UEPodcast/B-Change Episode 1: Eric Friedman

Warren: Well, Eric, thank you for being with us today on the UEPodcast. And, you know, I met you, I think right in 1992. So the last century, not a century ago, but the last century when UEP stood for Urban and Environmental Policy, not Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning, as it does now. But we were both starting at the Tufts Urban and Environmental Policy Program in 1992. But let's begin with your current job as director of the Leading by Example program in the state of Massachusetts, and work our way backwards from there towards the UEP experience, and how that prepared you for your current job. So I guess to begin with, you know, what is the Leading by Example program? And can you give us a brief overview and tell us what you do and the purpose of the program?

Eric: Yeah, sure. First of all, thanks, Warren, for inviting me to talk with you here today. It's a pleasure to be with you again, and to chat with you, again, and certainly have quite a lot of fond memories of those early days at UEP. And it's nice that our relationship and friendship has continued over the years. And also thanks for making sure everybody knows how old I am. We are putting ourselves into the last century.

Warren: We both have a lot of experience.

Eric: Yes, exactly. Yes, we can come up with lots of words to explain the number of years that have passed. So the Leading by Example program, essentially is if you think about a corporate sustainability program, and you translate that to state government here in Massachusetts, that essentially is what the Leading by Example program is. We work with all of state government, and that includes all 29 public institutions of higher education, all the UMass campuses, the 15 community colleges, and there are nine state universities, as well as every executive agency, you can think of -- our prison systems, our park systems, our highway, Highway Department, all of the health and human service agencies. So agencies and entities that run the gamut from the types of services they provide, the types of buildings they operate, the types of fleets they manage. And our job is to work with all of them to reduce the environmental footprint of state government in support of our overall state objectives. And that includes things like reducing our emissions to net zero by the time we get through 2052, to all of the recycling and waste reduction goals we have and rules we have here in Massachusetts, to conserving water, to buying environmentally preferable products. All of those things are part and parcel of the work that we do at the Leading by Example program.

Warren: Great, great and can you give us some examples? Like what are the things that you're most proud of?

Eric: Yeah, the program has been around in a couple of iterations. It officially started back in 2001, under a different name, actually, through an executive order by then Governor Jane Swift. The program was expanded and revamped into more of its current form in 2007, with another executive order under then Governor Deval Patrick. And actually just recently, Governor Charlie Baker just signed a new executive order just a couple of weeks ago actually revamping the program again and re-stating and resetting some key goals and objectives of our efforts.

Eric: And so I've been working on similar programs since 2000. And, and one, but again, the program really sort of I think, grew significantly in 2007, to more of its its current form, became, became I think, a higher priority within within state government recognizing that, in order to ask all the sectors in Massachusetts to do the things we want them to do, whether that's driving electric cars, or installing heat pumps, or making sure we're insulating our buildings, reducing waste that we generate, if we're asking people, businesses, individuals, other institutions in Massachusetts to do those things, then we had to get our own house in order. And we had to demonstrate that we are doing those things first in state government, and demonstrate how we can do those things. So sort of how do we move a large bureaucracy forward kind of moving the Titanic - right - away from the iceberg? To think of the state government as the Titanic, you're trying to move the ocean liners up slowly, but surely, in the right, the right direction? And I think part of your question in there was, I think you started to ask, like, what are we most proud of? Or what am I proud of in the program? It's a really interesting question. Because I think, certainly, many people would want to hear something about tangible results, or some sort of data or some kind of l, numerical equation or numerical results that we've had. And I think we could certainly point to, to a lot of those. But I, I think, perhaps what I'm most proud of is the sort of intangible cultural change and cultural shifts that we've been able to see happen within state government. As you can imagine, state governments are pretty large, we're talking about 10s of 1000s of employees, 10s of millions of square feet of buildings, 1000s of vehicles. And so trying to kind of integrate a way of thinking into a body like that is challenging, for sure. But I think that over the years, we've really created a program that has led to a shift in the way many of our institutions think about sustainability, think about greenhouse gas emissions, think about climate change. And I like to think that part of that shift, certainly, I can't take credit for all of it. And our program can't take credit for all of it. But I would like to think that our program has had an influence and an impact in helping at least some of that change happen throughout our colleges throughout many of the agencies that we work with. And we see that I think in the level of acceptance that really is ever present now in many of our agencies, all the way from fleet managers who are just recognizing now that electric vehicles are where we're going, this is the this is the vehicle of the future, and there's just growing recognition that gasoline vehicles are on their way out. And so, you know, rather than fight or oppose those changes, a lot of fleet managers now are coming to us directly and asking, How can we, how can we make this shift? How can we make this transition to electric vehicles within our fleets? Similarly, in a lot of our larger college campuses, instead of folks thinking poorly, or opposing the kinds of large scale shifts we need to see in the way we heat and cool our buildings, many of them are now thinking very far ahead and thinking how do we actually move away from fossil fuels? How do we electrify our heating system so that we are taking advantage of the grid that is getting cleaner every day, and really eliminate and move away from transition away from fossil fuels? This is something that you know, 10 years ago, wasn't really on anybody's radar screen, either of those. And now we see 10 years may seem like a long time, but in the timeframe of something like this and sort of shifting, you know, an entire system like state governments and really just rethinking the way we do business. So it's actually quite a short amount of time. And so I think we have seen a tremendous shift in the level of acceptance of the way people are thinking about the future.

