

Energy Committee Ashfield News May 2024- Elder Climate Action

Last year the May Energy committee column focused on youth climate action and this month's column will be focused on Elder climate action. This is an especially important topic in our town, with a median age of 58.5. Older adults have an important role to play in climate action, often having more time available for volunteering and a strong motivation to leave a positive legacy for their children and grandchildren. In this article we will explore different ways older adults can contribute to the movement to address climate change and profile some local elders making a difference.

Ellen L

I put solar panels on my house first in 2016 when they became more affordable, and efficient enough for a house in northern Illinois. When I bought a house in Ashfield in 2022, I immediately started looking at solar options. I moved in in March 2023 and the system was switched on in mid May, and I haven't paid an electric bill since. I have a plug in electric car and added a mini-split heat pump in my bedroom a couple of months later.

I volunteer for two committees, both the Municipal and Residential Solar Working Groups in Ashfield. I am thrilled to be part of an effort to decarbonize our area, and fully support efforts to achieve "Climate Leader" status.

I grew up in Albany NY, and we used to come to Ashfield, to the house and land my mother inherited from my godmother, every summer that my father wasn't teaching summer school. I escaped my noisy house (four brothers!!) by going into the woods to play, almost all day every day. I learned to love the land with all my heart. Coming back usually 2X/year as an adult I was dismayed to see changes: the red eft newts became scarce, the fall color dulled, the beeches are slowly dying. I have grandkids, and I want to help preserve as much of the life of the natural world as I can, both for their sakes and billions of other people, but also for nature itself. We have no right to destroy it, and the world will be a sad version of itself after mass extinctions.

I find myself discovering new ways to "live lightly on the earth" every day. I use the woodstove a lot, and my propane tank is still at 60% full 18 months after filling it. I buy used stuff when I can and trade on the "Buy Nothing" FB group locally. I garden like crazy. I have never really been an optimist, but finally doing something has given me some positive energy.

This is the great cause of our times, it affects all others: refugees, famine, war, poverty, inequality. At this point in life you have more of that precious commodity, time. Use it to leave a positive legacy in the world, for those and this that you love.

Peter C

I routinely reach out to congress supporting climate initiatives.

I belong to Elders Climate Action-MA chapter who are very active and keep me informed and give me opportunities to include my voice. I also belong to no Fracked gas in Massachusetts, and speak out against cutting down forests to power generation facilities, as well as trying my best to convince those who make the laws for us that more gas pipelines are not a good idea. In 2016 I built an energy efficient house with the HERS rating of 4. It is entirely powered by solar. The house is all electrical. My solar also powers my electric car which I bought in 2016, as well as my bicycle that I use for local shopping.

I feel like there's never enough that I can do. I feel that what I do do, doesn't really amount to much. What is necessary is that everybody get involved to the extent possible for each. I have a little hope that we're going to dodge this bullet. Already I'm finding that it's harder to grow food here. The growing season is changing rapidly, and my crops have been affected.

There are too many deniers out there. And they're too many people that don't care. As an 81 year old I don't have to bear the brunt of this, but I fear for my children.

My main motivation for doing all this is simple. It's the right thing to do. I don't want to be part of the problem, I'm hoping to add just a little to the solution.

This has affected my life in that I think of it every day. The thoughts are not pleasant. I'm angry that predatory capitalism drives climate denialism.

I would encourage anyone, not just elders, to speak out, to get involved to the extent that is possible for each of them. And I would encourage them to vote this November with a thought in mind that the outcome is very consequential.

Harry D

For six years I've been a member of the Ashfield Chapter of Citizens Climate Lobby (CCL). Under the excellent leadership of Richard Pree we've gone to Washington to lobby Congress in favor of a bill to place a fee on carbon and return the proceeds from the fee to every household in the US. We've also gone to the Massachusetts State House and collected hundreds of Ashfield signatures to successfully ask our State Representative Natalie Blais to file a similar bill in the state legislature. We've also obtained endorsements from local businesses, met with Congressman Ritchie Neal several times attended and tabled at regional CCL conferences. We hold monthly meetings in Ashfield featuring zoom meetings with CCL leadership and interesting and informative talks from featured speakers.

I've driven an all electric vehicle for the past 7 years and greatly enjoyed the experience. I'll never go back to a gas vehicle.

I do this work so that my children and grandchildren can enjoy a safe, happy life on our beautiful planet. I learned about CCL from Richard.

My work with CCL has given me something tangible to do to address the existential threat of global heating. It's allowed me to stop despairing and to take action to address the problem.

Getting in my EV every day gives me the satisfaction of combining greatly reduced carbon emissions in a car that's fun to drive.

I strongly recommend getting involved with CCL, the Ashfield Energy Committee, making their next car an EV or plug-in hybrid vehicle among other things

Richard Pree

I work with citizen's Climate Lobby- I started the Ashfield chapter back in 2014. It's a very unusual organization and I'm really happy to have found it- it takes the long view that burning fossil fuels creates this huge externality (negative impact not currently factored into the price we pay) and that

polluters should pay. We have to end use of fossil fuels and CCL has 2 main goals: 1) to build the political will for a liveable world, to raise the price of fossil fuels at a steady rate and to set in motion a market based approach. The primary focus of CCL is creating a carbon fee and dividend system. With that The markets will inch upward towards more efficiency and less emissions. The second main goal of CCL is to empower individual members to experience their own power in this democracy. It's really transformational. We work with members of congress. We focus on building relationships, not pressure tactics. We also work on natural solutions to climate change such as carbon sequestration in agriculture and forestry and electrification. We meet the second Saturday of the month at noon at the Ashfield Congregational Church and on zoom and we welcome new members!

