



February 2021

CLIMATE LEADERSHIP NEWSLETTER

NOTES FROM MASSACHUSETTS CITIES AND TOWNS

Dear Emma,

The Climate Leadership Newsletter features stories of environmental and climate action in Massachusetts. It provides a platform to highlight work being done by municipalities, climate leaders, and local groups in communities across the Commonwealth. To share local climate actions in your community, email [Emma Brown](mailto:Emma.Brown@sierraclub.org).

Clean Energy and Climate

Baker Sends Climate Bill Back to Legislators



State lawmakers have refiled the climate bill that Governor Baker vetoed in January,

and Baker has returned the bill to the legislators with suggested revisions. Although the bill passed unanimously in the state house and senate, it appears that lawmakers may compromise on some of the changes.

The bill contains several sweeping provisions that would increase the amount of renewable energy that utility companies must buy, boost contracting for offshore wind, create new energy efficiency standards for appliances, and establish a plan for Massachusetts and several industries in the state to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. Many of Baker's proposed changes would weaken the emissions standards presented in the bill. For example, the current bill requires the state to reduce emissions by 50% below 1990 levels by 2030, whereas Baker favors decreasing emissions by a range of 45-50% of 1990 levels by 2030 and by 65-75% by 2020. He cites concerns about the costs as the reason for lowering the target. However, environmental groups are concerned by his stance. They had hoped that cutting emissions by 50% by 2030 would be the minimum goal, not the maximum.

The bill would also require emissions reductions in six sectors, including transportation and residential heating and cooling. Baker has suggested that lawmakers introduce these changes as "planning tools" instead of requirements if the state is meeting its overall emissions targets.

Additionally, the bill would allow communities to require that all new buildings be carbon neutral as soon as 2022. The Baker administration and real estate developers oppose this provision, again citing economic concerns. Baker has proposed that communities could instead opt into rules requiring buildings to be "super-efficient", but not necessarily "net zero".

Advocacy groups largely oppose Baker's proposed changes, although they note that he also suggested changes that would strengthen the environmental justice language in the bill, which they support. Advocates are calling on lawmakers to reject any changes that would weaken the bill. Lawmakers will soon decide how to move forward: they could accept Baker's changes, further negotiate with Baker, or reject Baker's changes and override the governor if he vetoes the bill.

Review Process to Resume for Vineyard Wind Project



In February, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) announced it would resume the review process for the proposed Vineyard Wind project. The proposed project could generate 800 megawatts of electricity, enough power for more than 400,000 homes, and would be the first major offshore wind farm in the United States. While some details of the project have changed—including the turbines developers plan to use—developers believe the project is still on track to begin producing electricity by the end of 2023.

