



As people across the country protest in defense of Black lives, the Sierra Club recognizes the need to dismantle systemic racism in the United States and within our own organization. We must reckon with how white supremacy -- both past and present -- has shaped our institutions and do the critical anti-racism work necessary to repair the harm done. The environmental movement does not exist in a vacuum, and it is our responsibility to use our power to help abolish systemic racism, which is destroying lives, communities, and the planet.

August 2020

CLIMATE LEADERSHIP NEWSLETTER

NOTES FROM MASSACHUSETTS CITIES AND TOWNS

Dear Friend,

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 [Veena Dharmaraj](mailto:Veena.Dharmaraj@sierraclub.org).

Clean Energy and Climate

SMART emergency regulations finalized



The Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (DOER) has announced the final revisions to new regulations for the [Solar Massachusetts Renewable Target \(SMART\)](#) incentive program. The updated regulations can be found [here](#). New emergency regulations filed in April would have disqualified solar power installations on land designated as priority habitat, core habitat or critical natural landscape.

The [updated version](#) maintains prohibitions on projects on core habitat and priority habitat land, but has lifted the ban on projects on land designated as critical natural landscape so long as the project qualifies under the first 1,600 MW of the program's capacity. The final revisions ensure that projects that are further along in terms of their permitting and development can proceed as planned. The updated SMART regulations also expand the criteria for projects in low-income areas, establishes a set-aside equal to 5 percent of the incentives to provide a more stable incentive rate for those projects, and encourages the adoption of energy storage technology. The updated regulation doubles the program's total capacity to 3,200 megawatts.

Attorney General rejects Brookline fossil fuel ban



Attorney General Maura Healy has rejected [Brookline's bylaw](#) banning fossil fuel infrastructure in new and substantially renovated buildings. If passed the bylaw would have required homeowners and developers to install electric heat, hot water, and appliances.

The bylaw was rejected on the grounds that it conflicts with state building and gas codes, which preempt local regulations. It would have also conflicted with Chapter 164's policy that Massachusetts residents must have uniform access to utilities. If more towns adopted similar regulations, it would leave fewer customers to cover the costs that utilities pass on to ratepayers.

Columbia Gas to pay \$56 million settlement

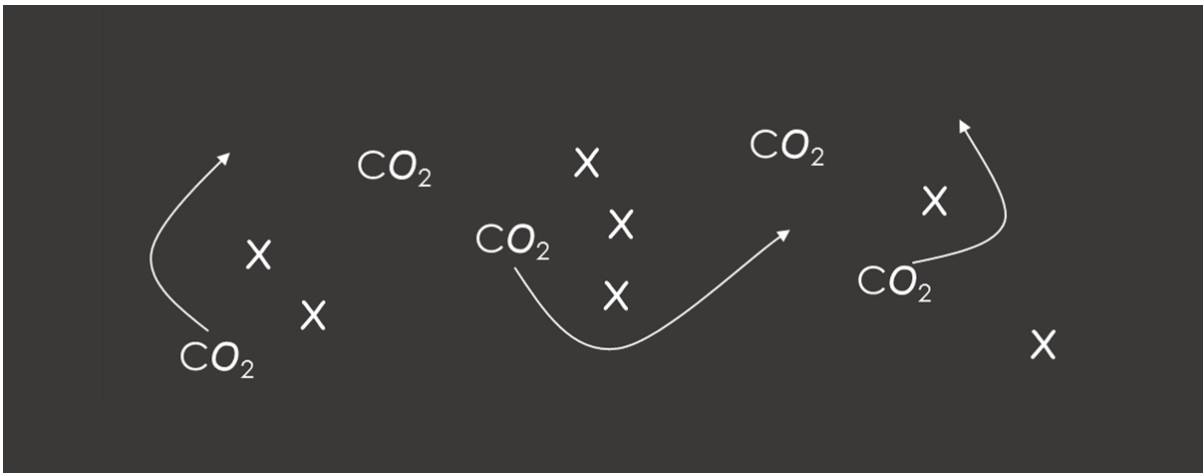


Earlier this month, Columbia Gas, the utility responsible for the 2018 gas explosions in the Merrimack Valley, agreed to pay the state \$56 million in settlement. Attorney General Maura Healey arranged the deal, along with the Department of Energy

Resources, and will oversee management of the funds paid. Approximately \$15 million of the payment will help eliminate gas utility debt for 26,000 low-income Columbia Gas customers. The remaining \$41 million will go into a Merrimack Valley Renewal Fund for clean energy programs and grants for homeowners, tenants, businesses, and municipalities in Lawrence, Andover and North Andover.

