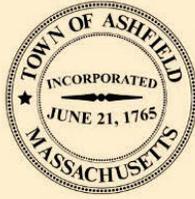




Ashfield Rural Climate Resilience and Living Culture Project

Municipal Vulnerability
Project Case Study



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**Ashfield Rural Climate Resilience and
Living Culture Project:
Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Case Study**

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Prepared for:

**Town of Ashfield, MA, Double Edge Theatre, and
MVP partners**

June 30, 2025

Executive Summary

Ashfield Rural Climate Resilience and Living Culture Project.

What happens when multiple generations of Ashfield residents, guided by a theatre company with a social justice mission, take the time to come together over good food, facilitated conversation, and shared purpose to discuss the community's needs around clean energy, affordable housing, and nature-based solutions to climate change?

One Community Resilience Day, Two Site Tours, Three Community Dinners, Twelve Student Liaisons, 72 Interviews, 417 Participants!

Thanks to a collaborative effort between the Town of Ashfield, Double Edge Theatre and partners, and supported by a generous Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness grant from the Massachusetts Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (hereafter MVP), the community was awarded a unique opportunity to undertake both visioning and information gathering to tackle some of the hardest hitting problems facing the community through the **Ashfield Rural Climate Resilience and Living Culture Project**.

***You need a bunch of things to exist before you can make theatre...
There is no theatre if the town is underwater or on fire. Adam Bright***

The goals were straightforward: to explore three main themes—Clean Energy, Nature-Based Solutions to Climate Change, and Affordable Housing—in community to understand what the residents think, explore meaningful solutions,



Community Dinner #2, Ashfield, MA. Photo by Double Edge.

and build toward creating rural resilience. To accomplish this, the grant mandated both the creation of meaningful community engagement events and that the Town apply for the MVP grant.

Community leaders recognized that Double Edge Theatre and their

close partner Ohketeau Cultural Center have demonstrated community engagement skills, missions that extend beyond their own walls, clean energy experience, and each work to uplift their communities— making them excellent partners for the Town. Each organization engages in work known as *civic practice*, working with the community on issues best solved together.

“We got a lot of people involved. There are people who want to be involved in civic practice, from young people to old people. It's good that we did that.” Stacy Klein

Double Edge recognized that this project would demand significant time and focus, but after consideration, they opted to work in service to the town and take this opportunity to address their common concern of the climate crisis with the community. As Adam Bright, Double Edge Executive Director, noted, “The environmental issues that we're facing as a human race are paramount to us. That's not to say I don't think theatre is a priority for us and it is super important, but you need a bunch of things to exist before you can make theatre. So, for instance, there is no theatre if the town is underwater or on fire. And you also need community, no matter what. So, all those things together make this project and how it was laid out important for us. The other part of what we do, one of our specialties, is that we bring people together to be able to converse, to argue, to discuss, to problem solve, and we do that in ways that are not necessarily how a municipality would do that.”

We were able to bring a group as diverse as Ashfield can offer across demographics into these critical conversations in a way in which voices were heard and supported. Justin Wellman

The requirement to gather and hear from community members was critically important to the grant, and multiple events were created to enable gathering, outlined below, as important were the outreach efforts to bring in as many voices as possible across town and across divides of age, race, gender, political persuasion, and income to share what each believed was best for the Town of Ashfield, their neighbors, their families, and themselves. Double Edge staff invested considerable amounts of time on outreach efforts, often meeting one-on-one to obtain as much input as possible. This effort helped to fuel fresh ideas and engage people who may not otherwise had elected to participate.

Community Events

The **Ashfield Rural Climate Resilience and Living Culture Project** partners determined that a variety of gathering opportunities would offer the widest potential to obtain input from the community on issues related to the three themes of clean energy, nature-based solutions and affordable housing. A mix of Site Tours with one each dedicated to clean energy and affordable housing, Community Dinners, and the creation of Student Liaisons which engaged middle and high school students and an instructor from Mohawk Trail Regional School. Each project drew different audiences with different focus and equally varied learning and outcomes. Double Edge catered each of the snacks, dinners and lunch. Each event was recorded, and the Community Dinners were livestreamed and open to the public. Recaps of each event was produced, and they have been posted on the Town of Ashfield's website. See the Appendix for a list of recordings and URLs.

Community Dinners and Student Community Liaisons

Three Community Dinners were created to provide a facilitated space in which Ashfield residents could come together, have discussions, ask questions, and question assumptions. Each of the Dinners produced opportunities for Action Steps which the Town of Ashfield can utilize for future projects, such as MVP 2.0, and this document can be utilized to create a Resilient Ashfield.

Community Dinners were held in three different locations (Double Edge, Ashfield Community Hall, and Sanderson Academy) to offer community building and introduce people to settings that balance new with familiar. Reimbursement for childcare was made available for parents and other caregivers to facilitate attendance, and onsite childcare was available at the final dinner.

Student Community Liaisons were able to highlight their semester-long project and serve as table moderators at the Community Dinner #3. Their work exploring a resilient future for Ashfield included 72 surveys which served as the key areas for table conversations, adding to the depth and richness of their work. Their story can be found in detail in the Case Study and in Key Findings #4.



Adam Bright capturing participant ideas. Photo by Double Edge.

Community Dinner #1

Held on Thursday, December 5, 2024, from 5:30 - 7:30 pm, at the Double Edge Theatre pavilion, this event was attended by approximately thirty people who gathered for conversation and dinner.

The goal of the project and this dinner was to address the question: *What does climate resilience look like for Ashfield?*

Double Edge Theatre welcomed everyone to the dinner, started with a land acknowledgement provided the context for the project, and the spirit of gathering in community was shared. The conversation circled the

room, as everyone introduced themselves and their favorite place in Ashfield. The conversation expanded to sharing stories, concerns, and ideas related to the prompt: ***What makes your daily life in Ashfield more challenging? What makes it easier to navigate the challenges?***

Among the challenges included: 1. The difficulty of farming in this era of climate change, and increasingly, too much rain and flooding. 2. Lack of access to public transportation. 3. Affordable Housing challenges were shared, including both affordable housing and unexpected sharing by those who noted that they had too much housing. Several of the participants shared that they lived in the same homes where they had raised their families, but they were now either single people or a couple living in homes built for large families. This event set a warm tone and set the stage for the balance of events, as moderator Adam Bright and all Double Edge staff worked to make attendees feel comfortable and heard, while the dinner and desserts made this winter weeknight special and feel unhurried. For more details, see the recap.

Community Dinner #2



Dylan Young captures participant contributions at Community Dinner #2. Photo by Double Edge.

Community Dinner #2 was held at the Ashfield Community Hall on January 30th 2025. This event started with refreshments and a chance to mingle before getting underway.

Ohketeau Director, Larry Spotted Crow Mann, Ohketeau Cultural Center and citizen of the Hassanamisco Nipmuc Tribe welcomed everyone to the dinner and performed two traditional

songs, sharing their messages of preparing, healing, and connection across generations past and future. The night was facilitated by members of Double Edge Theatre and Kim Pevia, consultant to Ohketeau.

After a round of introductions, Kim Pevia explained the structure of a Story Circle a way to ensure stories are heard and that everyone has a chance to share. The room broke into a collection of circles in groups of four. Each person was invited to tell a story about their **vision for the future of Ashfield**.

Similar key themes that emerged echoed such as affordable housing, more public transportation, celebrating farms from Community Dinner #1, but emphasized an interest in:

- Making the town welcoming and accessible to residents of all different backgrounds creating resilience hubs or community centers,
- Pursuing technological solutions for understanding our climate risks, where there are risks, and being proactive about climate action;
- Ashfield being more accessible, walkable, and connected, through public transportation, sidewalks, and clustering housing downtown; exploring collective action – including



Ashfield resident sharing a point at the Community Dinner #2. Photo by Double Edge.

organizing, dreaming, mitigating friction, and being creative in finding solutions.

- Learning from nature and the beings around us.
- Expanding Indigenous involvement and engagement, creating new opportunities and connections in the community.

In addition, there was much appreciation for Ohketeau's leadership during this community dinner. For more details, see the recap in the Case Study.

Community Dinner #3

The final dinner, was held at Sanderson Academy, on April 29, 2025, with 50 people in attendance. The event was facilitated by Kim Pevia. Each individual table was moderated by Student Community Liaisons, middle and high school students from Mohawk Trail Regional School.

Each table had a list of seven criteria that reflect visions for Ashfield and the Hilltowns region that have emerged throughout the process thus far. These included protecting farmland while developing more affordable housing, energy solutions, creating a rural resilience hub, improving resilience to extreme weather and resources for all generations. Each of the seven tables was assigned one topic and was asked to discuss what it would look like if Ashfield and the region could achieve this vision.



Student Community Liaisons: Youth Leadership and Survey work

The 12 middle and high school Student Community Liaisons met with their instructor Rachel Silverman and MVP team members Hannah Jarrell, Dylan Young and Kim Pevia at Mohawk Trail Regional School for a semester to deepen their exploration of what it means to be an Ashfield resident tackling important challenges. The Student Community Liaison work was deemed a resounding

success by parents, Town leaders and the MVP team. As Hannah Jarrell noted, the grant provided the youth with a small stipend, making this work an opportunity to not only get student insights, but offered some paid work for the students.

The liaisons students each conducted six interviews with community members (including peers, parents, neighbors, teachers, and others) to gather insights and ideas on the following questions:

- *What kind of vision of Ashfield / the Hilltowns do you have that would make you want to keep living here or come back to live here after school?*
- *What do you think we can do in our communities to help make our town(s) resilient to the climate / extreme weather events like storms, droughts, and floods we have seen?*
- *What would you do in your local town government to balance the need for farmland and the need for affordable housing? What ideas come to mind?*
- *What else would you like to see to help the future of your town?*

The Liaisons reported out some of their survey findings at the Community Dinner #3 which was built around their efforts each of the dinner tables (seven in total) was assigned one of the questions that the students asked in their surveys, creating the opportunity for more community participation and for students to lead. See more about the Student Community Liaisons in Key Findings #4.

A total of 417 people, or 25% of the total population, participated in the gatherings and took part in one-on-one conversations.

Community Resilience Day

The Community Resilience Day offered an opportunity for community members to learn more about the MVP project in a flexible and less formal setting than a community dinner. Individuals who may have been unable to attend a weeknight event at a set time could drop by Double Edge, engage in a fun activity, such as fly on a bungee, play musical instruments, and have a conversation about rural resilience. For families with children, the activities gave parents the chance to view available materials and have a conversation in a small group setting. Some people who may



Discussing the MVP grant during the Community Resilience Day. Photo by Double Edge.

never have heard of the MVP project before had the opportunity to be introduced for the first time, join the mailing list to be invited to future events, and bring home materials about the project goals, and work done to date. This event provided another opportunity for community members to explore what it means to create a resilient community.

Site Tours

Two Site Tours were developed to address two of the key issues of affordable housing and clean energy. Site Tour #1 was an opportunity for primarily municipal leaders and committee members from Ashfield and the region, those most responsible for making projects come to fruition, to share possibilities and provide updates on projects currently in progress or under consideration. The concept for Site Tour #2 evolved over the course of the project from more of an open house for residents to visit homes changed to a more intimate opportunity for sharing, with the end result of creating a resource for current and future residents to learn from those who have already built energy efficient, or small to tiny homes.

Site Tour #1

Site Tour #1 offered the opportunity to focus on municipal clean energy. The day began with State Representative Natalie Blais (Franklin 1st District) welcoming the participants, and the Ashfield Energy Committee sharing their concepts and potential for adding solar in Ashfield. The three sites selected showcased possible locations for new solar power, while one site also offered geothermal potential. The sites were the Ashfield Municipal Garage, Sanderson Academy, and a field located behind the Wastewater Treatment Plant. Each site had great potential for solar, and Sanderson Academy also offers ample space for geothermal.

Site Tour #1 was followed by discussion over lunch at Double Edge. Among the participants were members of energy committees from nearby towns, who were invited to learn from the tour and discuss possible collaboration opportunities. Of particular note was concern that Sanderson Academy, the local elementary school serving Ashfield and Plainfield is at risk of closure. The elementary school sits in a district where there is a notable decline in population, and the District is preparing to make hard decisions that could affect this facility. While there was clearly voiced concern and opposition to such a closure, if this occurred, the Town would likely

move its Town Offices there, and would consider the potential for Senior Housing. All options would still benefit from clean energy.

