Thursday, March 16, 2023 7:30 – 8:45 AM

Members present: Alexis Babaian, Mike Bellissimo, Leslie Clapp, Louise Clough, Betsy Edge, Marcy Holmes, Sarah Kuh, Lewis Laskaris, Marina Lent, Lisa Nagy, Chantale Patterson, Dan Pesch, Susan Pratt, Kathleen Samways, Susan Sanford, Joyce Stiles Tucker, Sheryl Taylor Thompson, Martina Thornton, Cindy Trish, Mary Jane Williams, Jim Woolf. Guests present: Cathy Wozniak, Sue Diverio, Liz Durkee, Meghan Gombos, Ruth McDermott-Levy

**Call meeting to order / Approval of February 16 meeting minutes:** Mary Jane Williams called the meeting to order at 7:30 AM. The February minutes were moved, seconded, and approved.

**Climate Action Plan Update – focus on Public Health and Safety** - Liz Durkee, Climate Change Coordinator, MV Commission and Meghan Gombos, consultant to the project.

Liz presented the Climate Action Plan: The Vineyard Way – Connected to our past, committed to our future. It’s a regional twenty-year plan addressing the causes and impacts of climate change, developed locally with over 100 Island residents and consultant Meghan Gombos. Liz acknowledged that the land and water the plan is based on is the traditional land and water of the Wampanoag tribe. Motivation to develop the plan was based on greenhouse gases on the Vineyard as well as climate impacts. Guiding values for the plan were: Healthy Natural Resources, Equity & Inclusion, Community Collaboration, Resilience Building, and Local Action. A timeline was developed to make everyone aware that climates action has been taking place on the Island for a long time – it’s nothing new. It started in 2003 when Kate Warner established the Vineyard Energy Project. Kate is now the Martha’s Vineyard Commission’s Energy Planner. A public survey was conducted and there were 261 respondents, indicating a strong belief that: Climate change is an urgent issue for MV, Our community should act now to reduce contributions and prepare for changes, Climate change will affect them or their families, and It’s very important to work together Island-wide vs. town by town. Before even starting the plan, there were listening to sessions with over twenty stakeholder groups on the Island to see what their issues and concerns were about climate change. Last year Climate Action Week had seven whole days with over forty organizations and events involved. This year there will be a Climate Action Day on May 7 from 12 -4 at the Ag Hall. The focus will be on action – things we can all do.

The Action Plan has six thematic planning areas:

* Land use, natural resources, and biodiversity
* Transportation, infrastructure, and waste
* Public health and safety
* Economic resilience
* Food security
* Energy transformation

Meghan Combos covered the public health and safety area, as this is important to Dukes County Health Council work. Lila Fischer was the leader of this thematic group. The main challenges to our public health and safety related to climate change were identified as: a lack of access to critical facilities and services, increased risk of physical health and mental health issues, and increased risk of wildfire events during droughts. Meghan said that our last Category 3 or higher hurricane was in 1954, so statistically we should be getting something in the near future. Broad long-term goals are:

1. By 2040, for the safety of all residents and visitors, we have an effective county-wide emergency preparedness, response, and recovery system in place, including multilingual communication.
2. By 2040, Island residents understand environmental and climate change impacts on health and well-being, and everyone has access to support that builds self-sufficiency and resilience. Objectives for this goal are:

* Objective 1: A subcommittee of the Dukes County Health Council is developed to facilitate Island health care provider education related to public health threats of climate change.
* Objective 2: By 2024, disseminate a set of Island-wide bilingual video and other outreach materials to educate the public about the health impacts from climate change.
* Objective 3: By 2025, the subcommittee works with Inter-Island Public Health Excellence Collaborative to conduct quarterly outreach events for health care providers and other targeted groups.

More immediately, a number of action items that individuals and towns can start working on are included in the Climate Action Plan. Meghan then turned the presentation back to Liz who covered the work of the other thematic groups. Overarching goals for the whole plan are: a framework for land use decision making, a sustainable source of adaptation funding, and capacity building for climate action. She recommends that we visit The Vineyard Way website at www.thevineyardway.org.

(*Note that the Climate Action Plan presentation was sent to Council members after the meeting and is considered part of the meeting minutes.)*

Lisa Nagy commented that she has been working on the issue of climate change with CC Doucette, including the use of energy and WIFI in schools. Lisa encouraged people to work with CC and said that her own public health issue is the heating up of the planet and the growth of bacterial mold. Mass Medical Society come out with a resolution on COVID and POTS, and Lisa said that COVID, COVID vaccine, and mold all cause POTS. Liz Durkee agreed that mold is an issue, and with more flooding we will see more mold in homes.