SMART Guidelines Available for Public Comment

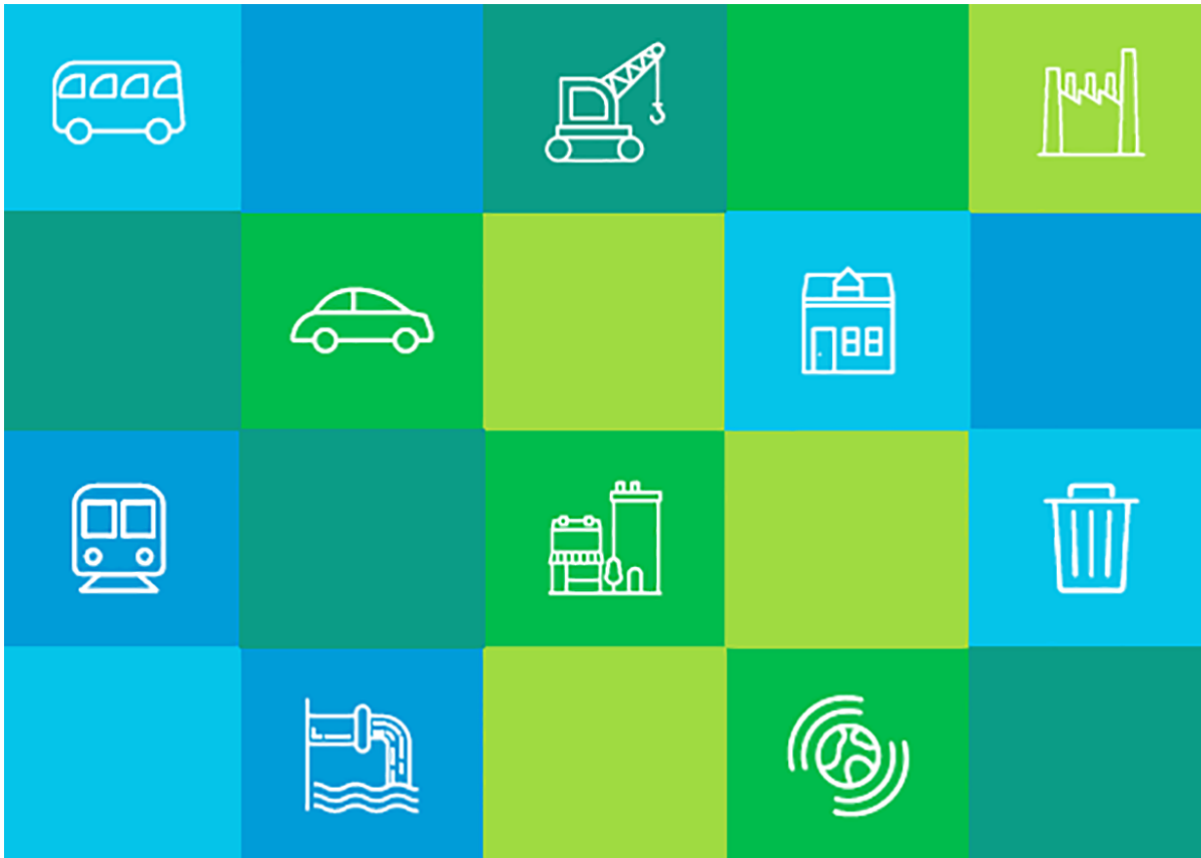


DOER has released revised guidelines for public comment. The guidelines can be found on the [Department's website](#). The draft guidelines and a summary of the proposed changes are:

- Guideline Regarding Alternative Programs for Community Shared Solar Tariff Generation Units and Low Income Community Shared Solar Tariff Generation Units- Further information about necessary steps to participate as a CSS/LICSS project through a municipal aggregation or a utility offered program.
- Guideline on Energy Storage- Proposal to compensate standalone DC-coupled solar with energy storage projects for their round-trip efficiency losses and clarification on energy storage compliance requirements.
- Statement of Qualification Reservation Period Guideline- Clarification to the extension request processes.
- Guideline on Establishing SMART Compensation Rates- Modifications to the process for combining rates on two or more STGUs.
- Guideline Regarding Low Income Generation Units- Clarification on maintaining eligibility for Low Income Solar Tariff Generation Units.

The deadline for submitting written comments on these guidelines is Friday, March 5, 2021, by 5pm. Written comments should be submitted to DOER.SMART@mass.gov with "SMART Guideline Comments" in the subject line. As an alternative, the public may submit written comments via mail to the Department of Energy Resources, 100 Cambridge Street, Suite 1020, Boston, MA 02114, attention Abby Barnicle. Please be advised that there may be delays in receiving written comments via the mail.

MAPC Climate Planning Tools Available



The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) is developing a “[playbook](#)” for municipalities developing net-zero and other local climate plans. It provides guidance and tools to equip communities to tackle their climate goals in an efficient and equitable manner. Chapters on reducing emissions from buildings and vehicles have already been released, with content on zoning and renewable energy forthcoming.

Communities developing climate action plans can also access [MAPC’s Community Greenhouse Gas Inventory Tool](#) to account for local emissions.