The Double Edge Theatre (DET) MVP grant was helpful for the Energy Committee in that it engaged more people in thinking and talking about the future in Ashfield and what we want for our town as relates to the impacts of climate change.
Alexandra Osterman

Site Tour #2

Site Tour #2 was held on June 25, 2025, at Double Edge Theatre’s Meeting Room, where twelve people, including seven featured guests who were sought after and selected because of their experiences with unique homes and building and real estate expertise, gathered for an intimate conversation in Double Edge Theatre’s Meeting Room. Featured guests shared the evolution stories of their own unique and energy efficient homes, , which ranged from a tiny house to a house designed to enable its residents to age in place, discussed both energy efficiency and what defines “affordable” housing, and shared dinner and conversation. A retired real estate agent also shared the evolution of the cost of land and homes in the region and a contractor shared her 30 years of experience renovating or building new and energy-efficient homes in town.

An important goal for this Site Tour was to have the opportunity to hear how varied homes in Ashfield were constructed and how they incorporated clean energy or energy efficiency practices. For those who felt comfortable, one request was to share the cost of land and construction, opportunities or barriers, such as bank or mortgage restrictions, and how these may have affected decision-making. Several shared the architectural plans and photos of the completed homes. Upon reflection, Bright and the MVP team are envisioning a document to help current and future Ashfield residents understand the variety of options and opportunities others have undertaken, but also what is possible due to new zoning, innovative ideas, as well as potential issues that could affect new homes or home renovation.

See Key Findings #3 for more on what was learned from this Site Visit and how this information helped inform the Action steps.

Key Findings

Many of the Key Findings from the conversations overlapped among the three areas to be explored, and several revealed important dependencies, vulnerabilities, and opportunities. For example, the lack of public transportation (shared in Student interviews and Community Dinner #3) made it hard for families to access grocery stores. Quality local farm products can be found at the Ashfield Farmers Market. Farm viability requires community support and purchase of products, yet producing those products is being negatively impacted by climate change. At the first community dinner, farmers illustrated how much harder growing food has become thanks to problems induced by climate change. For example, invasive species are overtaking the wild concord (fox) grape vines which had been plentiful for generations. The vines that remain have not produced well, if at all, in recent years, making affordable products harder for families to purchase. This type of awareness of regional interconnectedness underscores the importance of working together and using nature-based solutions to solve regional problems.

Key Findings #1- Continue the Work, Continue Gathering

One of the first questions raised during the Site Gathering #1 was *How to keep getting minds in the room to continue visioning and finding creative pathways to sustainability and resilience for everyone?*

The answer was clear as one of the most uplifting findings from **Ashfield Rural Climate Resilience and Living Culture Project** was the enthusiasm for participating in the Community Dinners and Student Community Liaison work, and the stated desire for this to continue. People want more opportunities to gather and continue to share time together working collaboratively toward solutions. They also want some degree of agency to help and have their ideas acted upon.

Collaborations such as the **Ashfield Rural Climate Resilience and Living Culture Project** offer a roadmap for involving residents and embracing local nonprofits and regional partners to share in creating resiliency and solving some of the challenges the community faces. The culmination of this project has been clarifying needs and actions identified by the community.

Actions: Continue to Gather.

- Create volunteer-run committees, including Youth-led (see Key Findings #4) to provide the leadership to hold future gatherings.

- Empower Leadership with clear goals.
- Design ad hoc committees with short term goals, clear deadlines, and opportunities to join another project. Ad hoc committees could support planning the next Community Gathering, Potluck Dinner, or Visioning session.

Actions: Remove Barriers for ongoing participation –

- Structure meetings and work to fit the lives of busy people. Aim to meet at mutually convenient times and in locations that could accommodate children,
- Seek stipend grant funds to engage future low-income Resilient Ashfield participants who otherwise need to be at work.
- See Key Findings #4 regarding Student Committees.

Actions: Visioning Sessions –

- Create a Resource Day to gather and prioritize the MVP findings and visioning action steps created during the MVP process See pages Community Dinner #3, and which can be found in this document.
- Share the prioritized list with the Town as a basis for what Ashfield Residents want.
- Seek funding for ongoing people-powered leadership to support an overstretched municipal government.
- Prioritize ideas that will cost little to nothing so there is at least one ‘win’ that can keep up the momentum.

Key Findings #2– Amplify What Already Exists

One resounding theme that emerged during Community Dinner #3 was the significant and sincere discussion about ways to support neighbors during times of crisis, such as during severe storms or prolonged power outages. Several of the stated needs were met with ideas, such as creating a buddy system to check on elders or isolated neighbors or creating a wood bank for those who heat their homes with wood. Many of these programs already exist in the Town of Ashfield, but were unknown to participants, and therefore are unknown to other Ashfield residents. The need to inform residents of programs, opportunities, or places to find information is

paramount. Information about this MVP grant, and all documents can be found on the Town of Ashfield website at: <https://www.ashfield.org/2436/MVP>.

Actions:

- Create a comprehensive pamphlet or PDF guide of current programs that exist in Town.
- Make this document known and available to all residents in the format they need. To raise awareness, advertise the document across a variety of channels, including flyers sent home with Sanderson students, notices sent out with tax bills, and displays on noticeboards such as at the post office or Elmer's store.
- Consider printing a QR code on refrigerator magnets or stickers with the website address and make it possible for those who need a printed copy to get one at an accessible location, such as the library, stores, or Town Hall.
- Create and share opportunities to volunteer or to participate by receiving services in the programs when needed.
- Fund this as creatively as possible. Seek a grant to pay for design and outreach. Make the awareness campaign fun and participatory, such as accepting photos of Ashfield sites and/or voting for the cover.
- Consider involving Ashfield Student Committee to research programs, support the design of the document &/or the cover and help spread the word that such a document exists.
- Add all service programs, Town, nonprofit and church run.

Key Findings #3 – Affordable Housing and Energy Efficient Homes

The need for more affordable and more energy efficient housing is at crisis levels in many parts of the country and according to participating residents, the same is true in Ashfield. Shared throughout this project by participants was the impacts that the lack of affordable housing is having on themselves and their families, and the deep desire to protect Ashfield's unique rural landscape and farmland.

What has emerged was a shift in thinking and personal desires. Residents are willing to give up the idea of owning a large house on a large lot, emblematic of American prosperity and independence, preferring smaller, affordable, clustered near others in the downtown. This selflessness supports their stated desires for connection, an active role in protecting open space and farmland, and doing their part to protect the planet. Interestingly, these small shifts offered huge benefits in areas like public

transportation, supporting local businesses, creating more vibrancy, and increasing community connectivity.

Action: Share information with low-to-moderate income homeowners of upcoming opportunities including grants, and energy conservation programs such as those offered by Community Action, as well as any state programs that may become available to support renovations that could divide a home into multiple units.

Action: Host an information sharing event so residents can learn about programs such as those funded by Mass Clean Energy Center that purchase dilapidated buildings, renovate and sell them to low-income residents, and Habitat for Humanity which engages community members to help construct homes with and for their eligible neighbors.

Action: Invite Community Action, which runs energy efficiency programs in Franklin County to inform low-income tenants and landlords about their programs.

Action: Create a living document which current and future Ashfield residents can access and add to that describe the types of energy efficient and affordable dwellings that have been created in town. This will include details on construction costs, tips to make efficiency easier to implement, how to access clean energy guidance, such as siting for best solar gain, stories from people who built unique homes and want to share ideas, and more.

Action: Revisit findings in this report from Site Visit #2 and Community Dinner #3 for visioning ideas and action items.

Key Findings #4 – Student Community Liaisons and Youth Leadership

The Student Liaison work completed by students at Mohawk Trail Regional School was considered by many to be the strongest part of this project. The hope for the project was to obtain multi-generational participation but having the Student Community Liaisons lead on that work exceeded expectations. This project created the opportunity to engage students, pay them for their participation, and obtain their input and ideas on the issues that will directly affect their futures and the future of Ashfield. The students also obtained or honed important leadership skills as they conducted interviews with those with whom they knew or were comfortable and led the discussion during Community Dinner #3 and were often seated at tables with people they were meeting for the first time. As Town Administrator Paul McLatchy noted, the students will be most affected by climate change, “So, I think they

understand that they have an investment in this. The truth is, and I don't mean to sound cliché, but they are the future. They are tomorrow. They are the future Select Board members, the Finance Committee, the Planning board members, they are the community organization, they are the directors of Double Edge Theatre. They are the people who are going to be taking over in the future.”

Action: Put out a call for volunteer community residents to support a Student Committee. Volunteers can:

- Meet with youth and help guide them to do their own work.
- Co-write LCC grants for event funds.
- Be CORI and SORI vetted by police department or staff at Sanderson or Mohawk schools to ensure safety.

Action: Put out a call for Youth to serve on their own committee with support from adult volunteers. The committee could provide the students with a multitude of skills, pride, and agency to solve the issue of nothing to do.

- Generate ideas for their own event(s), such as a dance, a Poetry slam, a weekly coffee house, drawing/art making time, etc.
- Co-write LCC grants for event funds.
- Plan, market, and execute event(s) that suits their interests.
- Ask the Town to provide a safe, free space for the project(s).

Action: To keep the momentum, especially for those students who have expressed their interest in creating change, recreate the Student Liaison Committee at the Town Administration level. This would serve multiple purposes, including teaching students about town governance and how to serve on a committee, how to present a variety of opinions and how to create action and direct the changes they want to see. While a youth committee is not new to Ashfield, this new group of students appears to be ready for the challenge.

Action: Seek grants to support the Student Liaison Committee and Jarrell's time to continue to work with the Youth at Mohawk Trail Regional School. Connect with the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts for ideas.

Key Findings #5 – Expand Nature-Based solution work

Finding nature-based solutions was the one area explored in the grant that was most complicated and broadly sweeping. Grant partners felt that this work required more time and that the least progress was seen. What emerged, however, were meaningful action steps.

Action: Enhance zoning to protect farmland from development, retain forests and the look and feel of the rural community.

Action: Protect the floodplains to mitigate further damage to town roads and infrastructure.

Action: Use MVP 2.0 to develop a plan for protecting the region’s watershed and floodplain.

Action: Work in collaboration with Ohketeau and Conway School of Landscape Design on ways to further nature-based solutions for the region.

Conclusion

The **Ashfield Rural Climate Resilience and Living Culture Project** aimed to seek innovative ideas and understand what would make a resilient Ashfield. Participants showed their willingness to consider new approaches to transforming clean energy, nature-based solutions and affordable housing. Affordable housing discussions illustrated this point well: Typical Ashfield homes were built to accommodate larger families and required larger lots. Participants emphasized that smaller homes on smaller sized lots, clustered together, preferably downtown, was more appealing than a large, financially out-of-reach home. This kind of innovative thinking could solve multiple problems at the same time. Smaller homes would be less costly to heat/cool and maintain, there would be no loss of the open space or farmland regarded as vital to maintaining the rural character of Ashfield, more walkability would reduce reliance on personal transportation, and closer neighbors meant more opportunities for vibrancy and gathering. This fresh thinking rang throughout the Community Dinners and Site Tours.

Ashfield is already doing a whole lot of things right.”

Kim Pevia

Continuing to be nimble and responsive to change and external unpredictability and thinking and acting collaboratively with the best in mind for all of the community will serve Ashfield well. The current loss of federal funds may require Ashfield to prioritize projects that either cost little or can be created or built by the community themselves. The community will have to prioritize which resiliency ideas will not only best serve their collective needs but will produce the greatest impacts and long-term cost savings.

Kim Pevia summed up the Ashfield Rural Climate Resilience and Living Culture Project best, *“(This project) gave me hope that Ashfield will figure out a way to maintain the charm that it has, that there will be a new generation of folks to push it further into what it can be: to be more socially just, more environmentally aware, more housing conscious. And just continue to do more and more of what they are already doing, because Ashfield is already doing a whole lot of things right.”*

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- Larry Spotted Crow Mann for his welcome songs and Kim Pevia for facilitating two of the Community Dinners, supporting the youth and grounding meetings.
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- Town officials Administrator Paul McLatchy III and Select Board member Todd Olanyk.
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Project Leadership

The following individuals comprised the leaders, consultants, and support team for this grant:

Double Edge Theatre:

Adam Bright, Executive Director, Ensemble

Hannah Jarrell, Director of Artist/Community Engagement, Ensemble

Justin Wellman, Production Manager, Grants Administrator, Company.

Dylan Young, General Manager, Costumiere, Musician.

Additional support from:

Stacy Klein, Founder, Artistic Director Emerita, Vision Strategist, Ensemble

Robert Carlton, Food Systems & Musician

Ohketeau Cultural Center:

Larry Spotted Crow Mann, Director, member Hassanamisco Nipmuc Tribe of Massachusetts, writer, poet, cultural educator, Traditional Storyteller, tribal drummer and motivational speaker.

Kim Pevia, consultant, Founder of K.A.P. Inner Prizes, member Lumbee Tribe, North Carolina.