Asked what motivates him and what this work means to him Richard states, "There are so many reasons to feel hopeless but your attitude can always be adjusted- you can choose optimism and we should do everything in our power to make the world better. The antidote to hoplessness is action and when you are involved in putting things together it feels good."

Brian Clark

Town Green Communities/Energy Committee - initially to improve energy efficiency of town buildings. Started in 2010 or 2011 with Mary Q. and Jennifer Williams. Helped town obtain Green Communities designation & grant, helped with planning and implementation of energy conservation (insulation, high efficiency heating systems ...) projects at WWTP, Town Hall (including excavating the craw space under the main hall and office spaces), Fire Station, Library and Town Garage.

- Advocating for EV's (electrify the transportation sector) by showing my EV's at car shows, sustainability fairs, etc., giving rides, test drives to others. Helping new owners locally with charging decisions, installations, advice etc. First EV (Nissan LEAF) purchased in spring of 2013. Have now driven over 200,000 miles in my EV's - 2 LEAFs and 3 Tesla's (S, Y, 3). Will be taking delivery of a Cybertruck in the next week or so, to replace an old diesel pickup.

- Deep energy renovation of my childhood home, 2007-2008. Insulation and air sealing of the entire structure, with HRV. Installed floor radiant heat throughout (3 levels), high efficiency wood gasification boiler (Tarm) with 1,500 gallon water thermal storage. Solar domestic hot water (installed by PV2). 7kw PV system installed (PV2) in 2013.

Helping with energy efficiency projects on the family farm (2009 to present):

- initiate & oversee installation of 40kw PV system (2010), and
- 7kw PV system (2019) - both by PV2,
- new, insulated foundation for 3 story farm house,
- design and install high efficiency heating systems for farm house, mechanic shop, apple packing shed, radiant floor heating system for new metal shop (in progress - hope to do geothermal heat pump)

Working/investing/volunteering with Coop Power to start a local biodiesel plant (Northeast Biodiesel LLC), converting used cooking oil collected from regional restaurants into a cleaner

burning and renewable replacement for fossil diesel. Turning out to be much more challenging than expected.

How did you get interested in doing what you do? What are your main motivations?

- initially, wanted to do things to help the country free itself from dependency on mid-eastern oil - my reaction/protest to our military actions (particularly post 9/11) there. Wanted to do something concrete/constructive to help solve the problem, not just taking part in protests of the countries policies.

- this has evolved as I came to understand the existential threat to our country and civilization that human caused climate change represents. I now view climate change as the biggest threat to the security/fortunes of the country (interesting that the US military does too) and human civilization as we understand it. Want to be able to tell my grand children I spent my retirement working on solutions to climate change, not continuing to contribute to it.

How has getting involved affected your life, your feelings about yourself and the world at this point in your life?

I sleep better at night knowing I'm doing as much as I can to help solve climate change, and reduce our countries motivations to be militarily involved internationally.

What would you say to other older adults who are thinking about getting involved?

Work on reducing your own carbon footprint - get to zero or negative as soon as practical. Look for ways to apply your skills and abilities to help others and other organizations working to do the same. Advocate for and educate others on the importance of addressing climate change, things they can do to help.

William Ashley, a Greenfield resident, took an unusual approach to climate action. Recognizing that he was more than financially secure, he began donating funds for solar installations for non profits and municipalities. He made a list of priority towns based on population size and per capita income and sent a letter to the top 18 towns offering to give \$35K each to fund municipal solar arrays. Some towns never responded but Ashley has funded arrays in Warwick, Wendell and Greenfield. As well as a Habitat for Humanity project in Conway. Bill Reports that as of September 2023 he had financed 157 solar panels. He wrote a "My turn" column in the Greenfield Recorder challenging/ encouraging other older adults to follow his example:

"This appeal goes out to certain senior citizens, with a definite "cc" to younger adults and to adolescents. Many of us (I'm 81) have more money than we'll probably need going forward at this point and are very concerned about humanity's response so far to climate disruption and about what the future has in store for ourselves and for those younger adults and children who we hold dear (for those seniors who are strapped for funds, this My Turn appeal is not focused on you). So it's time for us better-off seniors to arise from our laurels and start sponsoring solar installations. This action is likely to disrupt our current conventional IRAs,

annuities, wills, etc., but we must react to this climate emergency for the sake of our loved ones and for Mother Earth. Such action on our parts may confuse our loved ones, but, as climate events unfold, they should come to understand.

One direct “family” **approach would entail refurbishing (if necessary) and powering** the roofs of houses owned by those dear to us, assuming that there are no trees blocking the sun’s transit, etc.

I’m no millionaire, but I am taking action, have set aside a goodly share of my financial assets to sponsor installation of solar panels, and I appeal to you to do the same.”

So I will close this article by thanking the older adults in Ashfield who are active in working to stabilize climate change. Just writing this article and hearing your stories and what your work means to you has inspired me. And I hope that reading this will inspire others to get involved. Do what you can. If there are those who could afford to, do what Bill Ashley is doing. Wouldn’t it be wonderful to have Ashfield Citizens contribute to a “decarbonization fund” to either pay for municipal solar for our town or pay into a fund for residents who want solar but can’t afford it!