

Sustainability Committee Meeting Minutes
November 18, 2011, 2pm Lang Center Seminar Room

Attendees: Maurice Eldridge, Carr Everbach, Satya Nelms, Allison Holiday, Clara Fang, Tom Cochrane, Eric Wagner, Nicole Selby, Joy Charlton, Kathryn Wu, H.G. Chissell (via Skype)

Lang Professor Nominations

Joy noted that the deadline was very soon for nominations for 2012-2013 Lang Professor of Social Change. She thought both ENVIS and SusCom should provide suggested names; if these make it through the first round of consideration, detailed contact and recommendation information will be required. Maurice volunteered to ask David Gelber for suggestions of high-profile individuals, both academic and activist, with strong environmentalist credentials who might be potential nominees.

Phoenix Sustainability Reporter

Clara updated the committee about the sustainability reporter for the Phoenix. Clara had been working with the Phoenix to get a dedicated reporter for sustainability. David Salorio '14 has taken the job and he will be writing an article about sustainability for the Phoenix for every issue. A couple of upcoming topics are Green Advisors and the Renewing Fund. As committee members are working on different projects, it would be helpful to keep in mind how they can communicate sustainability events, announcements, stories, to the community and to promote their efforts. Carr suggested that another topic might be sustainability's connection with Wellness, and Satya expressed support for the idea. Nicole suggested an article on why energy conservation is important even though we are purchasing wind power.

Website

Clara then gave an update on the sustainability website. Clara had met with Communications with updated content merging the two current sustainability sites (Sustainability Committee and Greening of Swarthmore). They discussed that the college will be changing the website platform in March and all of the college's websites will be migrated to the new platform beginning in March. The new website platform will be more flexible and user friendly than the current one. It will have modules that can be employed for different purposes, including the ability to stream video, comment feeds, and articles. The first round of webpages to be updated to the new look includes the homepage, the President's Office, Admissions, and Career Services. The second round will include academic departments and administration pages. Clara said that it's recommended that we design for the new platform and wait to launch it in March or April rather than design for the current platform and have to do it again for the new one in February.

Strategic Plan

Carr gave an update on the Strategic Plan draft. Carr, Rachel Merz, and José-Luís Machado had submitted the edits to the Strategic Plan that SusCom, CAPCom and CWSC had written together. During the faculty meeting the previous Wednesday with Rebecca Chopp, Carr learned that a new version of the Strategic Plan is being developed. This version will be more broad and it will articulate the college's principles and aspirations. Implementation details will be taken out of this version to be worked out at a later stage.

Alison said that the committees had worked hard to incorporate the Sustainability Director as part of the recommendation in the Strategic Plan. In the new version will it be taken out?

Maurice expressed confidence that the recommendation for a Sustainability Director will remain a part of the ultimate plan, even if it is not stated in this more aspirational version. He also said that there will be no surprises in this new document. It will articulate all the principles that the community has advocated for, including sustainability, wellness, and social responsibility.

Greenhouse Gas Inventory

Clara gave an update on the greenhouse gas inventory that she has been working on. Clara has collected data on the college's energy use and maintenance vehicles. She is working on obtaining data about department vehicles, employee air travel, and faculty/staff commute.

Besides the maintenance vehicles, many departments on campus keep their own vehicles, including Biology, Engineering, Lang Center, Athletics, Library, and Chester Children's Chorus. Clara is going around to each of those departments to try to collect their fuel records. Eric said that Athletics has a record of mileage of their vans. The athletic teams also travel by air and car and trains. Clara said that air travel is required for the inventory but ground travel (unless it is in a college-owned vehicle) is not because the carbon impact from air travel is so much larger than that from ground travel.

Clara had made attempts to collect employee air travel and commute centrally, but that information is not available. Therefore she has created a SwatSurvey to collect that information individually from all faculty and staff. She asked when is a good time to send out this survey? Carr and Allison said that the best time for faculty is after classes end and during finals. Faculty have more unstructured time then. The last day of classes is December 6, 2011.

Allison asked if faculty housing is counted in the greenhouse gas inventory. Clara said that they are not because Facilities doesn't have control over energy use in those buildings. This brought up the topic that many faculty houses are not energy efficient,

and Facilities is responsible for those buildings. Faculty complain that it's hard to be sustainable on campus when their homes are not insulated and Facilities ignores their request for work orders.

Tom said that the college has been doing upgrades to a lot of faculty houses. However, building retrofits are extremely expensive, partly because insurance required by contractors for work on residential houses is so high. The facilities department and its subcontractors have to go through an enormous amount of insurance-related paperwork for every work order. Because of the difficulty and expense of performing building retrofits, facilities has to prioritize projects that are the most urgent and that will make more of a difference on our energy use. If you aggregate energy use in the faculty houses, it is less than the energy used by the Science Center (all the student dorms put together do not use as much energy as the Science Center).

Allison said that while it may be true that faculty housing doesn't affect the college's overall energy use as much as large buildings on campus, fixing the houses would go a long way to earn faculty buy-in and would encourage changing perception.

Nicole asked if it would be helpful if Facilities provided instructions and materials at-cost to help the faculty do some of the work themselves.

Allison said that, as renters, they aren't allowed to do major work on their houses (like insulating the walls). The work they are able to do on their house is limited to light bulb replacements and setback thermostats. Furthermore, renters' costs for improved insulation produce energy savings that are only worthwhile if they stay in the house a long time. Allison said that she paid to have the attic and crawlspace of her house insulated but only because she was cold and wanted a better environmental quality. She had emailed Workbox many times but got no response, so she went ahead and did it herself. Tom noted that College maintenance staff are relatively few, especially recently because of absences due to illness, and these staff must fix the highest-importance items first, such as dorms and academic buildings.

Carr said that AFewSteps.org, a community nonprofit organization, has a program in which they send an informal expert to do an energy audit of houses for free. Allison said that such a program wouldn't be very helpful if there are no means to implement suggestions, perform the necessary upgrades, and improve energy efficiency.

Joy said maybe retrofits for faculty housing can be supported through the Renewing Fund. Even though retrofits are really expensive, perhaps the Renewing Fund can be leveraged for a matching grant. Carr asked how the Renewing Fund would be repaid, and if renters would be willing to pay off the loan over time.

The meeting adjourned at 3pm.

Respectfully submitted, Clara Fang

*** Future planned meetings of the Sustainability Committee ***

Monday, November 21, 2011, 11:30-12:30, Lang Center Keith Room

Thursday, December 1, 2011, 8:30-9:30, Sharples Room 4

Monday, December 5, 2011, 11:30-12:30, Lang Center Keith Room