Town of Ashfield:

Paul McLatchy III, Town Administrator.

Todd Olanyk, Selectboard Vice-Chair.

Alexandra Osterman, Energy Committee Chair.

Mary Quigley, Energy Committee Member.

Climate Strategists:

Lauren de la Parra, Principal, Culture Climate Strategy.

Holly Jacobson, Independent Community and Climate Strategist.

Arts Extension Service, University of Massachusetts Amherst:

Dee Boyle-Clapp, Director.

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Student Community Liaisons.

Clean Energy Extension, University of Massachusetts Amherst:

River Strong, Associate Director.

Building the Ashfield Rural Climate Resilience and Living Culture Project Community

Between September 2024 and June 2025, 417 Ashfield residents met over three Community Dinners, two Site Tours, and one Community Day for facilitated conversations, group discussions, shared listening and student surveys. Guided by Adam Bright (Double Edge), Hannah Jarrell (Double Edge), and Kim Pevia (Ohketeau Cultural Center), with support from others listed below, participants included a diverse range of Ashfield residents ranging from farmers, business owners, parents, teachers, students, members of Ohketeau Cultural Center and Double Edge Theatre, to municipal officials including the Town Administrator, Selectboard and Energy committee members, and fire department staff.

During the academic year, 12 Student Community Liaisons gathered with their instructor Rachel Silverman and Hannah Jarrell, Dylan Young (Double Edge), and Kim Pevia at Mohawk Trail Regional School, to deepen their exploration of what it means to be an Ashfield resident tackling important challenges, adding to the knowledge base of community needs, and seeking insights around three major topics of clean energy, affordable housing, and finding nature-based solutions to climate change.

The grant partners included Dee Boyle-Clapp from the Arts Extension Service with support from River Strong from the Clean Energy Extension, both from the University of Massachusetts Amherst. They attended meetings, site tours and dinners, while climate culture consultants Lauren de la Parra (Culture Climate Strategy) and Holly Jacobson (independent) expertly guided the project planning and implementation, attending every meeting and event. Double Edge's Justin Wellman supported the marketing, managed the virtual components, and recorded the events. Additionally, Dylan Young took notes, took part in, and supported all events. Double Edge staff photographed and documented events and prepared and served all meals for the Community Dinners and Site Tours.

The MVP Planning Committee met a minimum of twice a month as the full team, but many of the partners worked significantly more, often daily, to conduct outreach, plan events, define the details regarding where and how events would take place, extend the invitations for participation, and implement the work.

Background: The Ashfield Rural Climate Resilience and Living Culture Grant Charge and Goals

The Ashfield Rural Climate Resilience and Living Culture Project: Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Grant's central goals and objectives met very clear grant requirements emphasizing gathering community ideas and input that will further conversation and decision-making. Overall, the application highlighted the following as key outcomes:

The project's Three Focus Areas are intended to help advance community projects that would each bring a wide range of community benefits once implemented.

1. The expansion of clean energy supports carbon mitigation, energy resilience, and community economic and health benefits.
2. The integration of nature-based solutions contributes to flood mitigation, ecosystem resilience, and public health goals.
3. And the development of affordable housing contributes to financial and housing security, allows people who work in critical service industries to live locally, supports the local and regional economy, enables aging-in-place, and prevents displacement as climate change drives migration.

Collectively, the community dialogue around these three topics will help contribute to a model for rural regional resilience, enhancing the potential for collaborative and resilient responses to likely future pressures from climate impacts.

The organizational partnerships created through the project also support knowledge- and resource-sharing to make it easier for the community of Ashfield to take action towards resilience priorities, while reducing administrative and economic burdens.

Nature-based Solutions

While the other key elements of the project, clean energy and affordable housing, are clear, nature-based solutions warrant some additional explanation. This MVP grant sought nature-based resilience projects focusing on general inland flooding,

defined as “flooding not caused by storm surge or tides.” Only municipalities named on an approved MVP list were eligible to apply without a cash match, which saved Ashfield significant time and resources. This list included Ashfield (as well as nearby Buckland, Conway, Heath, and Shelburne) all towns that demonstrated both inland flooding impacts in 2023/2024 and high financial need due to a reduced fiscal capacity per capita.

As with many small rural towns, Ashfield has a small tax base and a limited budget for investing in capital projects. Flood events in recent years have led to both higher costs for repair and maintenance, as well as an increasing need for proactive planning to reduce flood risk.

As part of this project, the town and community partners focused on investigating, creating shared knowledge, and developing pathways for advancing nature-based climate solutions, with a particular focus on flood mitigation, as well as maintaining the health and resilience of forest and water ecosystems. Finding ways for nature to solve problems, such as supporting flood plain restoration or finding other creative, and low-cost ways to move water will be opened to the community for input with an eye toward regional solutions.

Affordable Housing

Rent and home prices across the state and the region are out of reach for many, often forcing people to move away, or remain in a place they are unhappy with or no longer fits their needs. For Ashfield residents, available housing is limited, and affordable housing is even harder to find. There is increasing pressure as people from outside of the area move here to escape the higher cost of housing elsewhere. As much of Western Mass and the Berkshires experienced during COVID, self-employed people or those with remote jobs moved to escape more densely packed areas while short-term housing, such as Airbnb’s has gobbled up available housing, forcing real estate prices to rise. Governor Healy signed the Affordable Homes Act during this grant period in February 2025. The act included a provision to allow Accessory Dwelling Units, ADU’s, and while this is still relatively new, this has been noted with interest in discussions.

Clean Energy

Part of resiliency is energy independence, and for most communities this is clean energy such as solar and wind. The Ashfield Energy Committee has been working to expand clean energy in town and will be a key project partner on issues related to clean energy, including the Site Visits and exploration of potential future collaborations to further shared goals. The Clean Energy Extension at the University of Massachusetts Amherst is a resource for ideas, information, and decision-making support.

The founding of the Ashfield Rural Climate Resilience and Living Culture Project Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Project

During a conversation with the Massachusetts Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, Oleander Stone, Deputy Director of Climate Equity and Environmental Justice, shared with Adam Bright, upcoming changes to the next iteration of the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness grant in which the parameters would shift toward a focus on community participation. The agency's staff were aware that small towns lacked the personnel to do the work this grant required.

Said Bright, "They were talking about how to reach community on a wider scale, how to explore and affect change on environmental issues that might not have traction in terms of solutions or on the ground thinking... They were looking for organizations like ours, who are bringing community together for lots of different reasons and for different purposes. They thought it was a good idea for Double Edge to consider this grant."

Double Edge's mission "to pursue authenticity, interaction, and identity with whomever is seeking creative, emotional, spiritual, and political clarity" was a natural fit for the grant.

Before approaching the Town of Ashfield, Double Edge Theatre first had to decide if they were willing to devote the significant staff time necessary to support this project. Could the company supply ample capacity (people power) to develop the events and opportunities for community dialog? Could they devote the necessary time and space to enable town residents to come together to focus on key issues of mutual importance? Upon reflection, Double Edge collectively agreed to bring the possibility to the Town of Ashfield, and if the grant was obtained, would accept responsibility for overseeing and completing the work.

Said Bright, Double Edge’s “mission is extensive, but it’s also clear to us. The environmental issues that we’re facing as a human race are paramount to us. That’s not to say I don’t think theatre is a priority for us and it is super important, but you need a bunch of things to exist before you can make theatre. So, for instance, there is no theatre if

the town is underwater or on fire. And you also need community, no matter what. So that all those things together make this project and how it was laid out super important for us. The other part of what we do, one of our specialties, is that we do bring people together to be able to converse, to argue, to discuss, to problem solve and we do that in ways that are not the ways necessarily how a municipality would.”

Stacy Klein, Founder and Artistic Director Emerita, speaking as an individual about this grant and not on behalf of Double Edge, said, “To gather more was my only goal; people only gather at events or town meeting. To actually gather to talk is different.”

Ashfield Town Administrator, Paul McLatchy III, recalled that Adam Bright and Hannah Jarrell approached him about the possibility of collaborating on the MVP grant, and he brought the idea to the Select Board. Bright and Jarrell presented at three or four Select Board and other committee meetings, and “after discussion, mutual questions and answers, and with some hesitation, the Select Board said okay, you have our blessing to put together an application, because even though Double Edge did all the heavy lifting the town had to be the one that actually applied for the grant.”

Ashfield Select Board member Todd Olanyk voiced some initial concerns about this project and reflected on his personal desire for additional outcomes beyond the scope of the grant, primarily in the form of a master plan. Said Olanyk, “I was a little bit reluctant; I had misgivings and was hesitant about getting into it. But I can certainly couch that as my own impatience, and there are certainly other ways to go about doing things right. I am just keeping an open mind and following this process and am trying to take as much out of it as we can as we move forward.”

**ART + LIVING CULTURE + ART JUSTICE =
DOUBLE EDGE THEATRE**
an art / community / cultural collective

Our Vision is to prioritize imagination in times of creative, emotional, spiritual, and political uncertainty.

Our Mission is to pursue authenticity, interaction, identity with whomever is seeking creative, emotional, spiritual, and political clarity.

Our Art (performance / visual / multi-media) is grounded in a rigorous ensemble aesthetic unfolded in dream, imagery, metaphor, mystery, and symbolism.

Our Work (cultural / economic / organizational / personal / political) is created and sustained within an open, honest, meaningful, relevant shared experience. **We call this ‘Living Culture.’**

Our Dedication is to face isolation and erasure; to face despair and pain that can translate into personal incapacity and political paralysis. To uplift. **We call this ‘Art Justice.’**

During their tenure, and as far as Olanyk and McLatchy could recall, the Town had never partnered with any organizations or groups beyond committees before. Learning to work with a nonprofit and overcome their concerns that the Town would be held responsible for the project required a leap of faith. Bright noted that there was a risk for the town in working with a nonprofit, “There's potential for it not to work out or bad feelings to happen. Then you've got issues because you're dealing with residents as well as an organization within the town. But that wasn't a risk that I was worried about, and actually one that we're always looking to take, because I think the only way we can solve things is to work together.”

Capacity

This MVP Action Grant, like similar large grants, requires hours of work to write, plan and implement each event, conduct the necessary outreach to bring people together, prepare food and materials, document the work, track finances, and much more. The Town of Ashfield is the town’s largest employer with 25 staff positions, but only one position works as a full-time administrator. There was simply inadequate Town staff time available to manage the MVP grant’s many requirements for outreach and events. The only way for this project to move forward and be successful was through collaboration.

Town of Ashfield staff:
Total of 25 employees, (12 full time (FT) and 13 part time (PT)).
Administrative Staff: 8 total, 2 FT and 6 PT.
Other Departments: 17 total employees, 10 FT, 7 PT.

Partnerships are based on trust, commitment, and mutual interests. The Town of Ashfield has been home to Double Edge Theatre since 1999. Double Edge is Ashfield’s second largest employer, after the Town itself. Double Edge has 23 staff,



Ashfield Town Spectacle, 2017, photo: Double Edge

11 Ensemble members (performers) and 12 Company members (artists, administrators and others). Ashfield is also home for all but three of the Double Edge members. Many serve on town committees, have children attending local

schools, or hold second jobs in local establishments. Double Edge members are town members.

Double Edge has supported the town in several ways. Its work draws between 7,000 and 10,000 people to Ashfield for performances each year. Audience members contribute to the local economy by eating at local establishments, purchasing gas, staying at B&B's, or visiting farm stands. Double Edge has also worked to give back to the town, creating events that are free and open to the public, such as the well-attended Ashfield Town Spectacle & Culture Fair.

Said Stacy Klein: "The Town Spectacle was a cultural project, not a theater project. There were 700 people in our parade. Nearly half the town. We are continually trying to bring people together in meaningful ways."

Double Edge is committed to doing its part to see Ashfield succeed.

Building the Rural Climate Resilience and Living Culture Project Team

If it takes a village to raise a child, it took a team to complete the Town of Ashfield's Rural Climate Resilience and Living Culture Project. The effort needed a range of expertise, from community building, outreach, sharing indigenous voices, municipal support, and more. Others contributed to the work by offering guidance, suggestions and questions that moved the project forward.

Project partner **Double Edge Theatre** is a performing arts and community-based organization that operates through the principles of "living culture" and "art justice" - that is, a dedication to working through open, honest, and meaningful shared experience in order to seek truth, reconciliation, rematriation, and collective healing. Double Edge Theatre brought expertise in creating community spaces and processes embedded in solidarity and justice and played a key role in supporting the outreach, integration, and inclusion of community members in activities and community dialogue. This included, for example, ensuring that people who have lived expertise with housing and/or energy insecurity were centered in conversations about the community's plans for housing affordability and a just energy transition.

