



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 [Emma Brown](mailto:emma.brown@sierraclub.org).

Clean Energy and Climate

Community Choice Electricity coming to Boston



Boston's new municipal aggregation program, [Community Choice Electricity](#) (CCE),

will officially start on February 1, 2021. The program is “opt-out”, so customers who are already on Eversource Basic Enrollment will automatically be enrolled in CCE unless they choose a different plan. Residents can [enroll/unenroll](#) in the program at any time with no cost or penalty. Municipal aggregation provides many benefits to consumers, including cheaper and more stable electricity rates and more clean power options. The plan will also provide lower rates for many low-income people through the Commonwealth of Massachusetts’ [Solar Massachusetts Renewable Target](#) (SMART) Program.

The City’s environment department has already hosted 10 [informational webinars](#) for consumers where they will explain details of the program, like electricity rates and clean energy use, and answer questions. One more webinar is available on [January 4th at 6pm](#).

Accelerating Climate Resiliency Grants Awarded



Eleven Boston-area municipalities, including Cambridge, Somerville, and Chelsea, have been awarded over \$700,000 in "Accelerating Climate Resiliency" grants from the [Barr Foundation](#) and the [Metropolitan Area Planning Council](#) (MAPC). The program aims to accelerate climate resilience in the region by helping municipalities advance strategies that protect people, places, and communities from the impact of climate change. Grants range from \$50,000 - \$150,000, and all proposals should target at least one of the seven funding priority areas:

- Strategies that advance nature-based solutions for climate resilience
- Municipal climate resiliency regulations, zoning, financing, or infrastructure
- Support climate coalitions or convening
- Initiatives to boost social resiliency - particularly among at-risk or vulnerable populations and/or neighborhoods

- Local food system or community agriculture and resiliency measures
- District-scale resilience pilots
- Public outreach, marketing, and arts & culture

More information about the program and recipients can be found on the [Accelerating Climate Resiliency Grant Program website](#). For questions, contact MAPC Senior Environmental Planner Darci Schofield at dschofield@mapc.org or 617-933-0794.

Vineyard Wind Withdraws From Federal Permitting Process



Vineyard Wind has [withdrawn its construction and operation plans](#) from the federal permitting process, according to Vineyard Wind and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), the federal agency responsible for reviewing the project. Vineyard Wind has been working its way through the federal permitting process for the past three years, and has seen numerous delays.

“While the decision to pause the ongoing process was difficult, taking this step now avoids potentially more federal delays and we are convinced it will provide the shortest overall timeline for delivering the project as planned,” said Vineyard Wind CEO Lars Pedersen in a followup statement. “We intend to restart the BOEM process from where we left off as soon as we complete the final review.”

Mass Save is successful—but not everywhere



Mass Save, the state's energy efficiency program provider, provides programs, incentives, and support for residents and businesses save money and energy. The funding is supported from a charge on customers' energy bills, and the programs and services are managed and delivered by electric and gas sponsors, working with the [Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources](#) (DOER). While Mass Save is generally a successful program, a recent study indicates that some communities are still left behind, particularly communities with high proportions of renters and non-English speakers.

Mass Save offers annual [municipal partnerships](#) to selected municipalities, offering energy efficiency expertise and marketing support to expand participation. Municipalities set goals including energy assessments and residential energy efficiency measures completed in a calendar year. The application window for the 2021 program has closed, but municipalities can look for the 2022 application next year.

Spurred by climate activists, the town of Lancaster is currently participating in the Mass Save municipal partnership program, and since January 1st, has helped more than 65 households electrify their heating with heat pumps. The small town has exceeded many of its outreach goals over the last few months.