Warren: So but let's talk a little bit about-- I would like to come back to the examples. But for now, we're on a course where you just introduced, you know, a major, or there's been a cultural shift u is the way you put it. You know, how did that happen? What are some of the techniques or tools that you learned that you used to turn the Titanic? around? Or at least make it shift course away from the iceberg? What are the change tools that you have found to be most useful? Or give me some examples of some not to say what's most useful or not?

Eric: Yeah. Yeah, I can certainly try. And thanks for that question, Warren, I think it's an important one and one that programs like ours grapple with all the time. In fact, I'll just sort of as a segue or a side note, that will then lead us back to the answer there. We have been working with the US climate Alliance, which is a group of 25 states around the country that have adopted essentially the goals of the Paris accord. This was back when the US was actually pulled out of the Paris accord. And so a bunch of states got together and agreed to continue to, to try and achieve those goals independently of a federal action. And one of the new programs that the climate Alliance has established with us in support is a leading by example, coalition, or leading by example, working group. And so a number of states that have Leading by Example efforts have been meeting over the past number of months to get to know each other and start learning from each other. And this very question that you're raising is really at the crux of what many of them are asking, how do we, how do we affect change? How do we take a large institution like state government that is used to doing things a certain way? And how do we shift that institution in a different direction? And how do we do that quickly? And how do we do that effectively? And so I think, over the years, we've implemented and have attempted a number of strategies. And I think, in retrospect, I would categorize them as a group by saying, it's the approach that we take is kind of an all of the above approach, there's really not any strategy that we don't try, or we don't, we don't work on utilizing. And by that, I mean, you know, we work to make sure that there is top level support. And so by figuring out ways to get executive orders implemented, under different administrations, that's really important to demonstrate high level support to all of the state governments. So that's absolutely a key ingredient of moving programs like this forward. But at the same time, those directives from the top don't really have all that much impact unless you are finding and working with the right people at the right places in the right institutions. And so we spend quite a bit of time cultivating relationships with people throughout state government. And that takes many forms. We have regular meetings with contacts that we've developed at different agencies to listen to their concerns, to review priorities with them and to identify project opportunities with them. We have something called the leading by example Council, which meets regularly. And it's a body of particular state agencies that we meet with to, again, provide guidance to us, but we also communicate information to them. We have a regular email outreach system to hundreds of state employees throughout the Commonwealth at you know, every college or university that we work with, and at most agencies, and they do is there to try and make sure that they are up to speed on all of the resources that are available to them, all of the new priorities, all of the new directives, all of the new guidelines that that are available to them to support them in the work that they do. We also have worked hard to provide recognition and acknowledgement to individuals and also agencies and college campuses. And even though it's a relatively simple thing to do, it actually goes a long way toward providing the support for the people that sometimes are, you know, working in silos and their own institutions. It allows them to recognize that there are people watching. And it also provides them the kind of support they need internally to build broader support within their institutions. I think some other strategies that we've used are to sort of move incrementally. We are often trying to work with individual agencies in different ways, and to sort of meet them where they are. And what that often means is that some agencies in college campuses are further ahead than others. And so for those that are farther ahead, we are working with them on developing long range, decarbonisation plans, for example, something that's very cutting edge and very far reaching. On the other hand, there's other agencies where, you know, thinking about energy efficiency, and installing solar panels is more where they're at. And so, it makes a lot of sense to not push everyone at the same time, in the same direction, because not everybody is ready to take the same kinds of steps.