Clean Transportation

MassDOT Is Building a Complete Streets Corridor Through West Springfield and Agawam

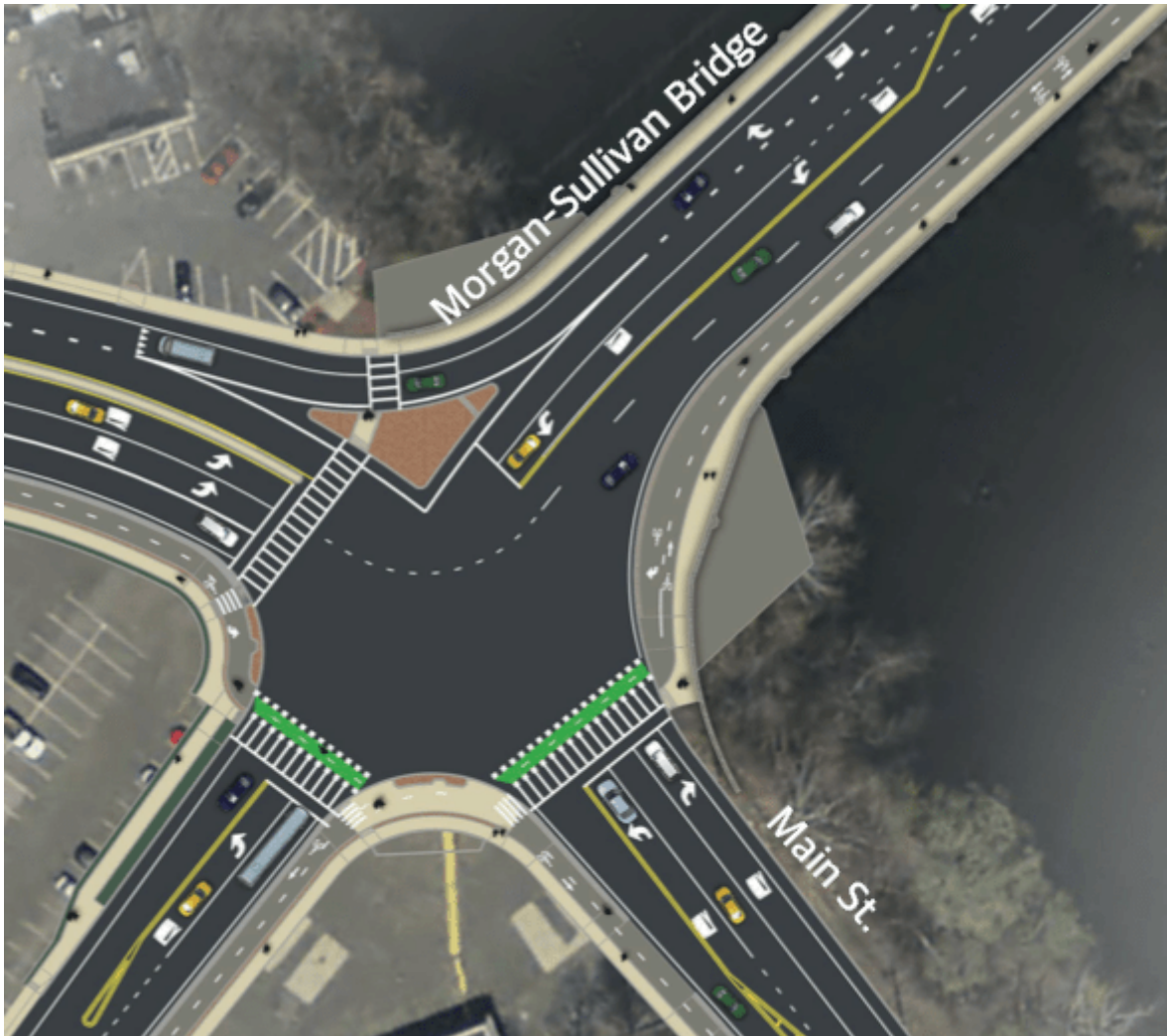


Image courtesy of MassDOT

[Two MassDOT projects](#) in West Springfield and Agawam will turn a car-centered main road into a “complete street”. The first project will rebuild the Morgan-Sullivan bridge, which crosses the Westfield River between West Springfield and Agawam. The new bridge will have continuous sidewalks and two-way bike lanes.