As part of the settlement, Columbia Gas will be barred from doing business in Massachusetts as of November 1st, and its assets will be acquired by Eversource, a deal that was reached earlier this year and is expected to be completed in the fall. In addition to the settlement with the state, Columbia Gas and its parent company, NiSource, must pay a \$53 million in federal fine for violating the Pipeline Safety Act, and a \$143 million settlement stemming from a class-action lawsuit.

Arlington seeks input on net zero plan



The town of Arlington is encouraging residents to [provide input and feedback](#) on ways to reduce carbon emissions community wide, including from buildings, transportation and energy use. Input from the survey will directly inform the Net Zero Plan being developed by Arlington's [Clean Energy Future Committee](#). The plan will establish community-wide greenhouse gas pollution reduction goals and identify measures to reach net zero by 2050 through reducing pollutants, such as carbon dioxide and methane, as much as possible, and then offsetting any remaining pollution through measures like planting trees and purchasing electricity from renewable sources like wind and solar.

Arlington is partnering with the city of Melrose, town of Natick and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council on a joint project to develop greenhouse gas inventories and net zero plans for all three communities. Further details on this joint planning project are available on MAPC's website [here](#).

Cape Cod Regional Policy Plan to include greenhouse gas reduction goal

The Cape Cod Commission voted to develop [amendments to the Cape Cod Regional Policy Plan](#) (RPP) that will integrate a new greenhouse gas emission reduction goal for use in managing and regulating future growth



and development across the 15 communities comprising Barnstable County.

The Commission's vote occurred during a hearing sparked by a citizens' petition signed by more than 300 Cape Cod voters. The petition, which included 11 amendments, was filed on April 1, 2019, after more than a year of grassroots advocacy designed to sharpen the RPP's focus on climate mitigation consistent with the state's Global Warming Solutions Act. Typically amended every five years, the RPP enacted in 2019 is now on schedule for a 2021 update.

Toxics and Pollution

State rescinds ban of reusable bags



The temporary reusable bag ban, put in place on March 25th, has [officially been lifted](#) by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. The ban was originally put in place to slow the transmission of COVID-19. Over 135 cities and towns in Massachusetts

have banned the use of single-use plastic bags over the last four years, an important step in limiting plastic waste in the state.

The Department of Public Health also rescinded limits on grocery store occupancy, an order that was put in place in April, unrelated to the plastic bag ban. Both orders were lifted on July 10th.

Draft 2030 solid waste master plan open for comment



Every 10 years, Massachusetts prepares a new plan called the Solid Waste Master Plan. This plan establishes the framework, goals, future direction, and strategies for solid waste management in Massachusetts over the next decade. MassDEP is seeking broad input on the [draft 2030 solid waste master plan](#) as they work towards finalizing the plan that will guide us from 2020 through 2030. [Click here for a summary presentation.](#)

You can attend one of the three remaining [online public hearings](#) (6:00 - 8:00 p.m., August 20, Sept 1, and Sept 10) scheduled by MassDEP or submit public comment to dep.swmp@mass.gov through September 15, 2020. The re-opened public comment period will focus specifically, but not exclusively, on issues of environmental justice, climate change, and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic as they relate to solid waste management in Massachusetts.

Clean Transportation

MA commits to electrification of medium and heavy duty vehicles



Massachusetts joined 14 other states and the District of Columbia in a joint commitment to advance and accelerate the market for electric medium- and heavy-duty vehicles. The [joint Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\)](#), signed by Massachusetts, California, Connecticut, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, and Washington, D.C., sets a goal of at least 30 percent zero-emission vehicle sales by 2030, and 100 percent by 2050.

Vehicles targeted under this MOU include large pickup trucks and vans, delivery trucks, box trucks, school and transit buses, and long-haul delivery trucks. Trucks and buses account for nearly 25 percent of total transportation sector greenhouse gas emissions nationwide. To provide a framework and help coordinate state efforts to meet these goals, the signatory jurisdictions will work through the existing multi-state [ZEV Task Force](#) facilitated by the Northeast States for Coordinated Air Use Management (NESCAUM) to develop and implement a ZEV action plan for trucks and buses. Read Sierra Club's [press statement here](#).