Warren: So I want to, I want to push back a little bit, because you started by saying, you know, you throw I mean, I'm paraphrasing, I think, but you throw, you throw everything at the problem. And I don't think that's really what you mean, because clearly, you've had success with some different approaches, and lack of success with other approaches, I'm assuming. So if you were talking to somebody who was going to be starting a, you know, program to change the efficacy of, of changing the state government. You know, you've mentioned three or four things on your list, building relationships, whatever, a couple of the other ones that you mentioned.

Eric: Record recognition, recognition, recognition. Yeah. meeting people where they are.

Warren: My guess, is that there are some things that work better than others. And, and so if you were giving advice to someone who was just starting out, what can I push you to? To name? You know, three to five, particularly effective strategies?

Eric: Yeah, well, let me see if I can answer that in a couple different ways. And so let me push back a little bit on your push back, Warren, if I may.

Eric: So I think that when I said, you know, it's an all of the above strategy, I think I didn't mean it's sort of a hit or miss, right strategy, where you're just kind of trying things and seeing what works. What I think I meant to say was that there are so many different types of organizations out there that are at so many different levels, that it's really important to have a toolbox of strategies that you can utilize, depending on the situation that you're sitting in.

Eric: And I think it is important to say that there is no magic bullet, right? There's no magic solution to these problems. And that it does require a kind of all of the above approach to try and accomplish what, what, what we need to accomplish. But I guess if I had to sort of try and focus in on a few things. I think that building relationships, having effective communication with people is really critical. Because the work doesn't get done without the people. It just doesn't happen. You can't You can't establish a policy and then implement the policy without having people do the implementation. So having those relationships really matters and that's not it sounds maybe easy. Although, you know, anybody who's been in a long term marriage or has kids or, you know, tries to navigate the intricacies of relationships, I think news perhaps it's not particularly easy at all. And in fact, navigating the relationships with, you know, hundreds of people across, say, the government, can sometimes be complicated and can sometimes be challenging. Sometimes, there aren't the right people at the institution you want to work with. And so you have to figure out how to either find those people or even cultivate some people, we've had some examples where, you know, we haven't really had success working with agencies, but we find there's a person who's kind of interested and so we have to sort of cultivate that relationship with someone who's expressing even some remote interest, and try and bring them into our, our universe, you know, slowly and try and make sure that we're not going to scare them away and not going to push them so hard that they want nothing to do with us. Sometimes we've got it contacts and agencies who really want to do the right thing, but they feel like they are constrained by people in charge, or by the rules that they're they're operating under or by some other priorities that are just, you know, taking precedence over the work that they want to do. And so in that case, you know, our relationship isn't so much in terms of cultivating a relationship with that person, but it's actually how do we, how do we build relationships with other people at that institution to then support this, this person that we are trying to work with them that is actually committed and wants to do wants to do the work. And so that requires a different set of, of strategies of outreach efforts of, you know, whether it's acknowledgment or finding the right leverage points, providing grants to a particular project, and you know, getting your foot in the door that way, even having events or a meeting at their campus or at their agency, and highlighting the work they're doing to people that are at the meeting can sometimes help to create a broader relationship and a more effective way of communication.

