a steam system we'd like to move away from, or we can put money directly into moving away from that system
- *Where does the money actually come from? How is it felt?*
 - o The Board wants sustainability initiatives, so one way to look at this is a reframing of that goal and take the money out of the Endowment
 - Puts a price on carbon, but is felt less by community members
 - o *How does international travel fit into this?*

- Some departments just require more travel
- *How finely do we need to split sectors of campus?*
 - We would spend an awful lot of money to get ourselves to a point where we can monitor at the level necessary to take a fine-grained approach
 - The Redistributive Model puts the onus of carbon reduction on more people
 - How do you get everyone to participate, though, without creating camps/conflict?
 - Incentivizing behavior change can occur at different levels – taking it on at a high level does not entirely preclude individual behavior
 - There are other ways to ‘nudge’ individual behavior
 - Using the more centralized, Shadow Pricing Model also means we could implement this fairly immediately
 - These models are not mutually exclusive – one could be phased in after the other
 - What good is it to just suggest the things that are good to do? We need rules/laws to induce behavior change
 - We can focus on behavior change in many different ways – top-down policy changes focused on the institution on the one hand (which also do affect individual behavior) and nudges focused on the individual on the other
 - The Shadow Pricing Model provides an analytic framework for the College community to begin to acknowledge a cost to our behavior, and additionally individuals will have an opportunity to be involved with the design process
- *How is the total carbon footprint being defined?*
 - We primarily look at Scopes 1 & 2
 - But we can certainly add in new things, such as certain types of air travel
 - There are limits to what we can include, of course
 - Life cycle analyses are not generally involved (Scope 3)
 - We have power schemes available on campus for many of our computers – but as much as the College sets power schemes on school computers, individuals will change the settings
- *What is needed from SusCom in this process?*
 - We need a lot of help! We are not experts on all of this and the proposal requires refinement
 - Proposal for SusCom to endorse the creation of the Shadow Pricing Model and to support a proposal going to the Board to take the cost out of the Endowment
- *Who decides what to do with the 400k every year? (and further commentary on next steps...)*
 - The committee ought to make a recommendation
 - This should be tied to our Climate Action Plan
 - We have a lot of work coming up on our 2035 carbon neutrality commitment, and there are a lot of ways that this can be tied in
 - The Board will need to be part of the decision-making process
 - Val would probably like at this stage to see a proposal more specifically choosing a model, decisions of where the money comes from and how it will be spent, and indicating who will manage the money (small group consisting of Director of Sustainability, Stu, Ralph, Greg?)

- Maybe also include several members from SusCom so that we can move forward immediately? (This would also make the subgroup more broadly represented)
- Can we also include outside expertise in this subgroup?
 - Perhaps some of the revenue could go to a consultant
- The Director will certainly have expertise to bring to the table, but given that this person will not be here until January and budget planning will occur sooner, we should try to move forward now
- David Singleton is happy to bring a proposal to the December Board meeting
- We really must incorporate a greater understanding of the ‘treadmill’ system that is so engrained in our culture; larger cultural questions of ‘sustainable futures’ that involve more than energy/fuel use (and include emotional health) must be part of this conversation; how do we define ‘success’ here at Swarthmore?
- *Conclusions*
 - The proposed structure of the internal carbon tax is to create a Shadow Pricing Fund based on the estimated carbon emissions of all new construction projects, but taken out of the Endowment
 - Will the money come from the main Endowment on the FFFF alternative endowment currently in development?
 - This Fund will be managed by a committee populated by senior staff & members of SusCom
 - A percentage of the revenues (TBD) will be set aside for culture/education change
 - An updated proposal will go to the December Board meeting
 - Going forward, SusCom may support a carbon tax on expanded types of emissions... to be looked at in subsequent years

Sub-Committees

- We will work on developing sub-committee structure

Respectfully submitted, Melissa Tier