Bikeshare program expands to five new Boston region communities



Bluebikes, the public bike sharing program, has announced a two-year pilot expansion to the communities of Arlington, Chelsea, Newton, Revere and Watertown. Each community will add six new stations to expand and extend the Bluebikes service area later this summer.

When combined with the stations already located in Boston, Brookline, Cambridge, Everett and Somerville, the program will have 400 docking stations and 4,000 bikes across the Boston region. New customers across the Bluebikes system can take advantage of the [‘first ride free’ program](#) through August.

MBTA falls short in COVID-19 preparedness and risk mitigation



A recent [study conducted by A Better City](#) found that the MBTA lags behind several peer agencies in its preparedness to minimize COVID-19 risks as public activity resumes, falling short in both long-term planning and mandating safe rider practices despite success in cleaning and workforce management. The T was compared to public transit systems in New York City, Chicago, San Francisco, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. on a range of safety protocols, and ranked second to last, only faring better than Washington D.C. While the T scored above average in cleanliness and workforce management, by providing personal protective equipment for staff and requiring rear-door boarding, the T lost points for not requiring enough distance between passengers in stations and on vehicles, according to the authors. The T also lost points for [not restoring full service](#) and for not offering more express routes.

Sierra Club joined LivableStreets Alliance and other allies in sending [this letter to MBTA](#) with recommendations to enhance safety and efficiency of the transit system as the economy reopens. While the focus of the letter is public health, these recommendations will also improve the accessibility, equity, safety, and effectiveness of this vital public transit system. As a result, the T has maintained flexible service scheduling, ramped up its communication efforts around the ride safer campaign and is now providing [real time crowding information](#) on 23 bus routes enabling riders to

make decisions about minimizing risk.

Grants and Webinars

Racial equity municipal action plan



MAPC is offering technical assistance and regional guidance to cities and towns in their region on ways that municipalities can advance [racial equity through the Racial Equity Municipal Action Plan \(REMAP\) program](#). The program is in collaboration with the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) and the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston (FRBB). Selected municipalities (application to be released soon) will receive technical assistance to create racial equity action plans and to take meaningful action to advance racial equity. [Click here to register for a webinar](#) on Thursday, August 6, at 9 a.m. to learn more about the program and the application process.

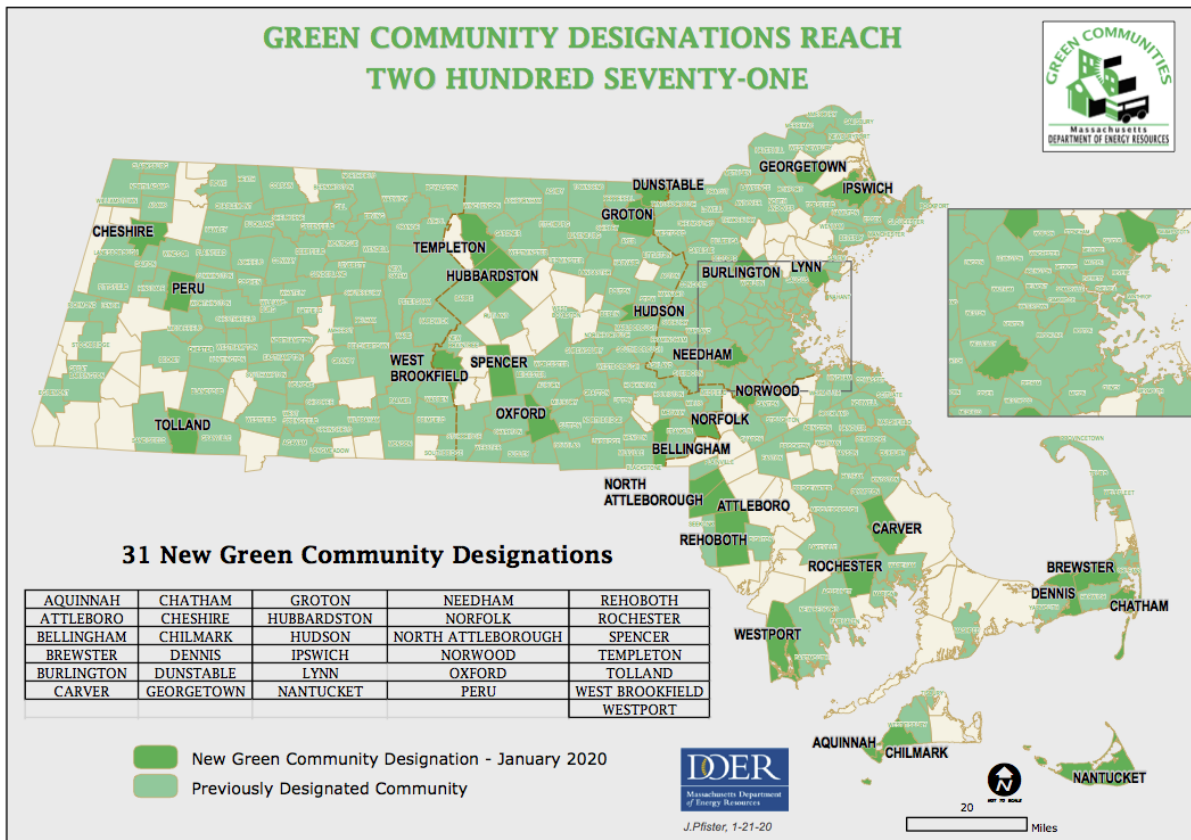
Local governments sought to pilot on-line solar permitting



