

Final Report of the Middlebury College Environmental Council 2020 – 2021

COMMITTEE PROGRESS REPORTS

MAY 24, 2021

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DESCRIPTION OF COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

The Middlebury Environmental Council (EC) focused on three challenges for 2020-21:

- I. Sports for Climate Action
- II. Break Free from Single-Use Plastics on Campus
- III. Social Justice and Equity Framework for Energy 2028

Sports for Climate Action

Sports have played a significant role in human development and well-being - from inspiring young people to pursue physical fitness and become their best selves to building fan bases with the potential for positive collective impact in solidarity with their teams. Sports teams and athletes also have an important role to play in helping address the climate crisis which is also taking its toll on the playing of sports worldwide including: warmer winters and lack of snow for winter sports, excessively high temperatures threatening heat exhaustion of athletes and fans and changing the times for events and damage to playing surfaces due to extreme temperatures, extended periods of drought, flooding, and/or pest species extending their natural range.

For decades Middlebury has played a leadership role in higher education in sustainability and environmental stewardship. Athletics teams and administration have been active participants in those efforts. The adoption of Midd's most recent response to the climate crisis, Energy2028 has created new opportunities for our athletic community to contribute to the success of Energy2028's bold goals. The Environmental Council, which advises the President on sustainability policy and supports actions to advance sustainability leadership, will include a focus on [Sports for Climate Action](#) this year. This is a global effort to engage sports organizations to display climate leadership by taking responsibility for their climate footprint, to step-up and incentivize action beyond sports to take meaningful and transformative action.

This committee will work across the College and in collaboration and coordination with the Climate Action Capacity Project to build awareness and develop action plans in concert with the Athletics department, teams, coaches and players to address the principles of the Sports for Climate Action principles:

- 1: Undertake systematic effort to promote greater environmental responsibility
- 2: Reduce overall climate impact
- 3: Educate for climate action
- 4: Promote sustainable and responsible consumption
- 5: Advocate for climate action through communication.

This committee will also build on past efforts by teams to achieve carbon neutrality and reduce their environmental impacts including the Green Panther Challenge. The committee will also work to initiate one or more pilot projects during the academic year and evaluate their impacts and provide recommendations for improving the effort going forward.

Break Free from Single-Use Plastic on Campus

This committee will work with students, staff, faculty from appropriate departments, and administration to develop a roadmap to a plastic free campus and elimination of all non-essential, non-compostable, single-use disposable plastics with readily available alternatives. The committee will first conduct an assessment of the current state of single use plastics on campus and their life-cycle fates and will identify items that are harder to eliminate because of a lack of available alternatives, for example, for accessibility or health and safety critical reasons where applicable. They will also do a census of the distribution of water bottle fillers on campus. They could also reach out to other campuses, such as the University of Vermont, that have banned single use plastics and/or the [Post Landfill Action Network](#) for assistance and advice.

The committee will develop a procurement and/or purchasing policy which includes an implementation and outreach framework for the long-term elimination of all non-essential, non-compostable, single-use disposable plastics - both provided by the institution and those provided by contracted food vendors. This policy will also focus on systematically switching all of these items to reusables or compostables (that don't contain PFAS).

Development of a social justice and equity framework for Energy2028 implementation and Climate Action Capacity Project Collaboration

This committee will develop a social justice and equity framework to help inform the implementation of Energy2028 going forward for the Energy 2028 Steering Committee. They will also apply the framework to Middlebury's past and present energy sourcing and provide a comparison of how it has changed over time. This committee will solicit input and advice from a wide range of stakeholders and entities on and off campus to help them develop the framework. They will also work in collaboration and coordination with the Climate Action Capacity Project including sharing their work in progress with participants at an Energy2028 forum and with other groups working on Energy2028 related initiatives. During January Term the committee may work with members of a J-Term internship for credit (TBD) to accelerate their progress and results toward implementation of the framework. The committee will also work with members of the Energy 2028 Steering Committee on the development of the social justice and equity framework.