The second project will rebuild Memorial Avenue between the Morgan-Sullivan bridge and the Connecticut River, which separates Springfield and West Springfield. The new road will also have new sidewalks and two-way bike lanes.

Both projects reflect the new MassDOT engineering standards implemented in 2020, which require re-built roads to have sidewalks, transit stops, and bike lanes. The project is located in a high-traffic area of the Springfield suburbs, close to multiple supermarkets and the Big E fairgrounds. Ten percent of households in West Springfield and Agawam do not have cars, so the new projects may also be in a high-impact location.

Agawam Mayor William Sapelli is in favor of the new project and hopes it will make the area attractive to new businesses. He also says the new sidewalks and bikeways will help the area’s children walk to school more safely.

MOR-EV Rebate for Trucks



The Baker administration has expanded the [MOR-EV program](#) to include a \$10 million commitment to fund electric trucks. Rebate values vary by vehicle weight rating, ranging from \$7,500 for pickup trucks up to \$90,000 for tractor trailer trucks. Rebates decline over time and are available for public, private, and commercial fleets. Vehicles registered or operating in communities that meet the environmental justice income criteria are eligible for an additional 10% rebate.

Toxics and Pollution

Statewide ban on plastic bags proposed



Massachusetts elected officials will consider a statewide ban on plastic bags in the next 2-year legislative session. 140 cities and towns in Massachusetts already have restrictions on plastic bags, which has led to a patchwork of local laws. The food industry supports the statewide ban, saying it would “level the playing field” as retailers currently follow different rules in different parts of the state.

However, the ban is opposed by the plastic and paper industries, as well as some retail groups, and past attempts at a statewide ban have failed due to industry pressure. Additionally, progress slowed last year when Governor Baker lifted the plastic bag ban and prohibited reusable bags due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Composting Goes Big for Some Municipalities



In February, the town of Hamilton became the [first in Massachusetts](#) to mandate composting for all residents. As many municipalities have seen residential waste increase over the last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and as the state's landfill capacity continues to dwindle, it has become increasingly important for municipalities to divert its waste. For many municipalities, around 28 percent of landfill waste is organic material which could be composted instead, reducing landfill burden as well as greenhouse gas emissions. In Hamilton, residents will need to use a special organics bin alongside their trash—if the compost bin isn't out, trash won't be picked up (at-home composters can get a special exemption sticker for their trash bins).

Meanwhile in Sterling, a group called Keeping Sterling [plans to create a compost program](#) at the compost site behind the police station. While the working group presented their plan to the Select Board in February, town officials will need to conduct a full review of the cost benefit before moving forward.

