

Energy Committee Bringing 3 articles to Town Meeting for Climate Leader Designation

In February's Energy Committee column we discussed our plans to apply for Climate Leader (CL) status with the Department of Energy Resources (DOER). To do this the Energy Committee will be bringing 3 articles to town meeting and this month's column presents those articles in more detail, invites you to a public forum to discuss them Wednesday April 17, and asks you to come to town meeting and vote YES!!

Why is Climate Leader status important? 2 Primary reasons- environmental and economic. The state of Massachusetts has set goals for greenhouse gas reductions to ensure a liveable climate for our kids and grandkids. The requirements for Climate Leader Community status are designed to help us get there. The science is clear and the clock is ticking. We need to continue to make progress towards net zero emissions and the Climate Leader requirements provide a planful and gradual way for Ashfield as a municipality to achieve this by 2050.

Once certified, Climate Leader Communities will be eligible to apply for grants for a wide variety of activities and projects beyond the energy efficiency projects currently funded by Green Communities grants. Grants will advance the Climate Leader Communities' clean energy and climate goals, and include funding for rooftop solar PV, battery electric storage, electric vehicles, and community engagement activities, as well as seed funding for municipal sustainability/ energy manager coordinators.

Ashfield has been a Green Communities certified town since 2010 and since that time we have received over \$175K in grants from that program to fund energy efficiency measures which themselves have saved the town lots of money.

Once certified, Ashfield could conceivably apply for both Green Communities grants through DOER up to \$200K AND Climate Leaders grants starting at \$500K **every year**. This would enable us to move forward with municipal solar projects with little to no cost to taxpayers. It would bring millions of dollars of grant funding to our town.

The articles the Energy Committee will be introducing in support of Climate Leader designation are 1) a Decarbonization Commitment, 2) a Zero Emission Vehicle First policy and 3) adoption of the Specialized Energy Code. Below is some basic information, and all of these will be posted on the town website.

Municipal Decarbonization Commitment

The current draft text of the resolution is:

"To see if the town will vote to commit to decarbonization (defined as the elimination of all on site burning of fossil fuels in municipal buildings and vehicles) of municipal operations by 2050 in accordance with state climate goals.

Be It Resolved, that the members of Ashfield Town Meeting call on Town government and staff, to commit to a climate mobilization effort, with appropriate support from the state and

federal governments, to bring municipal net carbon emissions to zero as quickly as possible, with a target date of 2050.”

This is quite simple. It declares our intention to move gradually to net zero emissions **over the next 26 years**. It does not require us to do anything drastic or sudden. Once we have the CL designation we will have access to grant funding to achieve this goal. Another of the CL requirements is that we create a “Decarbonization Roadmap” which uses trigger events such as a town building’s HVAC system coming to the end of its life expectancy, building of a new town building, or replacement of a municipal vehicle to plan how we will gradually move away from fossil fuels in a way which will not place an undue burden on taxpayers. The Energy Committee will work on the roadmap with support from DOER and the Selectboard will have final approval of it.

Zero Emission Vehicle First Policy

This policy says that the town commits to use the following flow chart when purchasing new non-exempt vehicles: Zero emission (EV) vehicles to be considered first, then plug in hybrids, hybrids, then high MPG ICE (Internal Combustion Engine) vehicles. If there is a zero or low emission vehicle **which meets our needs** the policy would direct us to purchase it. This policy would have very little short term impact as large trucks and equipment and police cruisers are currently exempt. The only town owned vehicle which would currently fall under this policy would be the wastewater treatment plant pickup truck. One thing to consider with this policy is that we still retain control. If the town was ever faced with an untenable decision- the policy requiring us to purchase a vehicle beyond our means (even with available grants and rebates)- we can apply for an exemption. If, in the end, we decide not to follow the policy we could ultimately lose our Climate Leader designation but would not face any penalties for doing so.

Adoption of the Specialized Energy Code

The Specialized building code will be brought to town meeting as an amendment of our 2011 general bylaw adopting the Stretch code. It is designed to ensure that all **new construction** is consistent with the net-zero economy we are moving to by 2050. It requires “all new buildings to be designed with electric service and wiring sufficient for future electrification of space and water heating...” For fully electric new buildings there is no change from the current stretch code. New buildings using fossil fuels will be required to be wired for future electrification and to install rooftop PV to offset the fossil fuel use, with some exceptions for shaded sites.

The specialized opt-in code has been adopted by 32 cities and towns so far, including Amherst and Northampton. Kent Hicks, owner of East Branch Studio Builders and faculty member at UMass Building and Construction Technology Program, has been building net zero homes in the Pioneer Valley for many years. “It’s how we should be building...we have to get off of fossil fuels.” He says “It is just not that big of a job to go to the specialized code...It’s not that much more impactful in terms of

cost.” He points out that homes without fossil fuels can be less expensive to build and are safer in terms of indoor air quality and less risky with no combustion happening on site.

The Energy Committee will hold a **Public Forum April 17** 6:30pm in Town Hall to provide more information and address questions and concerns regarding these 3 town meeting articles and our efforts to achieve Climate Leader designation for Ashfield. Please come! We will also have an Energy Committee member Saturdays at the Belding Library 10-12 for each Saturday in April for anyone who would like to talk about this.

As always feel free to contact us at energy@ashfield.org with any questions, concerns, suggestions, or if you would like to help. Next meetings of the Energy Committee will be Monday April 1 and Monday May 6, 3:45-5 in lower town hall and on zoom.