COMMITTEE PROGRESS REPORT SUMMARIES

Sports for Climate Action

This is the first year that the Environmental Council (EC) has worked on campus sports. Our main goal was to do initial investigative work on past and present sustainability projects in athletics, and to determine possible projects for sports for climate action. We focused on developing infrastructure that would withstand the change in student body from year to year, and that would incorporate long-term environmental and equity goals. We spent the fall semester gathering data, conducting informal athlete interviews, and holding conversations with Middlebury's Athletics. In the spring, we supported several enthusiastic student-athletes to establish a permanent Sustainability Subcommittee of the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) and created a library of ideas/actions for the SAAC, future EC subcommittees, and the Sustainability Solutions Lab interns.

Break Free from Single-Use Plastics on Campus

Our goal was to develop a roadmap to a plastic free campus and elimination of all non-essential, non-compostable, single-use disposable plastics with readily available alternatives. We determined that a membership in [PLAN](#), the Post Landfill Action Network, would provide the resources and guidance necessary to reach our goal. The next step toward elimination of single-use plastics will be to generate support from the College community for President Patton to sign PLAN's Break Free From Plastic Pledge. This will require a well-planned and publicized campaign as well as a list of target items to eliminate. We have begun the campaign through the use of surveys and research and we provide recommendations for how to continue progress on the campaign.

Development of a social justice and equity framework for Energy2028 implementation and Climate Action Capacity Project Collaboration

From Fall 2020 to Spring 2021 our subcommittee was tasked with helping to develop recommendations for embedding the demands of social and environmental justice more centrally across the college's activities and operations. Our specific focus was on how to integrate these concerns into Middlebury's flagship effort, and main organizing framework, for mobilizing around the climate crisis: Energy 2028. We engaged a range of stakeholders (including students, faculty and staff) in order to gather key priorities, concerns, and suggestions, and to assess how questions of justice and equity were and were not being addressed in Energy 2028. Our EC subcommittee conducted this work in collaboration with the Climate Action Capacity Project (CACP) and its team of Climate Action Fellows. We discussed these questions and involved additional student activists and organizers who brought prior experience working in this area. While our discussions yielded valuable insights, we also identified key stakeholders who were not represented in these deliberations. Thus, members of our group conducted a series of one-on-one consultations where such stakeholders could offer further input. Finally, events organized around Earth Week (Apr. 19-23) served as another important forum where stakeholders could discuss questions of justice and equity in the context of Energy 2028 and provide feedback and reflections on progress in this area.

In bringing together these perspectives, we highlight the need to better align ongoing climate and environmental activities with principles of equity and justice and we begin the process of identifying priority challenges and opportunities to inform next steps. Although our capacities were constrained by the many organizing challenges posed by the pandemic, and while much further work is needed, we were nevertheless able to discern important and recurring emphases through this process that are worth considering. We plan to share these more granular findings with other units (such as SSL, CACP, EC, etc.) who can continue this work into the future and refine more specific recommendations.

FULL COMMITTEE PROGRESS REPORTS

Sports for Climate Action Committee Report

This is the first year that the Environmental Council (EC) has worked on campus sports. Our main goal was to do initial investigative work on past and present sustainability projects in athletics, and to determine possible projects for sports for climate action. We focused on developing infrastructure that would withstand the change in student body from year to year, and that would incorporate long-term environmental and equity goals. We spent the fall semester gathering data, conducting informal athlete interviews, and holding conversations with Middlebury's Athletics. In the spring, we supported several enthusiastic student-athletes to establish a permanent Sustainability Subcommittee of the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) and created a library of ideas/actions for the SAAC, future EC subcommittees, and the Sustainability Solutions Lab interns.

1. In the fall of 2020 we conducted 22 informal athlete interviews to understand current student involvement and interest in climate action in club and varsity sports teams. We asked athletes about what their teams are currently doing in regards to sustainability/justice work, how they thought their teams could improve, and whether they would be interested in being involved going forward. We found that, while there is a lot of interest among student-athletes, in general teams are not participating in any sort of sustainability, justice, environmental work in a sustained fashion. There was interest among students to also bring specific programming and future curriculum to both club and varsity sports. Our interview results are available [here](#).
2. In November 2020, we met with Andrew Johnson (Nordic coach), Erin Quinn (Director of Athletics), and Sachi Howson (student, former Varsity soccer player and team "green liaison," member of SAAC) to discuss the EC Sports for Climate Action and the data collected in informal interviews. We explored possible avenues to create the long-term infrastructure within Athletics (e.g., collaborate with the Student-Athlete Advisory

Committee and the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee) and potential sustainability programming. Erin Quinn was interested in exploring sustainability partnerships with other liberal arts colleges or NESCAC-wide initiatives.