Project partner **Ohketeau Cultural Center** is an Indigenous organization located in Ashfield that serves Indigenous community members across Central and Western Massachusetts. A central premise of Ohketeau's work focuses on "uplifting the voices of Native peoples and dismantling unjust frameworks, replacing them with accessibility, equity, dignity, and wellness for our Native communities." Through the leadership and guidance of Ohketeau the project plan was to focus on elevating indigenous knowledge and perspectives in community decision-making around

"This project brought an indigenous voice to the table where there wasn't one. We would have had folks in the room contemplating things without us there, so I am always happy to be in the room where I can give that insight and offer some other ways of being and ways of thinking, as Kim (Pevia) did, so I think that was of importance. Whenever Natives are in the room it changes things. We are like atoms, you look away they are different, when you look at them, they change."

Larry Spotted Crow Mann

nature-based climate solutions, and clean and resilient energy systems and affordable housing in Ashfield.

Lauren de la Parra, principal at Culture Climate Strategies, and **Holly Jacobson**, both climate and cultural strategists and project advisors, brought their extensive backgrounds in connecting municipalities and arts organizations with clean energy, climate resilience, and other MVP projects. From planning to project and grant guidance to meeting facilitation, they created an overview document of each event and helped guide each segment of the project.

Dee Boyle-Clapp, Director, **Arts Extension Service at the University of Massachusetts Amherst**, brought ten years of experience with culture and sustainability training and projects, and participated in all meetings, Community Dinners and Site Tours, and prepared the final Case Study.

Rachel Silverman, teacher at **Mohawk Trail Regional School**, served as the lead instructor of the student project and members of the **Town of Ashfield Energy Committee**, **Alexandra Osterman** and **Mary Quigley** supported the Site Tours and offered presentations to inform participants about the Town's goals, insight on sustainable construction in Ashfield, and affordable construction projects.

Getting Underway: Outreach

The many months of discussion, research and proposal revision between Double Edge and Town officials were rewarded. The application was submitted and subsequently awarded. With the grant in hand, it was time to get to work.

Tapping decades of outreach expertise, Double Edge, in collaboration with the Town Administrator, began to inform the public of the grant and extended the invitation to residents via traditional local media, social media, email, and Town outlets to attend the first gathering to be held at Double Edge. As the goal was to engage as many residents as possible, an intense and prolonged effort was made by Double Edge staff members, especially Hannah Jarrell and Adam Bright, to make as many people aware of the project and upcoming events as possible and invite them to attend.

Jarrell and Bright held thoughtful conversations with people from a variety of backgrounds and interests, working to get input through personal outreach and being intentional in their efforts to speak with those individuals whose rarely heard voices could bring their ideas to the project. Jarrell and Bright often reached individuals at their jobs (including farms or fire and highway departments) or through their interest groups.

Hannah Jarrell, Director of Artist/Community Engagement, Double Edge, describes what she does at Double Edge as work “in relationship cultivation and tending” which requires Jarrell to build relationships and “show up in community and solidarity for other community events and other community organizations around the region and even across the State”.

Jarrell was able to work from existing relationships when she reached out to townspeople to participate in the project. She said, “The most effective thing (that enabled successful participation) was having a lot of one-on-one interactions. There were lots of instances of following up on conversations and with people who knew me from working other public facing jobs). We don't necessarily cross in other community spaces, but we knew each other cordially from when I was a bartender here, or a waitress here....So those kinds of efforts of finding the different places of crossing paths and community, of showing up to different community events that aren't necessarily art and culture rooted, was one of the things (that fostered

engagement).”

Said Bright on bringing new people into the conversations, “I think that the(outreach) gave the project a lot [of] strength. Because it allowed people to gather, and especially people that are not going to go to a municipal town meeting. And there are plenty.”

Hearing from a wide swath of any community takes effort. This project created opportunities for significant community input, action steps identified after each gathering event, and Key Findings which can be found at the end of this document. Using the collected data, the town is now better positioned to move from planning to action, to pursue a grant to create a master plan and implement the ideas generated in community, and build their collective dream for a Resilient Ashfield.

Ashfield MVP Community Dinner #1

Summary thanks to Lauren de la Parra and Holly Jacobson.

Overview - Despite a cold night and icy roads, approximately 30 intergenerational members of the Ashfield community, from middle schoolers to elders, joined the community dinner on Thursday, December 5, 2024, from 5:30 - 7:30 pm, at the Double Edge Theatre pavilion.

Reimbursement for childcare was made available for parents and other caregivers to facilitate attendance.

Background on the Community Dinner #1 Project - The goal of the project is to address the question: *What does climate resilience look like for Ashfield?*



Adam Bright recording participant comments. Photo by Double Edge.

What took place? Double Edge Theatre welcomed everyone to the dinner, starting with a land acknowledgement and sharing the context for the project and the spirit of gathering in community. The conversation then circled the room, as everyone introduced themselves and shared a little bit about their favorite place in Ashfield.

From there, the conversation opened to sharing stories, anecdotes, concerns, and ideas related to the prompt: *What makes your daily life in Ashfield more challenging? What makes it easier to navigate the challenges?* Topics ranged from housing affordability to the viability of farming in Ashfield, to ecosystem changes from climate disruption.

Community members continued to make connections, highlight concerns, and brainstorm ideas over a meal. A survey was sent out afterwards to capture people's thoughts about what stood out to them from the evening's conversations and what they are continuing to think about after the event.

Among the most memorable parts of the evening was when an elementary school student connected the dots, seeing a solution after several of the adults said they

own large homes but now live alone, while others spoke of not being able to find affordable housing.

Summary of the Discussion -

- The group started with introductions and shared a collective appreciation for the beauty and community of Ashfield.
- Several people reiterated the value of opportunities to come together across differences at a time when the country feels particularly politically divided.
- Many different yet interconnected concerns were expressed about the present-day and long-term impacts of sprawling development and climate change on the community's ability to adapt and thrive into the future.
 - Attendees shared ideas for tackling this concern, including increased conservation for ecosystem services and habitat protection and alternatives to the large-lot single-family development conventions of the past.
- This also connected back to affordable housing for many, and several attendees expressed enthusiasm for the potential of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) and more communally oriented development patterns (e.g. smaller lots, cohousing communities, multi-generational models, walkability to town, etc.) to help prevent displacement and enable more young people to stay or move into the region.
- Another major theme was the notion of socioeconomic change, particularly the challenges of making a living from the land (e.g. farmers, tradespeople) and the connections to food security and resilience. Ashfield has been a farming community historically, and residents expressed eagerness to support local agriculture in creative ways.
- The group also discussed the potential of renewable energy to support community resilience, including farm resilience. Climate vulnerabilities in



Discussions continued over dinner. Photo by Double Edge.

rural areas can create specific challenges including isolation and long delays post-disaster, so the value of self-sufficiency was emphasized.

Takeaways and Next Steps -

- Overall, the group expressed a strong desire for action - to work together and use this opportunity to build momentum and start to pursue concrete ideas.
- There's interest in advancing the resilience hub concept.
 - **Action:** Compile research on rural resilience hub models to support ongoing community conversations about what a rural resilience hub could look like in Ashfield.
 - **Action:** Share this research with the community through subsequent community dinners and other project outreach and engagement channels.
- There's a need to continue ongoing outreach to make sure the project is reaching and engaging all corners of Ashfield.



Dylan Young speaks with participants. Photo by Double Edge.

- **Action:** Connect with volunteer firefighters, the Rod and Gun Club, Snowmobile Association, Belding Memorial Library, Mohawk Trail Regional High School, and additional local businesses, among others.
- **Action:** Hold conversations outside the community dinners to meet people where they are, build trust, and learn what is needed to facilitate broad-based participation in critical community resilience conversations and action.

- Affordable housing is a major concern and priority for many Ashfield residents, and attendees proposed many innovative strategies that the community can explore.
 - **Action:** Support and elevate creative strategies and explore new and proven pathways for making affordable housing easier to access and more feasible to create/develop in Ashfield.

- Economic and food security are two intimately interconnected issues in Ashfield, and residents care deeply about supporting local agriculture and other land-based professions and trades.
- There is a need for continual Indigenous involvement and engagement. Indigeneity and discussions of climate/land are interconnected and cannot be separated if we are to create an atmosphere of non-erasing practices and a (better) bridged community.
- Members of Ohketeau Cultural Center were not able to attend this meeting but will co-lead the next MVP Community Dinner. This event, as with all the Community Dinners, was broadcast live and recorded by Justin Wellman from Double Edge Theatre. Recordings were posted on the Town of Ashfield's website, find a complete list in the Appendix or at <https://www.ashfield.org/2436/MVP>.

It's important that the work we've all done, and the conversations that everyone put in be archived and accessible to anyone who wishes to view it.

Justin Wellman

Ashfield MVP Community Dinner #2

Summary thanks to Lauren de la Parra and Holly Jacobson.

Overview - On January 30, 2025, from 6:00 - 8:00 pm, 30 members of the Ashfield community gathered for a community dinner and discussion at the Ashfield Community Hall.

Background - The goal of the project is to address the question: **What does climate resilience look like for Ashfield?** Between December 2024 and June 2025 the project includes community dinners and dialogues at different Ashfield locations, site tours, and a community resilience day. This community dinner was the second of three.



Participants at the Community Dinner #2. Photo by Double Edge.

Who joined the dinner?

The dinner was open to all Ashfield residents (as space allowed). Invitations were sent out to a wide cross-section of the Ashfield community – Town staff and committee members, local farms and businesses, landowners, emergency management personnel, artists, and regional organizations, among others –

and flyers were distributed on social media and in public spaces around town. Outreach focused on connecting with areas of the Ashfield community that the project had yet to reach as well as welcoming community members who had attended the first dinner. Roughly 30 members of the Ashfield community, spanning multiple generations of age, joined the community dinner, with several joining virtually. Reimbursement for childcare was made available for parents and other caregivers to facilitate attendance.



Larry Spotted Crow Mann welcomes participants.
Photo by Double Edge.

What took place? Community members began arriving at the Community Hall at 5:30 pm for light refreshments, before gathering upstairs. Larry Spotted Crow Mann, Ohketeau Cultural Center and citizen of the Hassanamisco Nipmuc Tribe welcomed everyone to the dinner and performed two traditional songs, sharing their messages of preparing, healing, and connection across generations past and future.

Adam Bright of Double Edge Theatre provided context on the project,

emphasizing the opportunity to come together in community. He gave a quick recap on the themes that had emerged from the first Community Dinner to continue building from. After a round of introductions, Kim Pevia consultant to Ohketeau Cultural Center explained the structure of a Story Circle.

Rooted in civil rights movements in the South, Story Circles are a way to ensure stories are heard and that everyone has a chance to share. The room broke into a collection of circles in groups of four. Each person was invited to tell a story about their **vision for the future of Ashfield**. Kim invited participants to use their imaginations for innovation, to share “the big audacious ideas, and to lean into what it would be like to live that vision”. After telling stories, each circle then spent five minutes “cross-talking,” discussing what they heard from each other and weaving the stories together. Each circle then shared out to the full group from their discussion.

Many common themes resonated across the groups. Pevia invited participants to talk further and incorporate ideas they found exciting. The formal brainstorming broke for dinner, but the conversations continued over a meal and dessert. A survey was sent out afterwards to capture people’s thoughts about what stood out to them

Nipmuk Healing Song

***We are praying for healing.
We are praying for peace.
We are asking our grandmothers
and grandfathers
to come and give us guidance
to stop the wars
and stop the fighting
and bring the (minowac) human
beings,
all of us,
back to peace.***

Repeated in the four directions
(north, south, east and west).

Translation by Larry Spotted Crow Mann.

from the evening's conversations and what they continued to ponder after the event.

Summary of the Discussion -

- There is a desire to make the town welcoming and accessible to residents of all different backgrounds. Many people highlighted wanting to make it possible for young people to return after college, for families to settle down here, for climate refugees to find a home here, and for older adults to age in place.
- There's a widespread desire to make the cost of living and housing truly affordable for all Ashfield residents, present and future. The group focused on opportunities for creating affordable and accessible housing through creative models like co-housing, accessory dwelling units (ADUs), and expanding housing downtown where it's more walkable. There was also a focus on building more sustainable housing and finding ways to overcome obstacles around solutions such as solar, EVs, and tiny homes.
- There's a strong desire to conserve and celebrate agriculture in town. Participants emphasized the importance of thinking about food security and housing together, making farming viable for aging and young farmers, and protecting sustainable food sources from climate impacts.
- There was wide recognition that nature can sometimes heal itself, if we let it, but also requires proactive human care. There was interest in creating agreements across different viewpoints for how to deal with invasive species, conserve resources like farmland, and work together at a watershed scale to protect against other climate change impacts such as droughts and fires.
- Folks highlighted the desire and potential to learn from nature and the beings around us, especially focused on interconnectedness and healing, providing the resources to sustain us, to age in place, to keep the circle connected.
- Indigenous involvement and engagement create new opportunities and connections that are strongly desired by many in the community. Appreciation for Ohketeau's leadership during this community dinner was expressed extensively.
- People emphasized hope and interest in building stronger intergenerational connections and bridging divides between various political and social perspectives to build stronger relationships across the community.