Grants and Webinars

2021 Local Solutions: Climate Preparedness Communities of Practice

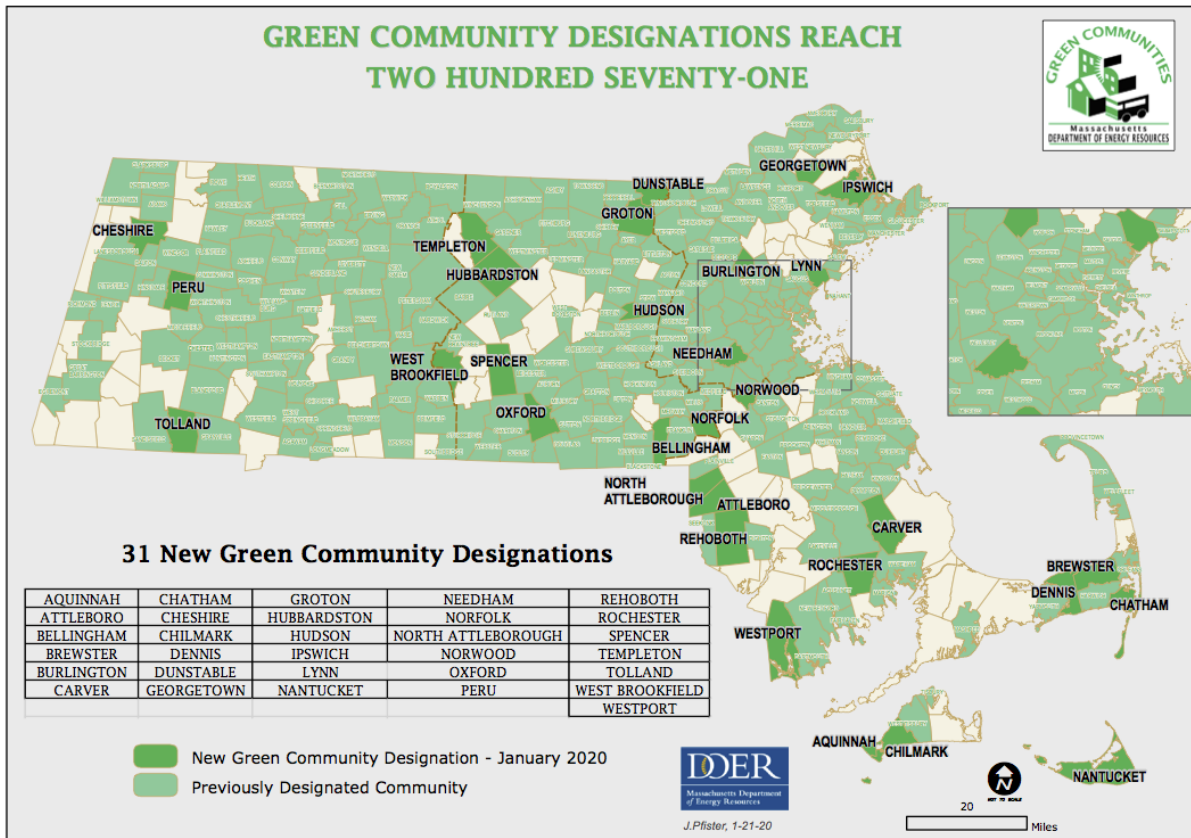


The [Antioch University Center for Climate Preparedness and Community Resilience](#) is hosting a “community of practice” for climate preparedness. A “facilitated community of practice” is a group of people who all share the same problem, concern, or interest and who teach and learn from one another. The virtual sessions, which run from March 16th – May 31st, are created for local government staff, regional planning councils, elected and appointed officials, municipal committee members, community-based organizations, and other who work in support roles with the priority groups. There are four subgroups of conversation: affordable and accessible housing, sustainable transportation and mobility, healthy neighborhoods and healthy people, and strong local economy and workforce development.

The community of practice will center equity in climate resilience while defining best practices to address common issues from the impacts of climate change, and participants will also create “next steps” for climate resilience planning in their communities and greater regions. Participants will also discuss how the community of practice model can be applied to other related sectors, such as housing. In addition to discussion, the program will incorporate speakers, workshops, and keynote session.

Rolling [applications are accepted](#) until March 9th or until 100 people have registered. Applicants from New England will be prioritized. If selected to participate, the program cost is \$50.

Green Communities 2021 Competitive Grant Program



The Green Communities 2021 Competitive Grant Application is [currently available](#). To be eligible, Green Communities must have:

- Expended all prior Green Communities designation and competitive grant funds by February 12, 2021;
- Submitted their final grant report no later than 5 PM February 12, 2021; and satisfied all outstanding questions no later than 5 PM March 19, 2021; and
- Submitted their FY 2020 Green Communities Annual Report by November 5, 2020 and satisfied all outstanding questions no later than 5 PM February 12, 2021.

Applications must be submitted online by **5pm on April 9, 2021**. For more information, visit the [Green Communities website](#).

MassEVIP Direct Current Fast Charging Incentives



[MassEVIP Direct Current \(DC\) Fast Charging](#) is a competitive MassDEP open grant program aimed at making electric vehicle (EV) fast-charging stations more widely available across Massachusetts. The program provides incentives for property owners with publicly accessible parking and educational campuses with at least 15 students on-site to acquire DC fast-charging stations.

