

Narrator 0:00

You're listening to the sounding line from the Gulf of Maine Research Institute.

Gayle Bowness 0:16

I'm Gayle Bowness Municipal Climate Action Program Manager at gmri. Thanks for joining us. In my work with the Institute I support coastal communities in better understanding and preparing for the impacts of projected sea level rise. This work includes developing maps that expose the complex impacts of sea level rise on community wellbeing, and engaging the public and data collection about the water level and weather conditions that result in local flooding. Much of that work is done in partnership with municipal leaders. In today's conversation, we're going to hear about two cities right here in Maine that came together to create a joint plan for climate action called one climate future. We'll hear about the plan from Julie Rosenbach, Sustainability Director for the City of South Portland, and Troy Moon, Sustainability Coordinator for the City of Portland. Let's take a listen.

Julie Rosenbach 1:09

So one climate future is a joint climate action and adaptation plan for the cities of Portland and South Portland. It's pretty exciting, because in previous iterations, we did climate action plans and we focused on mitigation, which is reducing greenhouse gas emissions. And now we're looking at how do we reduce greenhouse gas emissions but also adapt to the climate change that we know is coming in is already in a lot of ways here,

Troy Moon 1:35

you know, it's a it lays out certain steps that we think we need to take as communities to achieve our climate goals. But it's not just about doing certain things. It's really about thinking about what kind of community do we want to live in and 2050. As we know, it is really said, we're going to see impacts of climate change, whether it be you know, sea level rise, or more hot days or, you know, insect related diseases, you know, any number of things that could happen, but how do we prepare our communities for those changes and still make Portland in South Portland, the wonderful livable communities they are now and why people want to live here, we want to maintain that and make sure people still really want to live here in 30 years.

Gayle Bowness 2:16

So you're using the word we and we're talking about Portland and South Portland, a lot of you both here. So could you talk a bit about why you decided to do a joint city plan and why it was that important.

Julie Rosenbach 2:27

That was that's one of my absolute favorite things about this plan. And as far as we know, when we when we set off to develop this plan,

we were the only two cities doing a joint plan in the country. And it makes sense on so many levels. On a geographic level, we share Casco Bay, we have a lot of people who live and work in both cities, you know, our economies are so tied together. But also, it's a big undertaking. We know that climate change is not just a municipal or even a regional or even a state its climate change is a global issue. And so the more that we can build partnerships around addressing it, I think the stronger the plan. The other thing is, I absolutely love working with Troy. And we both started out as one person offices and now we've expanded our offices, but really taking on the the magnitude of how are we going to get to zero carbon emissions by 2050 is really daunting. And it's been fantastic. We had a partnership already based on a lot of initiatives we had done, and it just seemed like the next natural step. And in fact, I think it started with a little bit of me, saying, Hey, Troy, we achieved our municipal Climate Action Plan for municipal operations. And now I really need to do a city wide Climate Action Plan. And I think I need a steering committee, and I really need you on that steering committee. And he said, Well, my council wants me to do a climate action plan as well. Well, great, and it went from there.

Troy Moon 3:55

It hasn't really said it's it's better they work together, we were one of our goals was to demonstrate the importance of regional collaboration, we could have Portland could have the best climate action plan in the world. And if the things that South Portland were doing was weren't complimentary, and supportive, certainly as effective and the same for for South Portland and largely and for the state. So it's really important when you think about this as a as a thing we work on together. And also, it just made sense, from an efficiency point of view to I mean, Julie mentioned, we are really small teams, and doing a joint near doing both communities at once was not harder than doing it was it was easier than doing them separately because we're able to kind of pool our, our financial resources and our personnel resources and have a much better product and it was fun to like work on issues on both sides of the river and, and think about how, you know, different policies or practices, you know, affect people in each community a little bit differently, and just having great teammates to work together and share ideas and frustrations and sound off with and, you know, vent with and just in celebrate with you because we had, we really did have a lot of fun. It was super hard, but we had a lot of fun working on this plan.

Gayle Bowness 5:16

So to switch a little bit, what are some of the barriers to all this work that you're doing all these projects and, and what's keeping you up at night.