- Many highlighted their love for the town and sense of community. Folks emphasized the importance of social connections and want to create connectedness and inclusion by fostering community spaces, such as potlucks, block parties, and a shared commitment to helping neighbors. There was also a desire to continue to nurture that sense of community and intergenerational connections through new housing (e.g., co-housing, walkable neighborhoods).
- Folks emphasized an interest in creating resilience hubs or community centers, connecting and coordinating the resources in town, and making those resources legible and accessible. Ideas for sharing resources include a wood bank!
- There was an interest in pursuing technological solutions for understanding our climate risks, where there are risks, and being proactive about climate action.
- Many people envision an Ashfield where public transportation is convenient and accessible, and everyone can get where they need to go without exclusively relying on personal vehicles. There is also a desire to make Ashfield more accessible, walkable, and connected, through public transportation, sidewalks, and clustering housing downtown.
- People also explored and discussed what it takes for collective action – including organizing, dreaming, lifting up ideas, mitigating friction, and being creative in our solutions. Collective action needs relationality, reciprocity, sovereignty; there’s a need for both accountability and grace in getting to responsibility. As a whole, it requires being human with each other, and being in community.

Takeaways and Next Steps -

- Overall, the momentum for action continues to grow, with the group elevating actionable ideas that can move the community from its current challenges and opportunities toward the visions expressed over the course of the Story Circle process. People are eager to try things and get their hands dirty!
- **There’s an ongoing need to continue outreach to make sure the project is reaching and engaging as many corners of Ashfield as possible.**
 - **Action:** Reach out to Ashfield Farmers and Growers, additional local businesses, Snowmobile Association, Rod and Gun Club, Belding

Memorial Library, Ashfield Water District, Highway Department, Mohawk Trail Regional High School, Sanderson Academy families, and other young Ashfield residents attending other middle and high schools, among others.

- **Action:** Continue to hold conversations outside the community dinners to meet people where they are, build trust, and learn what is needed to facilitate broad-based participation in critical community resilience conversations and action.
- **There's ongoing and continued momentum around pursuing housing strategies that can make Ashfield more affordable for current and future residents.**
 - **Action:** Support and elevate creative strategies and explore new and proven pathways for making affordable housing easier to access and more feasible to create/develop in Ashfield.
 - **Action:** Focus on affordable housing strategies, solutions, and potential for partnerships at one of the two upcoming site tours.
- **A vision for a Resilience Hub is beginning to emerge.**
 - **Action:** Share Resilience Hubs research back with the community at the final community dinner and other project outreach and engagement channels.
 - **Action:** Incorporate the dimensions of resilience contained in residents' visions for the future into the framework for an Ashfield resilience hub.
- **There is a desire to collaborate at regional and watershed scales to support ecosystem health and local agriculture.**
 - **Action:** Explore pathways for partnerships and agreements across different viewpoints for how to support ecosystem health, conserve resources like farmland, and work together at a watershed scale to protect against other climate change impacts such as droughts and fires.

Ashfield MVP Community Dinner #3

Summary thanks to Lauren de la Parra and Holly Jacobson.

Overview - On April 29, 2025, from 6:00 - 8:00 pm, members of the Ashfield community gathered for a community dinner and discussion at Sanderson Academy.

Background on the Community Dinner #3 Project - The goal of this dinner was to address the question: *What does climate resilience look like for Ashfield?*

I liked a lot of different generations – it was a new experience to talk to adults about this stuff. Student Liaison



Who joined the dinner?

The dinner was open to all Ashfield residents, as well as students and their families from Mohawk Trail Regional High School, the local high school serving Ashfield and the surrounding towns. This dinner focused on creating a space for students to talk about their visions for the future of Ashfield and the region. In addition to students, invitations were sent out to a wide cross-section of the Ashfield community and flyers were distributed on social media and in public spaces around town. Roughly 50 members of the Ashfield community, including 12 students, joined the

community dinner. Childcare, available for each event, was made available onsite to facilitate participation by parents, guardians, and older siblings.

I also thought it was cool. Next time... make us mix away from our parents – (it) would be more interesting and help us get more out of our comfort zones.

Student Liaison

What took place?

In the weeks leading up to the community dinner, 12 youth from Mohawk Trail Regional School joined the project team as community liaisons. These students each conducted six interviews with community members (including peers, parents, neighbors, teachers, and others) to gather insights and ideas on the following questions:

- *What kind of vision of Ashfield / the Hilltowns do you have that would make you want to keep living here or come back to live here after school?*
- *What do you think we can do in our communities to help make our town(s) resilient to the climate / extreme weather events like storms, droughts, and floods we have seen?*
- *What would you do in your local town government to balance the need for farmland and the need for affordable housing? What ideas come to mind?*
- *What else would you like to see to help the future of your town?*

Some of the responses to these interviews can be found below, and the balance at the Town of Ashfield’s website. URL can be found in the Appendix. The Student Community Liaisons brought their findings from the interviews to the dinner discussions. The student liaisons received stipends covered by the grant to recognize and support their time and work on the project.

I found incredibly inspiring was the diversity of voices that we were able to engage with. We were able to bring a group as diverse as Ashfield can offer across demographics into these critical conversations in a way in which voices were heard and supported.

Justin Wellman



Larry Spotted Crow Mann welcomed everyone to the dinner with a traditional song and drumming.

Photo by Double Edge.

Adam Bright provided a brief overview of the project, and shared how this community dinner continues to build on the conversations from the [first](#) and [second](#) community dinners. Hannah Jarrell of Double Edge Theatre introduced the Student Community Liaisons, along with their teacher Rachel Silverman, and recognized them for their work towards this project.

Kim Pevia introduced the activity for the evening. Each table had a list of seven criteria that reflect visions for Ashfield and the Hilltowns region that have emerged throughout the process thus far. These included things like protecting farmland while developing more affordable housing, energy solutions, creating a rural resilience hub, improving resilience to extreme weather, and resources for all generations.

Each of the seven tables was assigned one topic and was asked to discuss what it would look like if Ashfield and the region could achieve this vision. She asked, *“What would be one big, audacious goal attached to each of these themes? What does it take to maintain over time? To meet the needs of all the people in the town?”*

The Student Community Liaisons were strategically spread across the seven tables and were encouraged to lead their table’s discussion. Each group discussed their topic, brainstormed ideas and strategies, and then reported their thinking to the full group, and wherever possible, by the students themselves. Conversations continued over a meal and dessert.



Kim Pevia introduced the agenda and Student Community Liaisons. Photo by Double Edge

Summary of the Discussion - Each table focused on a specific vision for Ashfield and discussed potential approaches to making progress together.

- **Vision #1: Balancing the need for affordable housing with land and farming preservation.** Proposed approaches:
 - Retrofitting larger houses to convert into multiple units, including more rentals.
 - Potential to seek grants for this purpose, with a need for guidance and support in this process.
 - Revisiting zoning regulations to identify areas most appropriate for competing land uses (e.g. housing vs. farming, land conservation).
 - Focus on increasing density in the center of town to promote walkability, community, and neighborly culture.
- **Vision #2: Creating and promoting community resources (e.g. access to transportation, food security, employment support).** Proposed approaches:
 - Mutual aid and community sharing. Many examples of existing programs and resources, such as Share the Warmth, and the seed bank and tool library at the public library.

- Advertising of community resources virtually (e.g. website or newsletter) AND physically, e.g. through bulletin boards in high-traffic areas or newspapers. There is a major need for a place to see what’s going on in town.
- A town recreation center would be a huge asset. Current facilities are limited and scattered around town but could also be better utilized through coordination with community groups.
- **Vision #3: Identifying and coordinating needs and partnerships for a community resilience hub.** Proposed approaches:
 - Potential for a crisis center - youth and small businesses need to be part of any planning, especially businesses related to essential needs during a crisis, e.g. food, clothing, bedding.
 - Support community organizers as the “glue” bringing people together. Community collaboration requires things like childcare and transportation to make it possible for many people to participate.
 - Identify grant-writers who can help the community secure resources for this work on an ongoing basis.
 - Explore the potential for cross-town liaisons to support working together with other towns in the region.

I definitely want to uplift some themes that emerged through (the) interviews and the last community dinner conversations. A lot centered on community and community care, such as intergenerational housing, ride shares, making sure everyone is connected and taken care of in emergencies, and supporting fun and interesting things to do in town so folks don’t need to travel so far for activities.

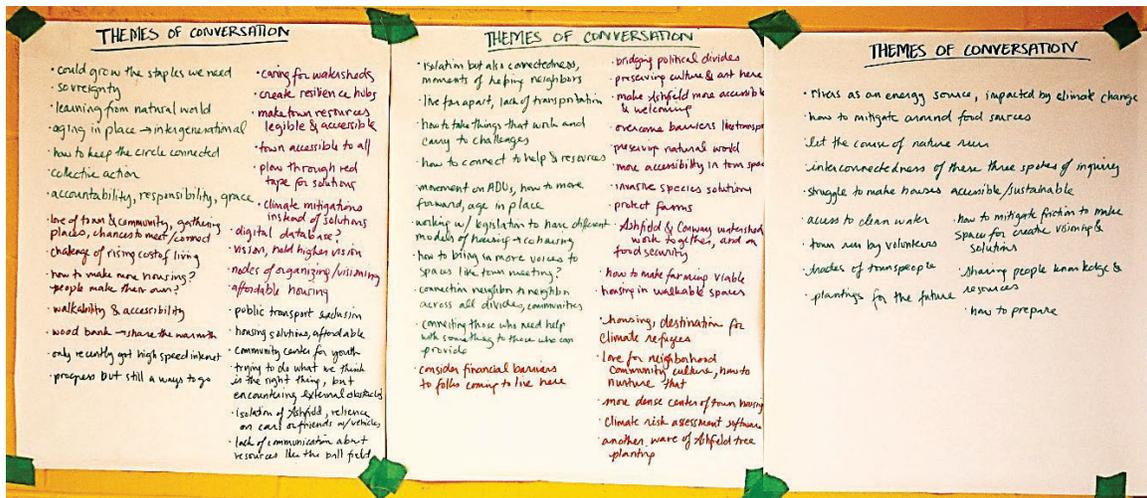
Dylan Young

- **Vision #4: Emergency management and recovery.** Proposed approaches:
 - Filtration systems so that we have water during droughts.
 - Solar panels, batteries, and generators to help maintain power during outages.

- Community Emergency Response Team is currently developing strategies for disaster response.
 - House calls to check on townspeople post-disaster.
 - Community food bank that can distribute food during emergencies.
- **Vision #5: Location for a resilience hub and how it could support the community during extreme weather events.** Proposed approaches:
 - Identifying the needs of a resilience hub space and assessing existing community spaces based on those needs.
 - Prevention measures to reduce impacts from extreme weather events, e.g. software and robo-call systems that would warn people before it floods so that they can evacuate, planting more vegetation in areas prone to flooding to reduce erosion.
- **Vision #6: Assessing vulnerabilities across town.** Proposed approaches:
 - Enabling robo calls to cell phones, not just landlines.
 - Recognizing that different areas of Ashfield are prone to different vulnerabilities and planning accordingly.
 - For example, South Ashfield may be more prone to flooding, but less so to fire because it is less wooded than other parts of town.
 - Similarly, some parts of town are cut off during flooding, so it would be helpful to have neighborhood-local places to go, and awareness of specific vulnerable populations as well as emergency resources (e.g. folks who have backup power, extra space, etc.) at a neighborhood level.
- **Vision #7: Nature-based solutions to environmental challenges in town.** Proposed approaches:
 - Paving high-hazard roads to reduce dangers e.g. icy roads or erosion.
 - Look at where invasive species came from, and how they are being managed in their original habitats. What can we learn from this?

Takeaways and Next Steps -

- There is strong community support for continuing this work and diving deeper into many of the solutions that have been suggested.
- From here, the project team will be working to identify specific next steps for action that have emerged over the course of this entire process.
- Participants were invited to sign up to stay involved in the specific areas they are interested in. Participants are also encouraged to fill out the follow-up survey from the dinner to highlight specific actions that they are feeling the most momentum behind and would most like to see happen.
- Ashfield Fire Chief, Kyle Walker, committed to working with the MVP team to make a resource list for residents regarding community emergency procedures.
- A need that was identified was furthering how community members are aware of existing resources in addition to the above – how do we make sure all residents know what exists so that we can collectively build on those resources? Many of these resources were shared with those in the room.