The National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) has been working with code officials, building officials, and industry project partners to test and pilot the [Solar Automated Permit Processing \(SolarAPP\) Platform](#). The tool provides a no-touch, online, instant permitting solution for residential rooftop solar projects, and the NREL team is seeking municipalities to pilot the tool in their jurisdictions.

Interested communities can join the testing queue before SolarAPP's formal launch in September by completing the [SolarAPP Interest Questionnaire](#). The SolarAPP team will evaluate your situation and contact you about next steps. A [webinar is scheduled for 1 pm, Wednesday, August 5](#) to discuss how SolarAPP has benefited partner communities, demonstrate how SolarAPP can integrate with existing software or stand alone, and explain how communities can adopt SolarAPP.

Municipal energy technical assistance grants available



The Department of Energy Resources (DOER) Green Communities Division is making \$250,000 available for a new round of Municipal Energy Technical Assistance (META) grants (formerly known as Owner’s Agent Technical Assistance) that will open on August 20 at 9:00 am.

These grants are for independent third parties who help municipalities, regional school districts, and water/wastewater districts negotiate, develop and manage energy projects, or who perform studies to support the development of such projects. The 2020 round of META grants is available to all Massachusetts municipalities (regardless of Green Community designation status), regional school districts, and water and wastewater districts. Please refer to the [Program Opportunity Notice](#) for information about eligible projects and other details. Applications will not be accepted before 9:00 am on August 20 and will be reviewed on a first-come, first-served basis.

Resources and Reading List

- [The Difference Between being “not-racist” and anti-racist](#), TED talk by Ibram X. Kendi, author and historian
- [Pulling Down Our Monuments](#), Michael Brune, Executive Director, Sierra Club
- [To Fight Racism, Transit Has a Key Role](#), Darnell Grisby
- [The Diversity Deficit: Municipal Employees in Metro Boston](#), Research by Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)
- [The Building Electrification Equity Project](#), Emerald Cities Collaborative
- [Rhetoric vs. Reality: The Myth of “Renewable Natural Gas” for Building Decarbonization](#), Report by Earthjustice and Sierra Club
- [The Natural Gas Divide](#), Emily Pontecorvo, Grist
- [America’s Cities are Staggeringly Unequal](#), Ronald Brownstein, The Atlantic

- [Streets for Pandemic Response and Recovery](#), National Association of City Transportation Officials
- [Securing Safe Transit, Before and After COVID-19](#), Green for All
- [Why Bus-Loving Rep. Ayanna Pressley Wants Transit to Be Free](#), Curbed
- [America's national parks face existential crisis over race](#), Stephanie Ebbs and Devin Dwyer, ABC News
- [Wiring the Wilderness](#), Christopher Ketcham, Sierra Magazine
- [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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The [COVID-19 crisis](#) has not passed and continues to [disproportionately harm](#) Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people and other communities of color. The pandemic has revealed how the communities hardest hit are often the same communities that suffer from high levels of pollution and poor access to healthcare. The fight for environmental justice cannot be separated from the fight for racial justice.



ABOUT