

# Ashfield Rural Climate Resilience and Living Culture Project

September 2024 - June 2025

Led by the Town of Ashfield, Double Edge Theatre, Ohketeau Cultural Center, UMass Amherst Arts Extension Service, and climate and cultural strategists Lauren de la Parra and Holly Jacobson.  
**Funded by the Massachusetts Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Program.**

What does climate  
resilience look like  
for Ashfield?

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# Project Overview

**The Ashfield Living Culture and Rural Climate Resilience Project** was a community-based initiative to support climate resilience in Ashfield and the greater Hilltowns region. The project aimed to build and strengthen relationships among local residents and organizations, create non-traditional gatherings for community dialogue, and increase the diversity of participation in Town governance and visioning for the future of Ashfield. In doing so, the project worked to strengthen pathways for collaboration to create a more resilient town and region.



# Project Goals

- 01** Create new opportunities for local organizations, community members, and Town staff to discuss goals and ideas related to three resilience focus areas in Ashfield: **clean energy**, **nature-based resilience solutions** to climate change, and **affordable housing**;
- 02** Identify avenues for community partners and the Town to collaborate on future projects and grant proposals to achieve community goals related to the project focus areas;
- 03** Grow Ashfield's potential for creative collaboration and leadership on rural climate and community resilience in the region.

# Project Activities

## Community Dinners (x3)

Ashfield residents came together over the course of three community dinners to discuss their visions for Ashfield and to identify pathways for reaching those goals.



- 30-50 community members attended each dinner
- Larry Spotted Crow Mann (of Ohketeau) opened the gatherings with traditional drumming and Kim Pevia (Ohketeau affiliate) facilitated conversations and authentic listening through story circles
- Conversations at the third dinner were led by youth who had gathered community insight through interviews

# Project Activities

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## Site Tours (x2)

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Community members working formally or informally in the three project focus areas participated in two “site tour” events to discuss opportunities, challenges, and specific strategies in Ashfield.



- 1) The **first site tour** brought together Town staff, energy committee members, and regional and state partners to discuss locations, opportunities, and strategies for clean energy installation in Ashfield.
- 2) The **second site tour** brought together residents with experience in affordable home construction, energy efficient design, and the housing market in Ashfield to discuss opportunities, challenges, and strategies for expanding affordable, sustainable homes in Ashfield.

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Community members from Ashfield and the region gathered for a day of music, dancing, acrobatics, community-building, and conversations about what it takes to foster regional community resilience.



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## Youth-led Interviews (x72)

Twelve middle and high school students interviewed their peers, family, and neighbors on visions for the future of Ashfield and a resilient community. Using this insight, they led discussions at the third Community Dinner.

# Project Activities

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## Site Tours (x2)

**+ Lots of outreach and many, many one-on-one and small group conversations with residents, businesses, and community groups!**

Specific strategies in Ashfield.

## Community Resilience Day

Foster regional community resilience.

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# Important Elements

## Relationship-Building

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The project focused on connecting with as many groups in Ashfield as possible, not only to expand the voices involved in Town decision-making, but to **build relationships** as the backbone of community resilience.

## Indigenous Perspectives

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As a project partner, Ohketeau facilitated the **inclusion of Indigenous voices**, traditions, considerations, and perspectives into the project's events – building awareness of Indigenous culture and context, and creating pathways for connection between Indigenous and non-Indigenous neighbors.

## Youth Leadership

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Twelve **youth community liaisons** brought personal insight and the insight of their peers into the process through conducting interviews, leading community dinner conversations, and advising on the process. Youth liaisons were provided with stipends to recognize the value of their input and support their time.

# Findings & Key Themes

01

# Continue to build community cohesion and intergenerational connections

## FINDINGS:

- Desire to build stronger intergenerational connections
- Desire to make the town welcoming and accessible to folks of all different ages and backgrounds
- Desire to retain and build social connectedness – to create spaces and activities (e.g., potlucks, community gardens, recreation center) that build community
- Desire for a better way to share information on existing resources for new and long-time residents
- Desire for a resilience hub space to connect, coordinate, and share resources in town

## ACTIONS:

- Strengthen ways to share and build awareness of resources in town
- Support community events and organizers as the “glue” bringing people together
- Explore the potential for a Resilience Hub in Ashfield
- Identify grant-writers who can help secure ongoing funding for this work

## 02

# Expand diverse and affordable housing, while protecting farmland and ecosystems

### FINDINGS:

- Desire for more diverse and affordable housing options to help older residents stay in Ashfield and enable more families and young people to move into the region
- Desire to explore more community-oriented development patterns (e.g. smaller lots, cohousing, ADUs, multi-generational models, and walkability)
- Desire for land use patterns that protect ecosystems and farmland and prevent sprawl
- Desire to make it more accessible to build affordable and sustainable homes in Ashfield