Paul McLatchy III was impressed by the work of the Student Community Liaisons and said, “Amazing. We have probably 3 or 4 students in my little breakout group, and it was encouraging to see how interested they were. They weren't just going through the motions. They weren't just there for class credit. They were genuinely interested in talking about these issues. Because, let's face it, if climate change is going to have an impact, it's going to be on them. They're going to suffer the most from it. So, I think they understand that they have an investment in this. The truth is,

and I don't mean to sound cliché, but they are the future. They are tomorrow. They are the future Select Board members, the Finance Committee, the Planning board members, they are the community organization, they are the directors of Double Edge Theatre. They are the people who are going to be taking over in the future. Whether that's 5, 10, or 20 years from now. It's going to be on them.”

Said Pevia regarding the project as a whole and the youth work in particular, “I was genuinely and maybe quietly surprised at the (project) participation.... I loved working with the kids. In a time when digital accessibility doesn't have them as engaged as perhaps other generations were, that they got into this project, they interviewed people, that they cared about the outcome and they cared about their town.”

The truth is, and I don't mean to sound cliché, but they (the students) are the future. They are tomorrow. They are the future Select board members, the Finance Committee, the Planning board members, they are the community organization, they are the directors of Double Edge Theatre. Paul McLatchy II

Site Tour #1 - Prospective Municipal Clean Energy Locations

Summary thanks to Lauren de la Parra and Holly Jacobson.

Overview - On April 4, 2025, 23 community members, regional collaborators, and government officials gathered in Ashfield for a Site Tour to discuss opportunities, challenges, and potential ways to collaborate on the deployment of municipal clean energy in Ashfield. Site Tour attendees convened at Double Edge Theatre at 9:30 am for a kick-off greeting by, 1st Franklin State Representative Natalie Blais, followed by an introductory presentation from the Ashfield Energy Committee. The group then departed to visit three sites that have potential for municipal solar installations – the Ashfield Municipal Garage, Sanderson Academy, and the Ashfield Wastewater Treatment Plant. Attendees reconvened at Double Edge post-tour for discussion over a shared meal where a few additional participants joined.



Site Tour visits Ashfield Municipal Garage. Photo by Paul Franz, *Greenfield Recorder*.

The Site Tours enabled participants to get a feel for the potential of, and any possible drawbacks, for each of the sites. The Municipal Garage roof offered fine solar potential, with some discussion about roof pitch, need for the proper transmission lines and grid connections, and an alternative solar field site on that property. A

concern about snow load was raised and Town officials believed these were manageable as staff currently shovel off the roof as needed during heavy storms. The alternative site was located directly on Rt 116. Negatives for this alternative site included both its limited size and visibility by passersby. Sanderson Academy, due to its size and many rooflines, offered significant solar potential as well as geothermal potential in the grounds behind the school. Discussion at the site included concerns about possible school closure due to reduced enrollments, and

should this happen, alternate uses for the school which included possible Town of Ashfield offices and senior housing. All alternative uses noted could still be well served by solar. Many in attendance shared this perspective. The Wastewater



Treatment site included an on-site presentation and photographs of a proposed solar field, noting ease of connecting to power lines and minimal visibility from the street.

Post-Site Tour lunch conversations.
Photo by Double Edge

Attendees:

Alexandra Osterman (Ashfield Energy Committee), Mary Quigley (Ashfield Energy Committee), Brian Clark (Ashfield Conservation Commission, Ashfield Energy Committee), Robin Pease (Sanderson Academy), Rachel Leopold Wang (Ashfield representative to the School Committee), Tom Poissant (Town Garage), Nancy Hoff (Wastewater Treatment Plant), Patrick Murphy (Wastewater Treatment Plant), Eric Leehan (Wastewater Treatment Plant), Emma Sass (MVP Regional Coordinator), River Strong (UMass Clean Energy Extension), Dee Boyle-Clapp (UMass Arts Extension Service), Natalie Blais (State Representative), Mollie Babize (Ashfield Zoning Board of Appeals), Danya Vera-Cruz (MassCEC), Madison Scoffield (Greenfield Recorder), Peyton Fleming (Ashfield News), Jody Lally (Conway Sustainability Committee), Todd Olanyk (Ashfield Select Board), Paul McLatchy III (Ashfield Town Administrator), Adam Bright (Double Edge Theatre), Hannah Jarrell (Double Edge Theatre), Dylan Young (Double Edge Theatre)

Themes that emerged from conversations:

- Opportunities for towns to collaborate on projects like maintenance contracts; towns that become Climate Leader Communities could team up on grants and projects.

- Sharing knowledge learned from programs like MVP and pilot programs.
- How to keep getting minds in the room to continue visioning and finding creative pathways to sustainability and resilience for everyone.
- Housing affordability influences families, which influences schools, which influences community - all an ecosystem.
- Interest in intergenerational projects, contention over potential school



Site Tour participants at Sanderson Academy. Photo by Double Edge.

closings or transformations. How might potential changes impact seniors and students?

Some questions that emerged from conversations:

- Could MVP Action Grants be used to fund battery storage?

- Yes! In the [FY25 grants](#), Chelsea received \$624,000 to go towards

a battery storage system, solar, energy efficiency, and EV chargers at two municipal buildings.

- What is the role of the Massachusetts MVP program versus Massachusetts Clean Energy Center (MassCEC)?
 - MVP supports municipalities with climate resilience planning process and Action Grants to implement resilience projects.
 - MassCEC supports clean energy pilot projects, learnings that can be shared later on, not specific to municipalities for resilience projects, but municipalities may have eligibility with some requirements.
- Is there interest in cooperative solar power in town?

- Energy Committee - started with municipal solar, interested in residential solar, agrivoltaics, etc, but there are too many possible threads to follow.
- Net generation solar credits - shareable as a community effort?
- Folks in town are philosophically interested in community solar, but access is a barrier.
- How do we work to further the needs of multiple municipalities and get funding for the most efficient next steps?
 - E.g. Ashfield Wastewater Treatment Plant – the Plant is awaiting prior USDA grant funds awarded for general engineering and renovation plans, which could also support solar. However, the Energy Committee has funds for solar at this site that need to be used *now*. How can we build capacity for coordination around these kinds of efforts to better align in the future?



Energy Committee chair, Alexandra Osterman, (right) and Mollie Babize (left) of the Ashfield Zoning Board of Appeals showed maps of proposed solar panels to be placed on the field behind them, located downhill and behind the wastewater treatment plant. Photo, Dee Boyle-Clapp.

Organizations, programs, initiatives, and funding sources mentioned:

- MassCEC Accelerator Grant - Energy Committee is applying, due 8/1/25. DOER has to support, then the proposal goes to the Governor's office. Ashfield would be an early adopter. Awards will be announced in the winter; the Energy Committee is optimistic.
- Wetlands delineation at the Water Treatment Plant - required for any future development. 8-10k project, will be in the Town budget (*subsequently passed*).

- Solar For All - program around financial access for solar through MassCEC.
- George Propane - program for community solar for current propane customers.
- UnDauntedK12 - organization helping schools decarbonize.

Next steps:

- The Ashfield Energy Committee will complete the application for the MassCEC Accelerator Grant to support clean energy innovation and education in the region.
- Alex Osterman and Adam Bright will meet with the Solar for All program team to learn more and explore how the Energy Committee can partner to share program information with residents interested in residential solar.



Alexandra Osterman (left) and Mary Quigley (center left) share maps and information about the proposed solar panels at the wastewater treatment plant. Paul Franz, Greenfield Recorder (center right), and Todd Olanyk, Ashfield Select Board (far right). Photo by Dee Boyle-Clapp

Ashfield MVP Community Resilience Day

Summary thanks to Lauren de la Parra and Holly Jacobson.

Overview - On May 4, 2025, from 1:00 - 4:00 pm, community members from Ashfield and the broader Hilltown region gathered for a day of festivities at Double Edge Theatre. Double Edge hosts a Community Day every year; this year's event included an additional focus on community resilience, as part of the [Ashfield Rural Climate Resilience and Living Culture Project](#).



Community **Resilience Day**. Photo by Double Edge.

What took place?

Community members joined in activities across the Double Edge campus – singing and creating music together, listening to stories, flying on bungees, walking on stilts, getting a tour of the farm, circle dancing, and talking together over coffee and tea. The many spaces and different activities invited people to connect with each other, learn about initiatives at Double Edge and in the community and region, cross-pollinate ideas, and have fun. Tables were set up with

materials from the Ashfield Rural Climate Resilience and Living Culture Project, including findings from 72 [student interviews](#) on visions for a resilient Ashfield and Hilltowns. Community members – both those who have been working on the project and those who were just learning about it – connected over these ideas of what would support a resilient community, from supporting local agriculture, to affordable housing, to emergency resources, to renewable energy solutions.

Who came to Community Resilience Day?

Community Resilience Day was free and open to everyone. Over 120 individuals attended, including middle schoolers and high schoolers who had led the project's community interviews, families with young children, as well as individuals from arts and cultural organizations including project partners Ohketeau Cultural Center, farms, local businesses, municipal



Adam Bright teaches children how to fly on bungees.
Photo by Double Edge.

committees, regional planning organizations, and State government. The vision was to bring together people from all sorts of backgrounds and interests to build community - the foundation for community resilience.



Visitors discuss the **Rural Climate Resilience and Living Culture Project**. Photo by Double Edge.

Site Tour #2 – Efficient, Affordable Homes

Overview - On June 25, 2025, twelve people, including seven featured guests who were sought after and selected because of their experiences with unique homes and building and real estate expertise, gathered for an intimate conversation in Double Edge Theatre's Meeting Room. Featured guests shared the evolution stories of their own unique and energy efficient homes, discussed both energy efficiency and what defines "affordable" housing, and shared dinner and conversation.

What took place: Rachel Hinkel-Wang and Davis Wang, Silas Riemer, Sal Link, and Peter Curtis shared the story of how they built their respective homes and some of the opportunities, limitations, and considerations they had to make during the process. Phil Pless, retired real estate agent, shared how the cost of land and homes have evolved over the last forty years, while Mary Quigley, building contractor and current Energy Committee member, discussed her work and showed a map of Ashfield with dots representing the 100 homes or structures that she and her crew built or renovated, most with an eye toward energy efficiency. Upon the conclusion of the meeting, Adam Bright took participants on a tour of a new one-bedroom, net zero home that is under construction at Double Edge which should be completed by the end of this summer.

The initial goal for this Site Tour was to have the opportunity to hear how varied homes in Ashfield were constructed and how they incorporated clean energy or energy efficiency practices. For those who felt comfortable, one request was to share the cost of land and construction, opportunities or barriers, such as bank or mortgage restrictions, and how these may have affected decision-making. Several shared the architectural plans and photos of the completed homes. Upon reflection, Bright and the MVP team are envisioning a document to help current and future Ashfield residents understand the variety of options and opportunities others have undertaken, but also what is possible due to new zoning, innovative ideas, as well as potential issues that could affect new homes or home renovation.

Participant homes varied widely. The Hinkel-Wang's found that their home, built to be south facing to make it easy for solar gain and winter heating, is much harder to keep cool in summer. Their home was built with significant support from their building contractor who was expanding his practice and, in some areas, was learning on the job to gain additional skills. In return for this trust, he showed Davis

how to do some of the work, such as flooring, so the couple could save on contractor/builder costs and do as much of the work as they could themselves.

Sal Link's 8 ft x 20 ft tiny house was built on a trailer, so it is easily moved from location to location. Built in Ashfield, Link shared its evolution and noted how community support made that structure possible.

Silas Riemer built what he described as a small house, not a tiny house, measuring 20 ft x 24 ft. The modest scale allowed for a lower cost, and some surprises. For example, built on a trailer platform with airflow beneath, the home is harder to keep warm in winter, but very easy to cool in summer.

Peter Curtis took a different approach and designed his home so it would be the place where he could age and live comfortably for the balance of his life. He considered what mattered most to him, such as one floor living and the ability to easily access his garden, as key elements and prioritized them.

Thanks to Lauren de la Parra and Holly Jacobson for capturing and sharing themes and next steps.