3. In March 2021, the SAAC established a new Sustainability Subcommittee with Elizabeth Peebles and Courtney Gannt leading this effort. We met with Elizabeth and Courtney to learn about their goals, exchange ideas, and to establish a working relationship. Eva Fillion will continue working with this new SAAC subcommittee going forward. We will share our ideas/projects library.
4. We developed a library of ideas/projects, as well as documented all previous sustainability projects in Middlebury athletics. The initial library is available below.

Ideas/Projects for going forward:

- Develop workshop curriculum related to sustainability and climate justice for teams to use and implement in team orientations/training before the season begins. This could include a powerpoint presentation or videos introducing climate action in sports, the role of teams and athletes, how to involve spectators, etc. Start with a basic curriculum for all the teams with an opportunity for each team to customize part of the program to fit their team's interests. The workshop could be developed in collaboration with the SSL summer interns and piloted with one or two teams in the fall of 2021 (e.g., women's soccer or Alpine ski teams).
- Collect resources for teams (e.g., a list of local organizations focused on sustainability, climate action, or environmental justice) and brainstorm possible community service activities related to environmental action. Team's fundraising efforts could be directed at climate action.
- Re-introduce the green liaison for each team and the Office of Sustainability Integration's [Green Panther Challenge](#). Green Liaisons could become members of the SAAC's Sustainability Subcommittee and develop programming across different teams.
- Get individual sports/teams involved with programs and practices specific to their sports. For example:
 - Tennis ball recycling: <https://www.recycleballs.org/>
 - Recycling other sports equipment: https://www.terracycle.com/en-US/zero_waste_boxes/sporting-goods
- Partner with NESCAC colleges and teams to improve environmental impact and justice as a conference. For example, develop a friendly competition between schools/teams: who can implement the most sustainable program? Who can help improve the athletic centers to be more environmentally friendly? Who can do more sustainability community service?
- Incorporate spectators and find opportunities to change minds/habits once spectator events are happening again. Use Middlebury's athletics facilities as an example of what could be done for climate action. For example:
 - Local food sold at concession stands
 - Discontinue use of single-use plastics and switch to compostable materials
 - Introduce compost, recycling, and trash bins with information on how to sort waste at all events

- Use the athletics facilities to exhibit Middlebury’s sustainability/climate action initiatives and programs in sports and beyond (e.g., a photo exhibit of renewable energy projects)
- Spread information about what the teams and facilities are doing for climate action (add to event programs, make announcements during events, etc.)
- Reduce team travel footprint. Currently athletics rent vehicles but there may be interest in the future in investing in college electric vehicles.
- Work on sustainability of the athletic facilities. Some potential ideas include
 - Get rid of vending machines to reduce single-use plastic impact
 - Use organic fertilizer on fields
- Introduce sustainability principles when purchasing uniforms and equipment. E.g., use more sustainable brands, use bulk orders to save to reduce shipping, explore laundry energy efficiency, etc.
- Think beyond varsity athletics to club and intramural sports to introduce similar programming and projects.
- Think about working with student not participating in organized sports but engaged in recreational sports (e.g., running, skiing at Snow Bowl or Rikert). For example, promote ways to reduce travel footprint, share equipment, etc.
- Increase collaboration between the many different groups on campus taking climate action and working to make Midd more sustainable (Sustainability Solutions Lab, Environmental Council, clubs (SNEG, Sunrise, more), Energy 2028, etc.)
- Athletics Earth Day activities/events to draw spectators/potentially raise money with funds going to climate action organizations.