Julie Rosenbach 5:27

I'm not necessarily up at night, I feel more jazzed about all of the

work that we're doing and just being able to work on these initiatives. And I feel like somebody else that doesn't directly do this work every day, might be more nervous about climate change than what we're doing. But since I get to wake up every day and take action, I just feel really inspired by our plan and by the work that we're doing. And every day just being able to put policies and programs together to to move something forward to create the sustainable community that we want to have, I should say, one, one barrier. Some of the barriers are that as municipalities, we don't have the capacity or the legislative state level action to move forward with what we do. Like the the, the building energy code is a is one uniform, building an energy code for the state and cities and towns can't go beyond that. So a lot of what we looked at is, where are the barriers? And where do we need to then advocate on the state level to change things so that we can move forward as cities and we're just trying to not see barriers and stop but see barriers and say, how do we make them into opportunities or change what we need to change at the state level. And that's been, that's been great.

Troy Moon 6:44

I'm really I've been working at this for a long time, we did our first Climate Action Plan in Portland and 2000 of our first greenhouse gas generation, say in 2001, and our first municipal Climate Action Plan in 2008. So it just seemed, you know, we've made some progress, and you know, but what's kind of exciting now is, it makes me feel good about what's going on, is it you know, after pushing that ball for so long, it feels like it's really starting to pick up some momentum finally, which, you know, I'm super gratified about that. But, you know, and so I'm glad we're doing it now. You know, I wish the ball had started rolling, you know, sooner, but we are where we are. And so I'm glad that it's finally happening. You know, but there's so much to do, and the, you know, importance and that, you know, and the fact that we're seeing climate change happening so quickly around us, you know, just underscores the importance of, of what we're doing. And so yeah, I mean, if anything keeps me up at night, it's like, Can we do this fast enough? Because there's so much to do, and the stakes are so high. Because, you know, any, you know, I think about whatever carbon we can reduce now is carbon does not going to make the world hotter. And for somebody, you know, largely for other people, we have our problems here, but other parts of the globe, are impacted much more dramatically than Portland is. So mean, we need to do our part to keep the entire planet to be a livable place for everybody, whether they're in North America or Asia or Africa.

Unknown Speaker 8:10

Yeah, I tell I totally agree that and it seems like the stakes are high. And it seems like how are we going to get to where we need to get to. But I have such faith that we will I mean, if you look at some of the things, and how many people have, you know, we were pushing air source heat pumps, or what people call mini splits for heating and

cooling. And now there's great efficiency, main rebates and people are installing left and right in their houses. And that changing what we use for energy away from fossil fuels, towards renewable energy, the EV car market and truck market that's about to make a major shift as well. So I feel like we keep pushing and pushing and it feels like we're making small incremental progress. And then all of a sudden, it catches and it's the tipping point and it takes on and it moves forward. And so it's just it's really love my job I love working with fantastic people like Troy and his team and you know, we just get to move we get to move things forward in a way that is going to create science create a different life people live here on purpose because a great way of life and so we're just gonna preserve it and make it more sustainable so

Gayle Bowness 9:17

so you guys have clearly put a lot of work a lot of heart a lot of soul blood, sweat and tears and all of that into this plan. And the the folks that you work with to a lot of people have contributed to it. So what advice do you have for other cities from what you have learned or other sustainability professionals?

Unknown Speaker 9:36

I'd say collaborate, we, we aren't in this, you know, we can't do everything. We can't do it ourselves. We can't solve the problem in our own individual offices or even within our own cities. So reaching out to partners in other communities, engaging with the citizens and people in the community. Just reaching out and and get started.

Julie Rosenbach 9:59

Yeah, they say that the dimensions of success are relationships process and results. And I feel like it's it's never been so clear to me as in this process, you know, we built a lot of relationships, and you know, Portland, South Portland, small towns, and really assume that relationships are fundamental to so many things that we do. And so we had really strong partnerships and relationships, and I think our city councils are, have been very supportive and, and visionary in it to what they want to see their communities be. And so that has allowed us to open up with people and start talking with people and kick around ideas and develop new programs and new policies. And so it's just given us a little bit of the freedom to say, here's, here's what we here's what we'd like to see and going out and seeking that. As we were developing all of the strategies. I mean, there's 67 strategies, but like 100, and something actions to take, we had to be careful and say, Well, that would be fantastic. But that's not quite in our wheelhouse. We need to make sure that we are doing what municipal governments should be doing and not mission creeping out. And so we just naturally said, Oh, well, we could partner with this group, or that organization or that foundation. And there are so many people that are doing fantastic research, advocacy education in the state of Maine, that that it just makes it a lot easier. And it does

make it easier when we get together with a group of people.