There are three tracks for funding: government-owned locations with publicly accessible parking; non-government-owned locations with publicly accessible parking; and educational campuses. Funding from MassDEP varies for each category. MassDEP will accept [applications](#) for these competitive awards through March 19, 2021.

U.S. Department of Transportation Announces FY 2021 Round of the Infrastructure for Rebuilding America (INFRA) Grant Program



The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) announced it is seeking applicants for the FY 2021 round of the [Infrastructure for Rebuilding America](#) (INFRA) discretionary grant program to fund transportation projects of national and regional significance. Projects should be in line with the Biden Administration's principles for national infrastructure projects that result in good-paying jobs, improve safety, apply transformative technology, and explicitly address climate change and racial equity. The funding available for this year's grants totals approximately \$889 million.

For the first time, the USDOT seeks INFRA projects that address climate change and environmental justice. Projects will be evaluated on whether they were planned as part of a comprehensive strategy to address climate change, or whether they support strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions such as deploying zero-emission-vehicle infrastructure or encouraging modal shift and a reduction in vehicle-miles-traveled. Racial equity will also be considered as a selection criterion, to the extent that project sponsors have completed equity-focused community outreach, and projects are designed to benefit underserved communities. The Department will also consider whether the project is located in a federally designated community development zone, including qualified Opportunity Zones, Empowerment Zones, Promise Zones, or Choice Neighborhoods.

USDOT seeks projects that apply innovative technology, delivery, or financing methods with proven outcomes to deliver projects in a cost effective manner. The Department will make awards under the INFRA program to both large and small projects. For a large project, the INFRA grant must be at least \$25 million. For a small project, the grant must be at least \$5 million. Under statutory requirements, 10 percent of available funds are reserved for small projects, and the Department must award at least 25 percent of funding for rural projects. INFRA grants may be used to fund a variety of components of an infrastructure project, however, the Department is specifically focused on projects in which the local sponsor is significantly invested and is positioned to proceed rapidly to construction. Eligible INFRA project costs may include: reconstruction, rehabilitation, acquisition of property (including land related to the project and improvements to the land), environmental mitigation, construction

contingencies, equipment acquisition, and operational improvements directly related to system performance.

This NOFO will remain open through Friday, March 19, 2021. More information may be found [here](#) and INFRAgrants@dot.gov.

Think Globally, Act Locally: Municipalities Adapt to the Climate Crisis



By definition, the climate crisis is a global problem. Its impacts, however, are felt much closer to home. When increased precipitation overwhelms our municipal infrastructure or when extreme heat threatens the health of our most vulnerable neighbors, we look to our municipal governments for solutions. Join the Climate Adaptation Forum to explore the role of municipalities in climate adaptation. Experts from New England and beyond will discuss innovative adaptation strategies being implemented in their communities, state programs and frameworks that are facilitating local action, trends in financing local adaptation projects, and other important topics.

The forum will take place on March 5 from 10:00am to 1:00pm. [Learn more and register here](#).

Resources and Reading List

- [A lesson in electric school buses](#) (Washington Post)
- [\\$10 billion bill offered to power Mass. climate legislation](#) (The Herald News)
- [What is Mass Save? Partnership offers chance to lower energy costs, emissions](#) (Berkshire Eagle)
- [Feds to take second look at Weymouth gas compressor approval](#) (Boston Herald)
- [State board OK's controversial East Boston substation; foes vow to appeal](#) (Boston Globe)

- [Barnstable County climate change plan wins assembly and community approval](#) (Cape Cod Times)
- [A Daily Ray of Hope](#). The Sierra Club has been offering a “Daily Ray of Hope” email for years, and we could all use a bit of that right now. Subscribers get a beautiful picture from the natural world along with some words of wisdom every morning. [Sign up today and bring some joy to your inbox](#).

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Corrin Moss contributed to this newsletter.



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