Break Free From Single-Use Plastics on Campus

Partnering with the Post Landfill Action Network (PLAN)

We established Middlebury College membership in [PLAN](#), the Post Landfill Action Network. This was an important first step in eliminating single-use disposable plastics from our Middlebury College campus. PLAN provides excellent educational and practical resources that can be used to run a “Break Free From Plastic (BFFP)” campaign on campus. The goal of the campaign will be to generate enough support from students, staff, and faculty to endorse President Patton to sign the [BFFP Campus Pledge](#). The Pledge commits the College to the following steps:

1. Develop a Plastic-Free or Zero-Waste Task Force which is comprised of students, staff, and faculty
2. Immediate elimination of all *non-essential, non-compostable, single-use disposable* plastics with readily available alternatives
3. Establish a procurement and/or purchasing policy which provides the framework for the long-term elimination of all *non-essential, non-compostable, single-use disposable plastics*
4. Implementation of campus-wide systems that facilitates the proper collection and management of the non-disposable products from step 3

We took the following initial steps toward building a campaign supporting the elimination of single-use plastic-free from campus:

1. We met with Young Grguras from PLAN, who is the director of the BFFP Pledge Program, to discuss how to begin implementing the pledge on Middlebury's campus. We discussed how to best start advertising, how to build a comprehensive team of students/faculty/staff to work towards accomplishing the goal, and who to reach out to first with this initiative.
2. We created a survey that enables any Middlebury College community member to show their support for signing the BFFP Campus Pledge. The survey can be accessed at the following go links: go/noplastic and go/byeplastic
 - o While that survey has not yet been widely publicized, it did receive 77 signatures as of 5/11/21
 - o One signer indicated they were staff, 3 did not indicate, and the rest were students
3. We created a second survey aimed at students that informed where we should target our efforts to reduce single-use plastics on campus.
 - o The survey can be found at go/plastic, and we received 101 responses. Overall, there is strong support to reduce plastic waste on campus.
 - o Summary of responses:
 - 61.4% of respondents said that vending machines could be eliminated, and others suggested that single-use plastics should be eliminated from vending machines.
 - While 99% of respondents use a reusable water bottle, 68.4% of students either don't feel confident about disposing of their waste correctly or want to learn more.
 - We received feedback that it is important to consider accessibility with a single-use plastic free campus because some students need to use them for contacts or medication purposes. In the future, we want to stress that the PLAN pledge focuses on the school's production/distribution of single-use plastics, and not the individual's use.
 - 87.1% of students who took the survey are also unaware of where their waste ends up on campus and many would like to know more about the MRF (materials recovery facility).

Recommendations

If it is decided that the Environmental Council (or other group) will continue this work to eliminate single-use plastic from campus, we recommend the following steps be taken:

1. Discuss with President Patton what level of campus support (or other conditions) she would like to see prior to signing the BFFP Pledge.
2. Conduct further investigation regarding:
 - a. the waste produced in athletics, crossroads, and midxpress
 - b. the *specific items* that should be targeted for elimination (see contact Dan Detora below)
3. Once Covid-related use of plastics ends and operations return to pre-Covid protocols, schedule the waste audit from PLAN.

4. *Build* the BFFP Campaign:
 - a. publicize the go link “go/noplastic” to accrue signatures for the PLAN campaign
 - b. create a social media presence for the campaign
 - c. add a focus on consumption via online purchases (packaging, single use items, etc...), though the PLAN Pledge focuses on the College’s production/distribution of single-use plastics, and not the individual’s use
5. Continue communication with professionals
 - a. Kim Bickham, supervisor for waste management. She recommended that we focus on certain types of plastics, such as party materials, Amazon.com packages and unwashed take-out containers, as these make up a large portion of the waste produced on campus.
 - b. Dan Detora, director of dining. Work together to create a detailed list of the single-use plastic items that are currently being used on campus and determine which items can be eliminated. Keep in mind the changes that have occurred in plastics use due to Covid and be aware of changes back to normal operations.
 - c. Corey Berman (Corey.Berman@uvm.edu), program manager for University of Vermont Recycling and Zero Waste Office. He outlined some of UVM’s pursuits in eliminating single use plastics, such as their plastic water bottle ban, providing reusable mugs and water bottles, and providing reusable to-go containers. He wants to pursue the elimination of plastic bags for lining the trash cans, as well as the single use plastics in vending machine products. He said the key to success in these campaigns is clear communication with the community and being in partnership with 3-5 different departments around campus.
 - d. SGA Environmental Sustainability Committee. It’s important to be in contact with students on this committee as they frequently work on similar projects and have their finger on the pulse of student sentiment.