Troy Moon 11:32

And one of the as Julie mentioned, relationships are super important and really foundational to what we're doing. And as we were doing the plan, we were trying to build those relationships. And one of the things we realize is that we need to enhance our relationships and have better relationships with some parts of our community, they're a little harder to get access to maybe whose voices aren't always at the table. If you think about relationships and government is that it really privileges people who are already in the networks and who understand or have time to participate in, in a political type process. So we really, you know, one of our goals and priorities moving into the, you know, implementing the plan is to be really a lot more intentional about building those relationships, getting to know more people, you know, in the immigrant community, or, you know, people who are experiencing homelessness, you know, some people are going to be impacted by climate change more than others. And we want to make sure that we build those relationships and get input and understand what some of the issues impacting, you know, everyone in our community are. So we can make sure that we are intentional about addressing them too. And, and having, you know, people really contribute to solving the problems that are will affect them as well. So

Julie Rosenbach 12:49

when COVID hit, we were still in the process of developing our plan, and then the Black Lives Matter movement started. And so we set out to develop a plan that was based on equity, and really focused on equity. But when COVID hit in the Black Lives Matter movement happened, it it really, we looked again at everything and really re examine things. And we said, climate justice is not going to happen without social justice. And that has to run through every single strategy in our in our plan. And so we've really worked on that. And like Troy said, we have, we have a long way to go. Because it's not just a matter of reaching out to people, it's a matter of spending time to develop the relationships with people who don't traditionally have a voice. And so we're working on that right now into the future.

Unknown Speaker 13:38

I mean, it's one of those things that we need to make sure we're intentional about going forward for everything we do.

Unknown Speaker 13:44

One last question, what what has been being part of this work meant for you personally, or for your families, personally?

Troy Moon 13:53

I think people who work in especially people who have been in municipal government for a long time, are maybe somewhat idealists.

And so for me, being able, you know, I'm really concerned about climate change, it's something that I care a lot about, and being able to, you know, play a role in taking action at this at the municipal level is really important to me, to be able to see the impacts what we're doing the changes and the you know, working because the municipal governments were like the rubber meets the road in terms of government, it's like things happen. It's not just policy, it's actually action. And so to be able to see the changes that we're talking about and contemplating actually starting to take place is really gratifying.

Julie Rosenbach 14:37

I don't feel like I'm an idealist. If I describe myself I'd be like a super practical person and I like just doing really practical things. And so, I mean, this is part of the partnership and why it works so well is that I feel like in this job, I get to be useful and practical towards fighting climate change in Laser so many different things that people are say, Hey, we should do this or we should do something else that we think about, we say, well, it seems like a big effort, and it might not actually change that much. So let's look at where we can have the biggest impact. And really design programs and policies that will push people to change the way they do business we live each day, and yet do it in a way that's not completely impractical. You know, we're not, I don't think we need everybody to be environmentalists, we just need to set up the systems that say this was the right decision to make in a very practical way. You know, there's cost savings associated with all a lot of the energy initiatives and the transportation options are coming that are going to be feasible, price wise, and with a lot of electricity range. And so I think just setting up choices that people make that they can say, Yep, I feel like I have a choice and it's a good choice. I can compost my food waste, because there's a program in my city to do it. And I can take advantage of that just, I think creating the container for people to make the choices.

Unknown Speaker 16:12

That was Julie Rosenbach, Sustainability Director for the City of South Portland and Troy Moon, Sustainability Coordinator for the City of Portland, talking about their experiences collaborating on a joint plan for climate action called one climate future. I'm Gayle Bowness municipal Climate Action Program Manager at the Gulf of Maine Research Institute.

Unknown Speaker 16:35

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