Warren: So can I, can I jump back to the beginning of your experience in the state and actually before that, to your experience at UEP? You were hired by the state, soon after graduating from UEP.Well, you were hired at first by the purchasing department. Well, what were some of the things from your UEP experience that you learned through UEP, that positively influenced your experience, working for the state, especially as a newly graduated person in the state, who was working during a time when environmental changes were not necessarily as mainstream, quote unquote, mainstream as they are now. But anyway, what were your experiences at UEP that helped inform your first role in purchasing?

Eric: Yeah, good. It's great, great question. And I think I'll just before I get to the answer, I want to add on that add on to sort of your description of that scenario was that the purchasing office was even, I think, less susceptible or less willing to think about environmental issues than perhaps going to work in another institution might might have been, and that, you know, remains the case to be remains the case today is as well, just because purchasing is not, you know, a hotbed of environmentalism, right. Purchasing offices are designed to develop vehicles, at least in Massachusetts, and certainly in many other large institutions that the people working in purchasing are, are there to support the needs of other agencies or other departments that need to purchase things in a streamlined and cost effective way. And so their goal is to help those agencies find products that are readily available for them that are that that'll save them money for their cost effectiveness and that serve the purpose that they are intended to serve. And so trying to bring in kind of an entirely new set of criteria around sustainability, around environmental protection, was something that is not particularly common to institutions, like a purchasing office. Let me just say that my experience of UEP is multifaceted. It's not obviously just the classes that I took. But it was also the field projects, or it was, you know, some of the work we did out internships I had, or some of the work we did outside of classes talking to, I think one of our assignments in one of our classes was to talk to a graduate and to interview them and to, to ask questions about, you know, their job, and to try and learn from that. And so all of those experiences, I think, kind of worked together to provide that UEP experience. And I think if I had to boil it down, although there's probably talk about a lot of things, but I think if I had to boil it down, I think the one of the most valuable elements of the UEP experience that really helped me in that first job and continues to help me to this day is this notion of understanding the wide array and wide variation of perspectives that people bring to any situation and any problem. So everyone can look at, you know, the same situation, and come at it completely differently. You could have 10 people in a room, they could be looking at, you know, climate change, and they could all think differently about climate change. So, the answer to how do you get people to to work on climate change isn't to tell them, tell them what they need to do, or isn't to give them one solution, but it's to understand how they are perceiving climate change, and to try and address their perceptions as a way of moving them again, to sort of adopt and accept that we need to do something on climate change. So for some people, it's what's the world I'm going to leave to my kids? For somebody else, it's how much this is going to cost me and how much am I going to save for somebody else, it's the, you know, lack of biodiversity, and it's the impact on wildlife and on species. For other people, it's a public health issue, or it's an environmental justice issue. And so people can, can come at the same problem and there can be just innumerable numbers of perspectives and ideas on why something is important. And so I think the UEP experience really helped me to understand that those perspectives are all valid, and that they all need to be acknowledged and recognized, and that that's the way you develop these relationships. And that's the way you help people to hopefully see what you want them to see, in terms of the need to solve problems.

Warren: I think that was one of the strengths of UEP. But I also wonder if there's a method or a way, you know, how do you? How do you for lack of a better word distill, or come to an agreement about what path forward you're going to take if some of the people are on the path for different reasons?

Eric: I yeah, I think I understand what you're saying. But I think that maybe I don't necessarily, I'm not sure the premise is right. So I'm pushing back more and again. Because I think that it's not the fact that people see just using that example, again, of climate change, and all the different ways in which people might attach importance right to that issue. On some level, it doesn't really matter why they feel what they do, or what they see as the issue. If, if you can understand the perspective that they're bringing to the problem, and then you can work with them to help them understand that the solution to the problem helps to resolve, you know, it helps to mitigate the the issues that they're that they're seeing or that they care about, then that's what really matters. The resolution to climate change doesn't change, whether you care about costs or whether you care about diversity or whether you care about public health, or environmental justice, right. We still need to implement the same policies. But the way you talk about them, the way you communicate about them, the emphasis that you put on certain elements. Have the solution may change. And the examples that you give may change, depending on who you're talking to, and what perspectives they bring. So I don't I don't think you end up having to convince people of different solutions, I think you just communicate to them in different ways that demonstrates your understanding of the issues and the perspectives that they're bringing.