Themes that emerged related to addressing housing needs in Ashfield:

- The cost of land and housing in Ashfield is increasing. There's a desire to support older residents aging in place, and a desire to attract younger residents and families, but affordability is a barrier.
- Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), which are smaller secondary housing units on the same property as a primary residence, could be one way to increase housing options in Ashfield. As of February 2025, legislation in Massachusetts made ADUs legal by-right. Ashfield can shape certain aspects of the policy – for example, by restricting short-term rentals or increasing the maximum allowable size. The Planning Board is currently discussing how to shape the bylaw to work best for Ashfield.
- ADUs could also be a way to support older residents with being able to stay in their home, with the help of rental income. This would be contingent on residents being able to finance a construction or rehab project to build the ADU. The State is looking to make financing models available (e.g., 0% interest loans) that would break down barriers and incentivize this type of project.

- Cluster housing, which allows housing to be clustered in a smaller area than in a standard subdivision to preserve open space, was proposed as another potential solution to build homes more affordably. Participants were interested in supporting more co-housing models, while also wanting to avoid creating a subdivision aesthetic. Cluster housing is currently allowed in Ashfield. The Planning Board is currently looking into ways to more effectively enable this in Ashfield.

Other key takeaways and next steps:

- Mentorship played a big role in making it possible to build more sustainably and affordably – and could continue to support others seeking to build their own home or expand housing in Ashfield.
- Storytelling and sharing real life experiences can help serve as education and inspiration to illustrate what’s possible and strategies for addressing challenges.
- As part of this project, themes and findings will be compiled and shared with Ashfield boards and committees and made available to the Ashfield community to support future discussions around housing policy.
- There is also interest in compiling and documenting local home construction projects that integrate clean energy and sustainability, to share stories that could guide residents, inspire future builders, and inform local planning decisions.

Student Community Liaisons: The Next Generation Leads

Student Liaison Community Interviews

“Visions for the future of our Hilltowns.” April 2025

As part of the Ashfield Rural Climate Resilience and Living Culture MVP Project, twelve middle and high school students from the Mohawk Trail Regional School working in partnership with Mohawk Trail Regional School instructor, Rachel Silverman, Double Edge’s Hannah Jarrell and Dylan Young, and Ohketeau’s Kim Pevia, interviewed six community members – three school peers and three family members or neighbors (a total of 72 individuals) on topics related to creating a more resilient town and region. Below are the questions followed by a sampling of the interview responses. The full list of responses can be found on the Town of Ashfield’s website, see links in the Appendix.

“I was the constant with the youth.

It was important for the youth to be able to see Kim and Dylan before (Community Dinner #3), who were holding different pieces also within the community dinner, so that they already had some experience that was really important.

Hannah Jarrell

According to Jarrell, the students each put in a minimum of twenty hours of work. Each conducted six interviews, which accounted for at least six hours, attended

“Being able to hire and educate our young people simultaneously was great. I’m glad that we were able to figure that out and land on that.” Hannah Jarrell

meetings at the school, and prepared to, and then led the conversation at Community Meal #3.

Student interviews underscored the difficulty of community polling and follow-up planning as answers to the same questions resulted in often contradictory responses.

What kind of vision of Ashfield / the Hilltowns do you have that would make you want to keep living here or come back to live here after school?

- *No additional development; protect/ maintain natural history and rural beauty. → no stores/ gas stations. → not city like.*

- *More grocery stores: more urbanization. → more options: restaurants, general stores, gas stations. → provide more of a reason for people to come to the Hilltowns. → more people coming in results in more money to invest in the towns.*

Additional responses are provided below. See the summary on the Town of Ashfield website. URL is noted in the Appendix.

- *Strong sense of community. Natural landscape and the care put towards it. Very 'human' scale of community.*
- *More public transportation and a nightlife/ things to do and ways to get there.*
- *More public transport, more activities to do with friends, more food diversity, more diversity, less racism*
- *Keeping up with making sure to preserve nature and wildlife.*
- *More job opportunities and recreational activities.*

What do you think we can do in our communities to help make our town(s) resilient to the climate/extreme weather events like storms, droughts, and floods we have seen?

- *Education. There are many steps to make our towns more resilient to all of these subjects, but education is the first step. Many people (young and old) do not realize the impacts that these topics can have directly on the community.*
- *We could make sure water has a place to go in case of flooding, prevent flood damage, and research into storm abatement.*
- *Having more food prepared in case of extreme weather events/ food security as a community.*
- *Increase local food protection and CSAs. Promote wild and natural landscapes. Foster community preparedness. Tree planting.*
- *Community Solar. Liberty gardens and food banks. Wildfire preparedness.*
- *Ensure the stuff that helps us, like tree growth. Don't cut down forests.*

What would you do in your local town government towards balancing the need for farmland and the need for affordable housing? What ideas come to mind?

- *I think that we should start selling a lot of older homes that have been on the market for a long time for a much cheaper price. This would help the housing crisis, while also making it easier for families to farm, because they will have more money due to the cheaper homes.*
- *I feel that affordable housing takes priority so people can live easier in this area.*
- *Allocating money for both.*
- *Don't put housing on good farmland.*
- *We need more senior/ disabled housing and help. Senior services to make it possible to stay there.*

It was heartening working with the youth liaisons, helping to center them in the last community dinner, and hearing their ideas and desires for the future of their town. That has been one of the brightest points of this project for me. Dylan Young

What else would you like to see help the future of your town?

- *Increased funding for rural schools.*
- *More art!*
- *Need more public and affordable transportation.*
- *Town board members need to be paid a stipend because almost all of our members are volunteers which most people don't have the time/ money to be doing that.*
- *Eliminate school choice and federalize public education – that would help every town in America.*
- *Continue to modernize and bring in essential services like high-speed internet and cell services. Improve local school district to attract young families. Support local artists and artisans.*

Key Findings #1- Continue the Work, Continue Gathering

The Ashfield Rural Climate Resilience and Living Culture grant created six event opportunities for Ashfield residents to come together, and do the work of thinking, sharing, and learning as a first step toward resilience. Participants appreciated the opportunities to connect, and many stated that they want more of these gatherings to continue the conversations, keep the momentum, and turn ideas into action.

During the Site Visit #1, one concern raised was: How to keep getting minds in the room to continue visioning and finding creative pathways to sustainability and resilience for everyone? Meanwhile Paul McLatchy III and Todd Olanyk independently shared concerns that the MVP work and this document does not sit in a drawer or gather dust on a shelf. At the end of each event a summary of actions or visioning step were recorded. As Ashfield Resilience work gets underway, each deserves a closer look.

To help the Town make use of these findings, the project would benefit from the following Actions.

Actions: Continue to Gather.

- Create volunteer-run committees, including Youth-led (see Key Findings #4) to provide the leadership to hold future gatherings.
- Empower Leadership with clear goals.
- Design ad hoc committees with short term goals, clear deadlines, and opportunities to join another project. Ad hoc committees could

Said Adam Bright, ***“The Community Dinners were wildly successful in terms of engagement and garnering public opinion data. What do people want? What do people care about in the town? I think it's crucial information that we'll be able to translate back to the folks in leadership in the town, too, as they consider what and how they are creating bylaws and things for the future. Because the whole project is really looking at the future and how we're going to be more resilient, I think that this has been very successful. And I think it's definitely a foundation for a potential planning process for the town, which was not an actual goal (for this grant), but it was loosely spoken about in several rooms with town leadership, because there is (currently) no plan.”***

support planning the next Community Gathering, Potluck Dinner, or Visioning session.

Actions: Remove Barriers for ongoing participation –

- Structure meetings and work to fit the lives of busy people. Aim to meet at mutually convenient times and in locations that could accommodate children,
- Seek stipend grant funds to engage future low-income Resilient Ashfield participants who otherwise need to be at work.
- See Key Findings #4 regarding Student Committees.

Actions: Visioning Sessions –

- Create a Resource Day to gather and prioritize the MVP findings and visioning action steps created during the MVP process See pages Community Dinner #3, and which can be found in this document.
- Share the prioritized list with the Town as a basis for what Ashfield Residents want.
- Seek funding for ongoing people-powered leadership to support an overstretched municipal government.
- Prioritize ideas that will cost little to nothing so there is at least one ‘win’ that can keep up the momentum.

The Double Edge Theatre (DET) MVP grant was helpful for the Energy Committee in that it engaged more people in thinking and talking about the future in Ashfield and what we want for our town as relates to the impacts of climate change. It was great to see people talking about the intersections of renewable energy independence, affordable housing, and farmland protection. It was particularly nice that DET engaged young people in the project since youth engagement has been something the energy committee has struggled with.
Alexandra Osterman

Key Findings #2– Amplify What Already Exists

One resounding theme that emerged during Community Dinner #3 was the significant and sincere discussion about ways to support neighbors during times of crisis, such as during severe storms or prolonged power outages. Several of the stated needs were met with ideas, such as creating a buddy system to check on elders or isolated neighbors or creating a wood bank for those who heat their homes with wood. Many of these programs already exist in the Town of Ashfield, but were unknown to participants, and therefore are unknown to other Ashfield residents. The need to inform residents of programs, opportunities, or places to find information is paramount. Information about this MVP grant, and all documents can be found on the Town of Ashfield website at: <https://www.ashfield.org/2436/MVP>.

Actions:

- Create a comprehensive pamphlet or PDF guide of current programs that exist in Town.
- Make this document known and available to all residents in the format they need. To raise awareness, advertise the document across a variety of channels, including flyers sent home with Sanderson students, notices sent out with tax bills, and displays on noticeboards such as at the post office or Elmer's store.
- Consider printing a QR code on refrigerator magnets or stickers with the website address and make it possible for those who need a printed copy to get one at an accessible location, such as the library, stores, or Town Hall.
- Create and share opportunities to volunteer or to participate by receiving services in the programs when needed.
- Fund this as creatively as possible. Seek a grant to pay for design and outreach. Make the awareness campaign fun and participatory, such as accepting photos of Ashfield sites and/or voting for the cover.
- Consider involving Ashfield Student Committee to research programs, support the design of the document &/or the cover and help spread the word that such a document exists.
- Add all service programs, Town, nonprofit and church run.

Key Findings #3 – Affordable Housing and Energy Efficient Homes

The need for more affordable and more energy efficient housing is at crisis levels in many parts of the country and according to participating residents, the same is true in Ashfield. During Community Dinners #1 and #3, Site Visit #2, and the Student Survey, participants shared the impacts that the lack of affordable housing is having on themselves and their families, and there is a deep desire to protect Ashfield's unique rural landscape and farmland.

During Site Visit #2, retired real estate agent, Phil Pless, noted that while home prices rise and occasionally fall, land prices have never gone down, and he believed that the best land for houses has been taken. Residents attending Community Dinners #1 and #3 repeatedly suggested that new homes should be built in Ashfield's downtown, aware that several of the problems cited in this project would be solved by doing so. Not only would creating density preserve farmland and forested land, but it would enhance town vibrancy and reduce reliance on cars as people could walk to the stores, farmers market and restaurants. Actions related to land can be found in Key Finding #5.

At Community Dinner #1, several residents shared that they had raised their families, their grown children had moved on, and their homes were currently oversized for their needs. Left with large homes that in many cases they owned outright (and were their most important asset), there were a variety of barriers preventing them from leaving or turning their homes into multi-family dwellings. While one resident had concerns over noise and the loss of privacy such a transformation would create, most noted that they simply did not have the financial resources to undertake renovations of this magnitude. Still others noted that the idea of selling a family home was made more complicated by the reality that even if they did choose to sell, there were simply no smaller homes available.

Creating new affordable housing in a community with limited means is making some consider alternatives such as building smaller homes on smaller sized lots or building low-cost alternative homes. During Site Visit #2 Sal Link shared both how a tiny house worked for their lifestyle and budget, but also how construction was made possible thanks to Ashfield residents who lent a skilled helping hand, family gifts, and the Quaker community that donated funds.

Action: Share information with low-to-moderate income homeowners of upcoming opportunities including grants, and energy conservation programs such as those

offered by Community Action, as well as any state programs that may become available to support renovations that could divide a home into multiple units.

Action: Host an information sharing event so residents can learn about programs such as those funded by Mass Clean Energy Center that purchase dilapidated buildings, renovate and sell them to low-income residents, and Habitat for Humanity which engages community members to help construct homes with and for their eligible neighbors.

Action: Invite Community Action, which runs energy efficiency programs in Franklin County to inform low-income tenants and landlords about their programs.

Action: Create a living document which current and future Ashfield residents can access and add to that describe the types of energy efficient and affordable dwellings that have been created in town. This will include details on construction costs, tips to make efficiency easier to implement, how to access clean energy guidance, such as siting for best solar gain, stories from people who built unique homes and want to share ideas, and more.

Action: Revisit findings in this report from Site Visit #2 and Community Dinner #3 for visioning ideas and action items.