Liz mentioned that Ruth McDermott-Levy is here at the meeting. She is a professor of public health at Villanova University and co-director of the Mid-Atlantic Center for Children and the Environment. She has agreed to work on the Dukes County Health Committee Climate Change subcommittee. Mary Jane Williams and Alexis Babaian are already on the subcommittee. A survey will be going out to healthcare providers in April to learn what their understanding is of climate-related health issues. Liz asked Ruth about education sessions planned and Ruth said there will be something on PFAS in June, and in May there will be something on air quality, which will touch on mold. Liz is hoping to encourage more Council members to get involved with the subcommittee.

Mary Jane commented that Oak Bluffs is still considering artificial turf at the high school and says we should be concerned that PFAS in it will run off into our water system. We need to be pro-active and educate the people in Oak Bluffs not to install artificial turf.

Kathleen Samways had a “wheel” that people could use to see what to do in various emergencies that said the perhaps the subcommittee could make up something like this, specific to the Island, and distribute them widely, as a first step in getting people to be aware of the impact of climate change and how they can respond. Martina Thornton said that the County stopped using these because it is out of date and not Island specific – it needs to be revised. Kathleen agreed. Mike Bellissimo said that he had just – after 18 months – made his house completely solar and suggested that perhaps we need navigators - like we have in healthcare - to guide people through the process of getting stings like solar panels. He also wondered if the Climate Action Plan was working with organizations like Eversource. Liz said that through the Vineyard Fellowship, Kate Warner, the Commission’s Energy Planner is working on regional issues with Eversource and the Steamship Authority, and Vineyard Power has hired an energy transition coordinator whose job is to guide people through things like how to get solar panels, heat pumps and the like. Meghan said that Vineyard Power just launched a website where people can get coaching on things like solar panels, electric vehicles, converting your home to all-electric. She said that maybe we need to look at that model for more than just energy. The food security group is thinking about how to provide more access to people who might want grow vegetables, and the land use grant is wondering if designers could help people who want to plant native species in their yard.

Dan Pesch spoke about the hospital. As many know, they are building a new nursing home in Edgartown to replace Windemere. It will also include workforce housing. The hospital itself is LEED certified, but there are a number of attached wood-framed buildings. We need to decrease our footprint and make a new building that takes advantage of things Mike was talking about regarding energy usage. This is a project that will take many years, and community support is needed. The hospital asks every year what kinds of things it should be doing, and climate preparedness has not been something that everyone has asked for and yet it’s imperative. This group could be very helpful in lobbying and weighing in. The planning hasn’t started yet because they’re working on the nursing home. But he’s just asking for our support.

Mary Jane said that she looked at solar, but would need a new roof, and the cost was too high to go forward. Marina Lent is going solar – along with a new roof – and said that navigators are really needed to guide people through the process – and people need to know that navigators are available. Liz said that among the climate positions we need, the most important now is a communication specialist. Kathleen Samways said that the Council is working on the website, and this would be a good time to collaborate with about messaging.

Anyone interested in joining the Council’s Climate Change subcommittee should contact Mary Jane.

**Public Health Updates** – Marina Lent, Town of Aquinnah Health Agent

Marina gave an update on municipal public health generally. There is a lot of turnover, with new, younger people coming in – it’s challenging but with big opportunities.

There is a grant from the Department of Public Health through fiscal year 2024 around but not limited to infectious disease management. Betsy VanLandingham, former ER nurse, will be in charge of infectious disease management. Fernando Lana will be working with the Brazilian community – both reaching out and pulling in – we want to use what we learned through COVID and the work of the Community Ambassador Program to make it permanent that we are never again disconnected from a quarter of the Island’s population. The State is also interested in shared services among the town health boards. We now have State-supported staff and one of them is exploring racism as a public health issue, and we’ve just hired a shared inspector.

**Other Member Updates**

Kathleen Samways reported that the hospital is no longer going to have the tent / drive through for COVID vaccines – COVID boosters will be done through primary care or other visits. Right now, Health Imperatives is the option for registering and getting COVID boosters. The $75 gift certificates will no longer be available (from the State) after the end of March. Betsy Edge said that there’s a possibility they will have $25 gift certificates, but that’s not positive. Boosters are available Saturday this week and Friday next week. Kathleen will send out the postcards again and people should use them to encourage people to get the vaccines.

Kathleen also wanted to welcome Ruth. Mary Jane explained that Ruth is not a Council member yet, but that she brought Ruth onto the Climate Change subcommittee because of her expertise. Mary Jane will contact Martina about getting Ruth onto the Council.

Mike Bellissimo suggested that at our next meeting, the Lyme Vaccine Trial – which failed – be discussed. He thought part of the problem was they no Island entity was in charge of it.

**Meeting adjourned at 8:45 am**

**The next regular Health Council meeting will be held via zoom on April 20 at 7:30 am**

Respectfully submitted, Louise Clough, secretary