Warren: But if when you bring people together to address the problem of climate change, they will have, I think, different priorities as you as you've already pointed out, and so they'll, a lot of they'll be up a desire, depending on who the people are that you're talking with, to start in different places. And so, if you're trying to develop an overall strategy to address climate change, you might have disagreements emerge, depending on the population that you're working with.

Eric: Or I would say, the strategy you develop has to be cognizant of the various perspectives that people are bringing.

Warren: Yeah.

Eric: Right. So if you're right, I mean, if your strategy to address climate change is to build, you know, wind turbines everywhere possible. That's a strategy that will, you know, maybe placate certain portions of the population that believe that we need as much renewable energy wherever it is no matter what, but for some people who care about other things that that may not be, you know, the single strategy that's gonna, that's gonna work for them. So developing sort of a narrow vision of what a strategy can be based on, you know, a single perspective, your right is not gonna is not going to serve the purpose. So it really, it really points to I think, developing a strategy that is complex, and is varied and addresses all of these valid-- back to this, this question of perspectives and valid perspectives, that strategy has to think about what the different needs are of different different types of people, different populations.

Eric: I mean, I think, you know, it's really important. We all have our perspectives, right, based on our experience. And so my perspective comes from working within these large institutions that are not monoliths, right, where people have lots of priorities, many of which have nothing to do with the environment, or have nothing to do with emissions reductions or sustainability. And so just by nature of my job, and the work that I have been doing, this approach has become necessary. It is, I could not do what I do without acknowledging that people come at things very differently, that it's really important to acknowledge that. Now, I'm not saying that's the right way, or the only way, I think it's really important that there are people out there who are banging the drums and are saying, No, no, no, we have to do you know, ABC at any cost, otherwise, the planet is not going to survive, or, as my son likes to tell me, humans will not survive the planet. So those, you know, perspectives are valid as well. And they come from the experience of those people, right, who believe that we have to take action now. And it doesn't matter almost what some people think. Because if we don't do it, all bets are off. So I, you know, I come I come to you sort of from one little mini slice of life with my perspective of how to affect change in the world that I live in. It's not necessarily the only way.

Warren: Right, now, and I appreciate your perspective. And I, I don't want to make it seem like I'm not, I'd like I don't. Well, and this may be a good time to bring in the issues around environmental justice. And I noticed that you recently completed an unconscious bias program, and communicating across cultures program through LinkedIn.

Warren: So why did you take these courses? And how does it relate to your work on sustainability?

Warren: And how well and the follow up question would be how do you think that-- How do you think that environmental leaders like you integrate the lessons of unconscious bias or should be integrating the lessons of unconscious bias? In their programming?

Eric: That's a lot of questions in one--in one question,

Warren: All right, take them, take them one at a time.

