

Climate Action, Sustainability, and Energy Committee Meeting Minutes

February 24, 2025, 2:00pm

Zoom: <https://virginiatech.zoom.us/j/83381805540>

Present: Nathan King (Chair), Teresa Sweeney, Leslie Stevens, Ava Garrity, Matt Stolte, Cassidy Blackmore for Dwyn Taylor, Simon Allen, Nam Nguyen, Josh Clemons, Felicity Billow, Pat Donovan, Sushant Dahal, Autumn Timpano, Emily Williams, Andrew Dolbin-MacNab, Paul Ely, Diane Bonsall, Julie McClafferty, Irene Leech, Liza Morris, Yohan Sequeira, Annie Lawrence, Dean Paul Winistorfer

Absent: Zhuo Fu, Carrie Cox, Wesley Gwaltney, Allison Tobar, Zoe Caran, Kendra Paisley, Catherine Shewchuk

Guests: Kristina Cook, Yugasha Bakshi, Emily Vollmer, Erin Poff, Justin Lough, Sheree Anderson, Ralph Hall, Wesley Gibson, Brenda van Gelder, Sean McGinnis, Morgan Ralph, Sarah Bell, Javad Torabinedjad, Olivia Soloman, Pat Hilt, Steve Durfee, Mark Witt, Ron Meyers, Chris Tedder, Adia Long, Meghan Marsh, Charul Agrawal, Gillian Eastwood,

Nathan King called the meeting to order at 2:00 pm. A quorum was present.

1. Adoption of Agenda

A motion was made and seconded to adopt the agenda. The motion carried.

2. Announcements

The Office of Sustainability Interns will be tabling for the Freezer Challenge Thursday, February 27, from 12-3 in Fralin Hall.

Internship applications for the Office of Sustainability close on March 12.

Streamkeeper Applications for the VT Office of Sustainability are open until March 7.

Careers in Energy Conference on March 26, 5-8 pm in the Goodall Room of Newman Library.

Earth Month 2025 planning is underway!

3. Presentation

Nathan King presented on the seven RFPs recommended for CASEC approval by the Green RFP subcommittee.

Paul Winistorfer: I especially liked the proposals for tree cover and the Stroubles Creek restoration. That has been an awesome project with far reaching benefits. The support of this

group and others has been remarkable. I am uninspired by the \$64,000 covered bicycle rack. I walk by the covered bicycle racks and many of the bikes have flat tires, are rusty, or haven't been moved. Utilization of a space and the amount of bicycles that are actually used are two different things. I am not in favor of a \$64,000 covered bike rack at Pritchard. I am just uninspired by the utilization of bicycle racks, they have become a parking garage. Any student with a bike of value is probably taking it in their room. It's nearly half of the budget and I don't think it's a good investment.

Nathan King: Duly noted, Paul. I do know we at Facilities try to remove bikes left over, and we know it is common for students to abandon bikes, and we are trying to mitigate that as much as possible.

Nick Quint: For the bike racks, there would be two included in that price. I know that's still a lot of money, but it's not just one. We do go through and remove abandoned bikes in the summer the week after commencement and get as many as we can. We have yet to remove abandoned bikes from campus during the fall and spring semesters unless there is a complaint, but it could be something we look at in the future. I know there are some students who bring a bike and then discover they can get around fine walking or taking the bus and end up not using their bike regularly.

Kristina Cook: Sean McGinnis says he agrees with Paul due to excessive cost per sustainability value.

Nathan: Duly noted, Sean.

Ron Myers: Can you verify the total amount of funding?

Nathan: Technically, there is no funding ceiling for this process, each project is reviewed on its own merits and funding gets dispersed from various pools of money. It's a bit of a mixed bag, but we don't have to worry about where the money comes from on this committee, that's the responsibility of the Office of Budget and Finance Review Committee. No ceiling limit, we've funded over \$300,000 in some years, and we've generally sat between \$100,000-300,000.

Paul: I'd like to suggest that we'd move the Pritchard rack to the bottom priority if we send them to the budget office listed by priority. I'd hate to see the tree planting, or anything we can do to increase our tree canopy, be prioritized over the bike racks. I think we need more study. I'd bet if we marked the tires under covered bike racks, you'd see hardly any bikes used during the school year. I don't believe students on campus are using their bikes. With the budget climate we are going into, we should really reconsider.

Nathan: How do folks feel about that suggestion?