### ACTIONS:

- Revisit and adjust zoning to best balance new housing and farmland / ecosystem protection
- Identify ways to encourage housing models (e.g., ADUs, cluster housing) that can support housing diversity, affordability, and walkability
- Develop resources to support sustainable and affordable home construction

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As a newer person to Ashfield, I was surprised & encouraged at how many other people are trying to think of ways to live cooperatively. My husband, son and I have been renting from family in Ashfield and are needing to find a new living situation in the spring. Affordable housing is a huge concern, so I'm glad to hear others are thinking about ways to make that easier.

**Ashfield resident**

Reflecting on Community Dinner #1

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Young people have lots of ideas and energy around what Ashfield could look like. They are willing to engage, but current town governance is opaque and sometimes intimidating.

**Ashfield resident**

Reflecting on Community Dinner #2

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[This event left me thinking about] the power of the Ashfield community and intertwined relationships - the true foundation of resilience!

**Ashfield resident**

Reflecting on Community Dinner #2

# Invest in food security, local agriculture, and nature-based solutions

## FINDINGS:

- Desire to protect farmland and make farming more viable for aging and young farmers
- Desire to support and celebrate local agriculture in creative ways
- Desire to work at a watershed scale to build ecosystem resilience and to protect local food resources from climate impacts
- Desire to learn from nature (especially tied to interconnectedness and healing) to address invasives, flooding, droughts, fires, and other climate impacts

## ACTIONS:

- Explore pathways for partnerships across viewpoints at watershed scale to support ecosystem health and climate impacts
- Identify new ways to support local agriculture; consider a year-round indoor farmers market
- Consider a future MVP Action Grant that focuses on nature-based solutions

# 04

## Expand renewable energy for rural resilience and self-sufficiency

### FINDINGS:

- Desire to expand renewable energy to support community resilience (e.g., on municipal buildings, as part of new housing development, on local farms, etc.)
- Desire to make clean energy installation more affordable and accessible in home construction and retrofits
- Desire to continue to support the Ashfield Energy Committee's efforts to fund and implement municipal clean energy projects
- Desire to integrate renewable and resilient energy systems into a vision for a Resilience Hub

### ACTIONS:

- Pursue MassCEC grant to support energy innovation and education in the region (underway!)
- Consider MVP Action Grant for municipal clean energy + battery storage
- Promote State programs and incentives for residential clean energy
- Connect farmers to UMass Clean Energy Extension solar technical assistance

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Moving towards right relationship with the original stewards of this land feels like it should be at the center of conversations around climate resiliency.

**Ashfield resident**

Reflecting on Community Dinner #2

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How to make sustainable energy sources more accessible and affordable?

**Ashfield resident**

Reflecting on Community Dinner #1

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What are some ways that local farmers and other local entrepreneurs can be supported more directly?

**Ashfield resident**

Reflecting on Community Dinner #1

[This event has left me thinking about] how to make Ashfield more walkable, community events and third spaces, the community garden idea, the resilience hub idea, affordable housing, and a more centralized form of communication to bring the community together!!!

**Ashfield resident**

Reflecting on Community Dinner #1

# 05

## Strengthen Town partnerships, youth leadership, and regional collaboration

### FINDINGS:

- Desire for sharing findings from grants and pilot programs with neighboring municipalities and regional partners to collaborate on projects with regional benefits
- Desire to team up with neighboring municipalities on maintenance contracts, grant applications, etc. to reduce capacity constraints
- Desire to support youth leadership in town planning
- Desire to build ongoing partnerships (with community organizations, businesses, community groups, etc.) to collaborate and expand capacity for planning and action

### ACTIONS:

- Create opportunities for youth leadership in town government (e.g., consider reviving Ashfield Youth Commission)
- Share findings and collaborate regionally on projects / grants / contracts that meet regional needs
- Explore potential for cross-town liaisons to support working together in the region

**Learn more!**

**Project website:** [www.ashfield.org/2436/MVP](http://www.ashfield.org/2436/MVP)

**Community Dinner #1 Recap ([link](#))**

**Community Dinner #2 Recap ([link](#))**

**Community Dinner #3 Recap ([link](#))**

**Site Tour #1 Recap ([link](#))**

**Site Tour #2 Recap ([link](#))**

**Community Resilience Day Recap ([link](#))**

**Summary of Student Liaison Interviews ([link](#))**

**Project Case Study ([link](#))**

**Case Study Executive Summary ([link](#))**