Eric: I'll try and take them one at a time. And if I, if I miss something, please remind me of what I managed to miss. So start with the easy one, which is why they take these courses. These courses are, and were offered to all state employees, through our HR department, actually, through LinkedIn, but sort of offered again, through HR department in, in our growing efforts within state government to acknowledge that there is work to be done on environmental justice and equity issues. And that while I think no one would say, at least on an individual level, right, that we are not aware of these issues. I think that that's a far cry from recognizing some of these unconscious biases and sort of institutional biases, that that exists and have existed for forever, I guess. So. So these courses were, you know, offered to us. And I think we all, you know, have jumped at the chance to take them to start exploring how to look at these issues differently. I think, you know, I'll, I'll jump to sort of, I think your last question, which is to say, I think your last question was, how have we or how should we be dealing with these issues in the positions that we're in? And I'll start by saying that I think we've not really been dealing with these issues at all. And I think it's why these courses and these discussions that we're having are so important. But I also will acknowledge that this is incredibly challenging and incredibly difficult. One, it's because just acknowledging that you may actually have unconscious bias is a hard thing to, to admit on a personal basis, I was raised in a very, very liberal, very welcoming family that, you know, where, obviously, we valued and treasured diversity. But that's not to say that I wasn't raised in a culture that was familiar to me. And clearly, you know, over the years, I have gravitated toward people who are similar, similar to me. And so starting to recognize that, that even though I'm not I don't have kind of a conscious, a conscious bias or that I'm not thinking anything at all poorly about anybody. That's not to say that I am not perpetuating kind of some of these injustices that have been around for centuries. So. But where do we go from here? I it that that last question, which is the big one, Warren, which is like how do people like me, or people in the sustainability world kind of bring these issues to the to the forefront, and make sure that we are considering them in a way that can start to, again, move the Titanic, this time? It's the Titanic of, you know, historical injustices? And I don't have an easy answer for that. I am not sure. I think this is a work in progress and is something that we are all grappling with. I think the first step is that we recognize that this is an issue, and that we at least start to ask the questions. So when we are developing programs, when we are developing projects, when we are communicating impacts of things. First and foremost, we need to ask the question, you know, are we negatively impacting or perpetuating some of these injustices and some of these equity issues, and to at least acknowledge that that's something we need to be asking right up front? And to be thinking about that. That's a huge, huge shift from the way we've always done things, right. Where we just kind of did things because they were sustainable, and because they were the right thing to do, but didn't ask like, are we? Are we addressing some of these equity issues in a way that we need to be in our way? Are we actually targeting or prioritizing overcoming some of some of these issues through the work that we're doing? So, you know, that's not a very satisfying answer, probably to, to you listeners, or even myself. But I think it's a place that's the place that we're at, right now.

Warren: Ella, do you as someone who is writing your thesis on environmental justice-- do you have anything to ask, or questions?

Ella: Um, yeah, I had a question that was somewhat answered just now, but, I almost have a clarification question on sort of the scope of your work. So, you are working within the state government but I did a little research and it says that Leading By Example also works to sort of empower residents and businesses. Do you do any direct outreach work and if so are there strides to center equity in that work?

Eric: So, yeah, so I think that when we say empower businesses and residents what we mean is by example. So the idea is that ya know if we can change our fleet over to electric vehicles or if we can build solar canopies in parking lots or if we can build buildings that are all electric incredibly efficient net zero buildings then the idea is that residents and business and other institutions can do the same thing. We don’t directly work with businesses or individual residents other than to kind of set the example demonstrating strategies that work. So that’s, yeah, that’s kind of the extent to which we are involved with some of those other elements.

Ella: Absolutely. Um, and Warren and I were talking a bit about, obviously, COVID changes all of the work that we all do and the question was has the evidence of clear disparate impacts by race during the COVID pandemic changed the way you think about your work?

Ella: Or how, is the better question?

Eric: Yeah, so I think, I think I would say yes but indirectly. Um, I think that again what we are seeing in the ways in which some of the disparities and injustices are being expressed through the kind of institutional response to COVID, is again, uh, providing evidence that these institutional biases and the structures that are set up are incredibly powerful. And that despite, you know, you can argue that no one intended to do this, let's just assume for the moment, right, that some of the injustices that we are seeing are not intentional, um, maybe that's overly optimistic but let's just use that as a premise. Then if they're not intentional and yet they still occur at the scale in which they occur, then the sort of the institutional infrastructure that is again perpetuating these injustices is just incredibly powerful and incredibly strong. So I think it's just more evidence that, um, in order to overcome these types of inequities we have to be incredibly conscious about the work that we do, it's not just enough to say, to acknowledge these injustices or ask a few questions, the consciousness just has to be throughout everything we are doing and everything we are thinking. And again, that is a sea change, it is a huge shift from how we have done business in the past and so I think it's why for many of us this is incredibly important but it's also very challenging.

Ella: I just had one other question not necessarily about equity just more about COVID and the state of the world, in UEP we talk a lot about sort of like the window for change and i have done internships at the state level and there is a lot of conversation around how COVID has changed our infrastructure in a way that there has sort of been this window to change things more rapidly and also there is pushback on that, I was wondering if that has been part of the discussions you have been having?