Andrew Dolbin-MacNab: What's the lifespan of these covered bike racks? What is the amount of years we are going to get out of them? Because if we're talking about ROI, I think that's an important piece so we can look at per the number of students that live in that area, how many years it will be available. If it's a short lifespan, I'd agree with Paul, but if it were longer, I would say we need it since it's one of the more crowded residence halls and I'm not sure I agree with

the statement that students don't use this. My office used to be in Pritchard, and I used to see plenty of students biking.

Nick: The first ones were installed in 2015 and are still in good condition. I don't know how long they'll last, but they are powder-coated steel. The manufacturer is in Roanoke, and if we had to have them recoated to extend their life, we could.

Andrew: If you look at the student experience across different residential buildings, where they live impacts the experience they have at Virginia Tech. Pritchard is one of the cheapest residential buildings. As a result, their experience at Virginia Tech is not as nice. One of the things I'm sensitive to is the concern of an equity issue here between the lower and higher-quality residence hall. Do we have a responsibility to consider equity?

Nathan: Absolutely, that's a great point.

Nick: That's where the proposals for covered bike racks have been coming from the past few years. We've been trying to get at least one at every residence hall. Bike racks are not a line item in my budget, a lot of them are funded through capital construction projects. I have some funding for maintenance and repairs of damaged bike racks, but that's really it.

Nathan: Over the years, Coca-Cola has funded some of the biking infrastructure we have put in.

Nick: My department has as well, but that would have to come out of our general operating fund.

Kenneth Harmon: Does anybody know when we'll be renovating Pritchard or Hoge? If we're going to renovate them soon in the future, they may get their own new bike racks through capital.

Paul Ely: That's a good thought. I'm not aware of it on any calendar. For LEED, there is a point for encouraging alternative transportation. For residence halls, this would include covered bike racks. Nick, this also makes me wonder about starting a discussion on the culture of bike racks and whether they actually get used. It's sort of a chicken or the egg, if they don't have a good place to store the bike, they won't bring the bike, but there are certainly some really tired-looking ones on the rack.

Nick: the policy is that students are allowed to bring their bike into their dorm room with the permission of their roommate.

Paul W: Fiscally, to make an expenditure of \$64,000, I'd need more data. We have a responsibility to be fiscally responsible, and we don't have enough information. After years of walking by the covered bike racks, being uninspired by their use, the bikes there are rusty with flat tires. We need to take a look at data and have somebody do some observational studies to gather some recurring survey data and see what's moved. I don't think they're being moved. I think it's fiscally irresponsible to use half the budget on this proposal. Plant trees, avoid this this year, and plant trees. That's a long-term investment. These bike racks, they're not much shelter, with snow and rain coming in from the sides. I think we can do better.

Nathan: Given that fact, is there a motion to move the bike racks to the bottom of the list?

A motion was suggested, and a vote of 16 was counted to pass the motion.

Nathan: Do I have a motion to vote for the approval of these projects given that Pritchard is now in the seventh position?

A motion was suggested, and a vote of 17 was counted to pass the motion.

Nathan: Thank you everyone. We will keep you all updated as these projects move to the budget office. Again, all comments duly noted. We will continue to work on gathering evidence for bike racks in the future and definitely appreciate the lively discussion. With that, we will jump into our Green Spaces Updates presentation, starting with sustainable labs progress to date.

Kristina Cook presented on Sustainable Labs Progress and Green Lab Certification

- Sustainable labs overview
- Certification
- Freezer Challenge

Kristina Cook presented on Revitalized Green Office Certification

- Certification Tool
- Shared MS Teams Drive

Sarah Bell presented on Partnership Opportunities with Residential Well-being

- Student Leader Program Overview
- Sustainability with Student Leader (SL) Program

Kristina Cook presented on VT's Bee Campus USA

- Committee Meeting Updates
- Recertified for this year
- Habitat Maintenance Days/Service-Learning Opportunities
- 4th Annual Bee Day April 24th at 10:30am at the Visitors Center! All are welcome!

Nathan King presented on Tree Campus in Higher Education

- One of our foundational certification programs. Well over a decade in. Great collaboration between Facilities, CNRE, and students.
- Living Laboratory opportunities
- Standing committee is committed to discussing campus issues

5. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:59 pm.

The next CASEC Meeting will be held on March 31, 2025 at 2:00 pm over Zoom.