Clean Transportation

Malden Adds Dedicated Bus Lane



Photo credit: MBTA

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), and the City of Malden have installed a new shared bus and bike lane in Malden Center, on Florence Street north of Malden Station. The new lane will benefit the MBTA's routes 104, 105, and 99, and is part of a larger project to enhance access to the MBTA Orange Line's Malden Center Station and the surrounding downtown area. To complete the project, the City received a grant of \$211,715 through the [Shared Streets & Spaces Program](#), to facilitate quick-build projects that support safe, sustainable transportation modes in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The MBTA has also been working to improve bus service for the 104 and 105 routes (among others) in Malden and Everett, including building bus lanes on Broadway, Main Street, and Sweetser Circle in Everett. The lanes were built through the [Rapid Response Bus Lanes Program](#).

MBTA Board Approves Service Cuts



Last week, FMC Board voted 3-2 to approve the [modified version of the service cuts](#). Some of the service cuts proposed in November were scaled back but overall the impact on service levels will still be significant. The changes will likely come into effect between January and March. The Board also approved an amendment that will not allow the T to increase bus and subway fares until service levels are restored to 2019 pre-pandemic levels. However, there are still a lot of unknowns. The Board will be discussing the service cuts in March and service levels may be modified (increased or decreased) again. By that time more information on federal funding, roll out of vaccines, and ridership numbers will be available to hopefully have a better outcome. [Read our blog post here for more information.](#)

Toxics and Pollution

Weymouth Compressor Start Date Delayed Again



The Weymouth natural gas compressor was slated to re-start this month, but a federal agency has ordered a safety review before the facility can re-open. The order from the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) follows [two emergency shutdowns in the fall](#). The facility will not operate until January 2021, at the earliest.

The compressor would pump gas from Weymouth to Maine and Canada. However, local activists have fought the project since its inception due to the risks it poses to health and safety. The compressor is located in a “high consequence area” that is densely populated, and is also close to a school, a nursing home, and the busy Fore River Bridge. The activists applaud the safety review and delayed opening. [Massachusetts senators have also spoken out](#)—before the delayed start-up was announced, Ed Markey and Elizabeth Warren asked PHMSA administrators not to allow the compressor to operate until the safety review was complete.

“Forever Chemicals” in Mosquito Spray



The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection has found PFAS, a group of toxic substances, in a pesticide that has been sprayed over significant portions of Massachusetts to help reduce the spread of Eastern equine encephalitis (EEE). PFAS are also known as “forever chemicals” because they never completely degrade, and they have been linked to cancer, low birth weight, and many illnesses. Clarke, the manufacturer of the pesticide, denied that PFAS were present in their product, but some officials acknowledged that they could have originated during manufacturing or packaging.

The DEP investigated whether the PFAS had contaminated Massachusetts water supplies. So far, the chemicals from Anvil 10+10, the pesticide, have not “presented significant risk to water supplies”, perhaps because they are quickly diluted when they enter drinking water reservoirs.

However, there are many reasons that the PFAS from this pesticide could [pose a problem](#). First, the pesticide contains a higher concentration of PFAS than allowed by current safety limits, and it has been sprayed widely over the state for the last 20 years. Additionally, because the chemicals never fully break down, they may build up over time. Massachusetts water supplies are also already struggling with PFAS – in the last year, several water systems had more PFAS than allowed by safety limits. While most of the PFAS likely originated from other sources, such as wastewater treatment plants and consumer goods, widespread pesticide spraying may have also contributed.

Grants and Webinars

Resources and Reading List

- [Salem among communities calling for fossil fuel divestment](#) (Salem News)
- [Taunton Sen. Pacheco prods climate bill negotiators with new bill](#) (South Coast Today)
- [Boston building owners get a one-stop shop for energy efficiency resources](#) (Energy News Network)
- [BTD Backtracks On Safety Improvements For Deadly Section of Mass. Ave.](#) (StreetsBlog)

- [The need for Complete Streets in Springfield](#) (Gateways Podcast)
- [Lexington designated 'SolSmart Bronze' for advancing solar energy growth](#) (Lexington Minuteman)
- [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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