Eric: Yeah, it's a fascinating question, and it's probably something you could spend hours on you, you know, talking about, I think the jury is still out on the lasting impacts of COVID, on the way we operate our society, the way our businesses are going to work moving forward, what’s doing to happen to communing, what's going to happen to cities, um, I think that, um, there are already some pretty dramatic changes that are happening. I think the question is how long lasting are they gonna be and it’s really hard to know. It’s clear that the future of work, which is sort of the term of art that many people are talking about, is definitely changing. There are definitely significant changes happening whether that's within state government or within businesses within the way colleges are teaching classes, clearly there are going to be changes in the way we commute to work, how many days we spend in the office, and that's going to have ripple effects and ripple impact on all sorts of things. I will say from an environmental point of view it has been really interesting to watch the impacts on greenhouse gas emissions, and on building energy use, we've seen obviously in this last year we saw tremendous energy drops across many of our facilities, a lot of our colleges were closed. Lot of offices were closed or opened intermittently, and so to some degree we might expect some of those changes continue, on the other hand, you know, COVID has also opened up a window into the need for appropriate ventilation, and building systems that work not just provide the right temperature, but provide the right air flow and sufficient fresh air and filtered air and that’s going to have dramatic impacts on energy use as well but on the negative side because you're going to have to bring in more fresh air, which means you have to heat or cool that air or dry that air and so those impacts are yet to be sort of factored into what’s going to happen to our energy use. And also I think, you know, from a personal level and the program that I work on, the Leading by Example program, the effects of COVID are so important and so unknown that it's making it hard or challenging to think about how we meet our goals or what the right strategies are. So if people are working in offices less, does that mean that we don't need the same number of vehicles, let say, in our fleet? Because we're not traveling to meetings, right or if were doing remote meeting alls the time do we not need to be traveling to meet with each other, what does that mean in terms of the kind of vehicles we buy or does that mean electric vehicles are more appropriate or not and so some of those questions are things that we are grappling with right now and probably will be for some time.

Ella: I’m sure, that’s very interesting.

Warren: Yeah, and some of these things, like for example ventilation, um, you know in Somerville, uh, kids couldn't return to school because a lot of the buildings did not have appropriate ventilation, so there's the sort of potential conflict between different values in terms of like public health, public education, environmental sustainability, may come to different conclusions and also community-- the value of being together in a community-- I don’t know how you would quantify that, but that's a value, so, it is fascinating because there are beyond the differences within the environmental movement itself or environmentalist’s themselves there's a whole nother layer when you start to have the complexity of competing values around different silos or what were different silos in the past, so that's fascinating.

Eric: Yeah, no, agreed.

Warren: Yeah, so, Eric, was there anything important that we left out in terms of the questions we had for you that you'd want to comment on?

Eric: Um, no, this has been really interesting having the chance to think about some of these questions and appreciate you raising them. You did mention one thing, Warren, just in your last bit of the conversation that I thought was interesting and this notion of silos, and I do think I wanted to harken back to the early days of UEP also and talk about one of the lessons I think that I got from UEP that again I continued to hopefully utilize here in my life now which is this need to cross over silos. And this needs to kind of break down the boundaries and the borders between all of the different work that we do. I find that you know when I’m in a room whether its virtual or in person with people again that come with different perspectives and have different roles that the conversation is just more energizing and much more interesting and really leads to better solutions because people are coming at it from different perspectives and so the solutions and the decisions that are made are much more robust and address a much wider range of topics rather than being in their room with people that just have the same goal as you and coming up with solutions that address that goal or that problem but that don't really have a broader impact or a broader view on the different ways it can impact different people. So I think that notion of silos, righ, where public health people are talking to you know building designers and people who operate buildings and ya know people who work in the buildings and have to, you know all of those people have to be involved in that example you gave of whether or not you're able to go into a school all of those people need to be involved in that decision ultimately and that decision cant be made by just the facility manager or just the teacher or just the school district because all of those people are impacted and all need to weigh in on the approaches to resolve that dilemma.

Warren: Yeah, well, Eric, thank you so much for this really, for us at least I think, informative and exciting dialogue that we just had and you know, good luck, and let us know what happens.

Eric: Well thanks Warren I really appreciate the conversation and thanks to you Ella to for inviting me and participating in this.