“There were a lot of solutions offered but practically speaking, there is funding needed for each solution given. The problem might not be finding solutions (like splitting up housing). To split a huge house into three apartments, that requires money. We need to be talking about how funding can be found. If nothing can be funded, then the conversation becomes what can we do without funding?”

Stacy Klein

Key Findings #4 – Student Community Liaisons and Youth Leadership

The Student Liaison work completed by students at Mohawk Trail Regional School was considered by many to be the strongest part of this project. The hope for the project was to obtain multi-generational participation but having the Student Community Liaisons lead on that work exceeded expectations. This project created the opportunity to engage students, pay them for their participation, and obtain their input and ideas on the issues that will directly affect their futures and the future of Ashfield. The students also obtained or honed important leadership skills as they conducted interviews with those with whom they knew or were comfortable and led the discussion during Community Dinner #3 and were often seated at tables with people they were meeting for the first time.

Responding to the youth and his experience with them at Community Dinner #3, **Paul McLatchy**, Town Administrator, said, “I think that it's incredible that they've (the students) been brought into this process as much as they have, and I think that it's a fantastic idea to continue pursuing that. And it's not like we're just picking a random school from, you know, 20 to 30 miles away. These are kids who either live in Ashfield or in a neighboring town. We're all in this together. So, you know, kids were saying, ‘Oh, I live in Shelburne, but I come up to Ashfield Lake all the time.’ There's an inter-town connection, and it's nice to see that.”

Hannah Jarrell said, “In my opinion the strongest part of this project will be everything that (the youth) said in their debrief; that some of them had never had these kinds of conversations with anybody. Some, maybe with their peers, but not with anybody who's not their age. Some had never experienced a multi-generational conversation. Some had never talked to people who do anything outside of their family. All of these types of things make me (excited) that they were interested and curious. That makes me want to figure out a way that they can have that kind of opportunity nonstop. You know, it's also hard to find jobs for our youth here. So being able to hire and educate our young people simultaneously was great. I'm really glad that we were able to figure that out and land on that.”

Going forward there is a hunger for continuing this work.

First, currently under discussion is hosting an exhibition of art about climate created by the Student Community Liaisons at Elmer's store, and discussion of a continued partnership with Mohawk Trail Regional School and Rachel Silverman. Students

used the phrase *next time*, as they gave suggestions for the next round of work and indicated their interest in future participation.

Second, embedded in the survey responses were the students' heartfelt comments concerning being isolated due to lack of transportation, having nothing to do, and wanting to see change. Several ideas emerged in the interviews and post event meetings that could help empower the youth to channel their energy and continue to give them a platform to take the actions they wanted. The opportunity for students to interact with adults they did not know, while serving in a leadership capacity stretched several of the youth and pulled them out of their comfort zone. This work, while hard in the moment, is important for student growth, especially for those who live in rural areas who may have fewer opportunities than their urban counterparts.

Action: Put out a call for volunteer community residents to support a Student Committee.

Volunteers can:

- Meet with youth and help guide them to do their own work.
- Co-write LCC grants for event funds.
- Be CORI and SORI vetted by police department or staff at Sanderson or Mohawk schools to ensure safety.

Action: Put out a call for Youth to serve on their own committee with support from adult volunteers. The committee could provide the students with a multitude of skills, pride, and agency to solve the issue of nothing to do.

- Generate ideas for their own event(s), such as a dance, a Poetry slam, a weekly coffee house, drawing/art making time, etc.
- Co-write LCC grants for event funds.
- Plan, market, and execute event(s) that suits their interests.
- Ask the Town to provide a safe, free space for the project(s).

Action: To keep the momentum, especially for those students who have expressed their interest in creating change, recreate the Student Liaison Committee at the Town Administration level. This would serve multiple purposes, including teaching students about town governance and how to serve on a committee, how to present

One theme that repeated in their (student) feedback and reflection on the experience was how nerve-wracking but also interesting and new it was to be in this future-visioning conversation with adults. I think these intergenerational conversations are integral to helping any ideas come to fruition. Dylan Young

a variety of opinions and how to create action and direct the changes they want to see. While a youth committee is not new to Ashfield, this new group of students appears to be ready for the challenge.

Action: Seek grants to support the Student Liaison Committee and Jarrell’s time to continue to work with the Youth at Mohawk Trail Regional School. Connect with the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts for ideas.

“It was good to show teenagers that they can take part in their community so that they learn about participation early on in their lives.” Stacy Klein

Key Findings #5 – Expand Nature-Based solution work

Finding Nature-based solutions was the one area explored in the grant that was most complicated and broadly sweeping. Grant partners felt that this work required more time and that the least progress was seen. What emerged, however, were meaningful action steps.

Action: Enhance zoning to protect farmland from development, retain forests and the look and feel of the rural community.

Action: Protect the floodplains to mitigate further damage to town roads and infrastructure.

Action: Use MVP 2.0 to develop a plan for protecting the region's watershed and floodplain.

Action: Work in collaboration with Ohketeau and Conway School of Landscape Design on ways to further nature-based solutions for the region.

Conclusion

The **Ashfield Rural Climate Resilience and Living Culture Project** aimed to seek innovative ideas and understand what would make a resilient Ashfield. Participants showed their willingness to consider new approaches to transforming clean energy, nature-based solutions and affordable housing. Affordable housing discussions illustrated this point well: Typical Ashfield homes were built to accommodate larger families and required larger lots. Participants emphasized that smaller homes on smaller sized lots, clustered together, preferably downtown, was more appealing than a large, financially out-of-reach home. This kind of innovative thinking could solve multiple problems at the same time. Smaller homes would be less costly to heat/cool and maintain, there would be no loss of the open space or farmland regarded as vital to maintaining the rural character of Ashfield, more walkability would reduce reliance on personal transportation, and closer neighbors meant more opportunities for vibrancy and gathering. This fresh thinking rang throughout the Community Dinners and Site Tours.

Ashfield is already doing a whole lot of things right.”

Kim Pevia

Continuing to be nimble and responsive to change and external unpredictability and thinking and acting collaboratively with the best in mind for all of the community will serve Ashfield well. The current loss of federal funds may require Ashfield to prioritize projects that either cost little or can be created or built by the community themselves. The community will have to prioritize which resiliency ideas will not only best serve their collective needs but will produce the greatest impacts and long-term cost savings.

Kim Pevia summed up the Ashfield Rural Climate Resilience and Living Culture Project best, ***“(This project) gave me hope that Ashfield will figure out a way to maintain the charm that it has, that there will be a new generation of folks to push it further into what it can be: to be more socially just, more environmentally aware, more housing conscious. And just continue to do more and more of what they are already doing, because Ashfield is already doing a whole lot of things right.”***

APPENDIX

Links for Ashfield Rural Climate Resilience and Living Culture Project materials

The links to all recordings, survey results, recaps of Community Dinners, and other events and this Case Study can be found at the [Town of Ashfield](https://www.ashfield.org/2436/MVP) website at: <https://www.ashfield.org/2436/MVP>.

COMMUNITY DINNERS:

Community Dinner #1:

- Community Dinner #1 Recap: [Download the Recap](https://www.ashfield.org/DocumentCenter/View/10726) or <https://www.ashfield.org/DocumentCenter/View/10726>
- Community Dinner #1. [Recording Now Available](https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/Elk6GDE340JgxHvacfPfVEEGZsVnZVa3lk41KzjO8nSBaFjTrCBr2-17H7EQpVKv.VuEeQqm_-LHdClev). https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/Elk6GDE340JgxHvacfPfVEEGZsVnZVa3lk41KzjO8nSBaFjTrCBr2-17H7EQpVKv.VuEeQqm_-LHdClev
- Shareable flyer: [Community Dinner - December 5th, 2024](https://www.ashfield.org/DocumentCenter/View/10545) or <https://www.ashfield.org/DocumentCenter/View/10545>

Community Dinner #2:

- Community Dinner #2 Recap: [Download the Recap](https://www.ashfield.org/DocumentCenter/View/10858) or <https://www.ashfield.org/DocumentCenter/View/10858>
- Community Dinner #2. [Recording Now Available](https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/C3ArpV0lLex9vG3WDwmKkBDFczBSgC_bN0JXws-3uEDIYN7qusZn65sG_IBOeaK.kHPA-881b8M8SE2i?startTime=1738278352000) https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/C3ArpV0lLex9vG3WDwmKkBDFczBSgC_bN0JXws-3uEDIYN7qusZn65sG_IBOeaK.kHPA-881b8M8SE2i?startTime=1738278352000
- Shareable flyer: [Community Dinner - January 30th, 2025](https://www.ashfield.org/DocumentCenter/View/10638/MVP-CommDinner2_Flyer) or https://www.ashfield.org/DocumentCenter/View/10638/MVP-CommDinner2_Flyer

Community Dinner #3:

- Community Dinner #3 Recap: [Download the Recap](https://www.ashfield.org/DocumentCenter/View/11047) or <https://www.ashfield.org/DocumentCenter/View/11047>

- Community Dinner #3 - [Recording Now Available](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kCunqkC3abmeOTuX7dX_sE2-GRQ_uRB3lmfhCz07Pzg/edit?usp=sharing) or https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kCunqkC3abmeOTuX7dX_sE2-GRQ_uRB3lmfhCz07Pzg/edit?usp=sharing
- Shareable flyer: [Community Dinner - April 29th, 2025](https://www.ashfield.org/DocumentCenter/View/10962/Ashfield-2025_4) or https://www.ashfield.org/DocumentCenter/View/10962/Ashfield-2025_4

SITE TOURS

- Site Tour #1: [Summary](https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/vAmxbHyWwgDu4M_HueRSUpJqPtE0C_HlfWqDnjWSFCiG_7tbJsOa0p_0bhzo-O_uZ.vLTobJnz5DgzPqOk?startTime=1745964735000) or https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/vAmxbHyWwgDu4M_HueRSUpJqPtE0C_HlfWqDnjWSFCiG_7tbJsOa0p_0bhzo-O_uZ.vLTobJnz5DgzPqOk?startTime=1745964735000
- Site Tour #2: Summary is pending at the time of this writing. Links be available from: <https://www.ashfield.org/2436/MVP>

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE DAY

- Community Resilience Day - [Recap](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1M4Mh0UNmgK7yoBfNq3sVw6HE9dJkHpogkcX8vVvLmnU/edit?usp=sharing) or <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1M4Mh0UNmgK7yoBfNq3sVw6HE9dJkHpogkcX8vVvLmnU/edit?usp=sharing>

STUDENT LIAISONS INTERVIEWS

- As part of the Ashfield Rural Climate Resilience and Living Culture MVP Project, twelve Student Community Liaisons, middle and high school students from the Mohawk Trail Regional School interviewed members of the community on topics related to creating a more resilient town and region. Each student interviewed six community members – three school peers and three family members or neighbors for a total of 72 interviews. Find them [here](https://www.ashfield.org/DocumentCenter/View/11042) or <https://www.ashfield.org/DocumentCenter/View/11042>

Ashfield Rural Climate Resilience and Living Culture MVP Project Case Study

- The **Case Study** and separate **Executive Summary** will be available on the Town of Ashfield MVP page or <https://www.ashfield.org/2436/MVP> and the [Arts Extension Service](https://www.umass.edu/arts-extension-service/culture-climate-action) or <https://www.umass.edu/arts-extension-service/culture-climate-action>.

Town of Ashfield Staffing

This information was kindly shared by the Town Administrator Paul McLatchy III, and underscores both how lean the town staffing is and difficult it is for the town to take on additional work, such as this project.

Town Staff: Total of 25 employees, (12 FT, 13 PT)

Administrative with FTE: 8 total, 2 FT, 6 PT

1. Town Clerk: 0.60
2. Treasurer: 0.75
3. Collector: 1.00
4. Administrator: 1.00
5. Assessor: 0.50
6. Conservation Agent: 1.00 (shared between 5 towns) 20%
7. Custodian: 0.15
8. Facilities Manager: 0.20-0.25

Other Departments for full- and part-time staff: 17 employees, 10 FT, 7 PT

1. Highway- 1 Supt., 1 Foreman, 3 Laborers (6 FT)
2. Transfer Station- 2 PT Attendants (2 PT)
3. Library- 1 Director, 3 PT Assistants, 1 PT Custodian (1 FT, 4 PT)
4. WWTP- 1 Chief Operator (1?)
5. Fire- 1 Chief (1 FT)
6. Police- 1 Chief, 1 PT Officer (1FT, 1 PT)

Park- All seasonal

PHOTO CREDITS

Unless noted, all images are courtesy of Double Edge Theatre, with special thanks to Victor Figueroa. Site Tour #1 images, courtesy of the Greenfield Recorder, and Dee Boyle-Clapp, Arts Extension Service.