Development of a social justice and equity framework for Energy2028 implementation and Climate Action Capacity Project Collaboration

Toward a justice and equity framework for Energy 2028

From Fall 2020 to Spring 2021 our subcommittee in Environmental Council (EC) was tasked with helping to develop recommendations for embedding the demands of social and environmental justice more centrally across the college’s activities and operations. Our specific focus was on how to integrate these concerns into Middlebury’s flagship effort, and main organizing framework, for mobilizing around the climate crisis: Energy 2028.

We engaged a range of stakeholders (including students, faculty and staff) in order to gather key priorities, concerns, and suggestions, and to assess how questions of justice and equity were and were not being addressed in Energy 2028. Our EC subcommittee conducted this work in collaboration with the Climate Action Capacity Project (CACP) and its team of Climate Action Fellows. We held regular meetings over two semesters discussing these questions and involved additional student activists and organizers who brought prior experience working in this area. While these group discussions yielded valuable insights, we also identified key stakeholders who were not represented in these deliberations. Thus, members of our group conducted a series of

one-on-one consultations where such stakeholders could offer further input. Finally, events organized around Earth Week (Apr. 19-23) served as another important forum where stakeholders could discuss questions of justice and equity in the context of Energy 2028 and provide feedback and reflections on progress in this area.

In bringing together these perspectives, we highlight the need to better align ongoing climate and environmental activities with principles of equity and justice and we begin the process of identifying priority challenges and opportunities to inform next steps. Although our capacities were constrained by the many organizing challenges posed by the pandemic, and while much further work is needed, we were nevertheless able to discern important and recurring emphases through this process that are worth considering. The takeaways noted below reflect only the broad contours of the much more substantial volume of comments we collected. We plan to share these more granular findings with other units (such as SSL, CACP, EC, etc.) who can continue this work into the future and refine more specific recommendations.

Broadly, our findings emphasized:

- Continuing challenges related to questions of diversity, equity and inclusion in many existing spaces already engaged with climate and environmental issues (such as Environmental Studies, related academic nodes, Environmental Affairs, and student groups); in this regard, stakeholders emphasized:
 - A lack of diversity in the faculty (e.g. the dearth and/or absence of BIPOC scholars)
 - Difficulties experienced by BIPOC students trying to navigate (or simply opting out of) spaces and cultures of environmentalism shaped by problematic historical legacies which privilege parochial and exclusionary attitudes and perspectives
 - The need for student-led and institutionally recognized efforts (complementary to the work of SACs) to recruit, mentor, and advocate for BIPOC students in and around “already environmental” spaces and to work closely with faculty to integrate equity and justice principles into and across environmental curricula in those spaces
 - The need to direct more resources and support to existing environmentally-oriented spaces that are already successfully beginning to center justice, diversity, equity and inclusion in their work (such as The Knoll and FIRE, among others) and cultivate broader networks of support for BIPOC students more broadly
- An apparent lack of substantive engagement with climate and environmental issues (including but not limited to questions of environmental justice) across significant segments of the college—namely, those “outside” of established “environmental spaces”—a finding that was especially emphasized in student experiences; this finding was particularly concerning given Middlebury’s pronounced environmental branding; in this regard, stakeholders highlighted:
 - The need for greater emphasis and programming around climate and environmental issues among the general student population in “non-environmental spaces” but also a need to structure that emphasis around an explicitly justice-led analysis and intersectional framework that appropriately situates “environmental issues” in deeper histories rooted in systemic patterns of

violence, exclusion and inequity related to identifiable processes like capitalism, (settler) colonialism, racism, etc.

- e.g. by establishing a sustainability and/or environmental justice requirement for students across the college (akin to steps taken by other colleges in this regard)
- e.g. by supporting continuing curriculum decolonization efforts (both in ES and non-ES spaces) and expanding them
- A continuing lack of broad awareness about what Energy 2028 is (which was likely compounding a deficit in student interest and sense of ownership in it)
- The need for more expansive thinking and critical interrogation regarding how the college is “preparing” and “professionalizing” students for life after college, and the ways in which certain career pipelines (especially those that are most lucrative) are being actively encouraged, whether implicitly or explicitly, by different academic departments, with major equity and justice implications (this is not just a concern in relation to environmental careers)
- Among those stakeholders who were more familiar with Energy 2028, more specific challenges were highlighted, including:
 - A desire for greater transparency about how decisions were made in Energy 2028, including how roles and responsibilities of its governing bodies were being defined (who does what), ways for students to access, participate, or intervene in the governance of Energy 2028, and whether terms of reference to those tasked with leading Energy 2028 did or could include specific guidance on incorporating justice and equity considerations
 - Continuing concerns about the college’s management of its endowment: while fossil fuel divestment was the object of intensive student organizing leading up to the establishment of Energy 2028, concerns about how to *reinvest* the college’s endowment in ways that accord with principles of equity and justice came up repeatedly, as well as the need to:
 - expand divestment from other unjust institutions and practices (beyond fossil fuels)
 - appropriately compensate and care for its employees (such that Middlebury can rightly claim its mantle of being a justice-centering institution)
 - take steps to increase responsiveness and transparency in this regard (e.g. by adopting the suggestions of the Middlebury Open the Books Campaign)
 - A strong desire for the college to reassess its procurement, energy, and other operational practices and realign these practices to more ethical standards which, again, center principles of justice and equity, including by:
 - e.g. ensuring that all partnerships already established going forward (including and especially Goodrich Farm) are equitable, using a process that engages and empowers local community members and already-established social justice organizations (such as Migrant Justice, the Milk with Dignity Program, ACORN, and others) and by developing a code of ethics in collaboration with such external organizations which would

- involve the review of partnerships (retroactively as well as proactively) and renegotiating them as needed.
 - e.g. critically interrogating Middlebury's relationship with Vermont Gas, as well as all other energy resource partnerships, with an eye toward these concerns
 - e.g. reevaluating Middlebury's dependence on carbon credits, biomass, energy from Hydro-Québec and renewable natural gas as a way of reaching its energy goals
 - e.g. by more candidly introducing incoming and existing students to continuing problems facing efforts to switch to renewable energy sources (including Middlebury's ongoing struggles, as noted above) so as to avoid greenwashing and acknowledge the need for continued activism and organizing in these areas
- Other issues related to how the college relates to its surrounding community, particularly in the context of indigenous peoples, were also a clear priority; here, stakeholders emphasized how:
 - Energy 2028 could and should extend its scope of implementation to the broader Middlebury community in the spirit of facilitating a more reciprocal, partnership-driven interaction between the college and its host town, which could prioritize the inclusion of indigenous peoples and move towards centering them in questions of reconciliation and justice.
 - e.g. by dedicating resources to support the needs, history and experiences of marginalized communities and local Abenaki (e.g. giving back some lands, free tuition, listening to their voices, etc.)
 - Energy 2028 and the college would benefit from, as a start, committing resources towards hiring a full time indigenous programmer / educator and, more broadly, take into serious consideration all options on the table that are requested by the indigenous community (including giving not just access but ownership / decision-making capacity to college lands to the indigenous community if requested).
 - The college could consider ways of using its lands and buildings to advance more sustainable as well as more just and equitable outcomes in the surrounding community, for instance, by addressing the current housing crisis
 - The decolonial demand of land-back creates difficult challenges for the college: while acknowledging land is an important place to start, true justice while occupying stolen Indigenous land is hard to imagine; responses might include financial and material return, and can be considered with regards to investment, endowment and donor funds, land dispossessed for carbon neutrality and under active college ownership and future properties and assets promised to the school.
- Student activism continues to be a fundamentally critical feature of the college's aspirations to climate and environmental leadership and needs to be institutionally nurtured and materially supported