



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.

July 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).

COVID-19 Resources for Municipalities

- Resources from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts include:
 - A [COVID-19 State of Emergency page](#) with updates, emergency orders, and guidance on phase II reopening.
 - [COVID-19 Response Reporting](#) with daily and cumulative data on Massachusetts COVID-19 cases and testing, and weekly data on confirmed cases by city/town, and residents subject to quarantine.
 - A list of [COVID-19 Municipal frequently-asked questions](#)
 - Resources for [Maintaining Emotional Health and Well-Being](#)
 - [A number of printable Fact sheets](#) on dealing with COVID-19
- The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) is [constantly updating resources available](#).
 - You can track upcoming MAPC webinars and access the recording of earlier ones through this [COVID-19 Response Webinar Series](#).
- The [Massachusetts COVID-19 Relief Fund](#) supports those across the state most impacted by the COVID-19 health crisis, focusing on essential frontline workers and vulnerable populations including the homeless, immigrant populations, people with disabilities and those facing food insecurity.

Clean Energy and Climate

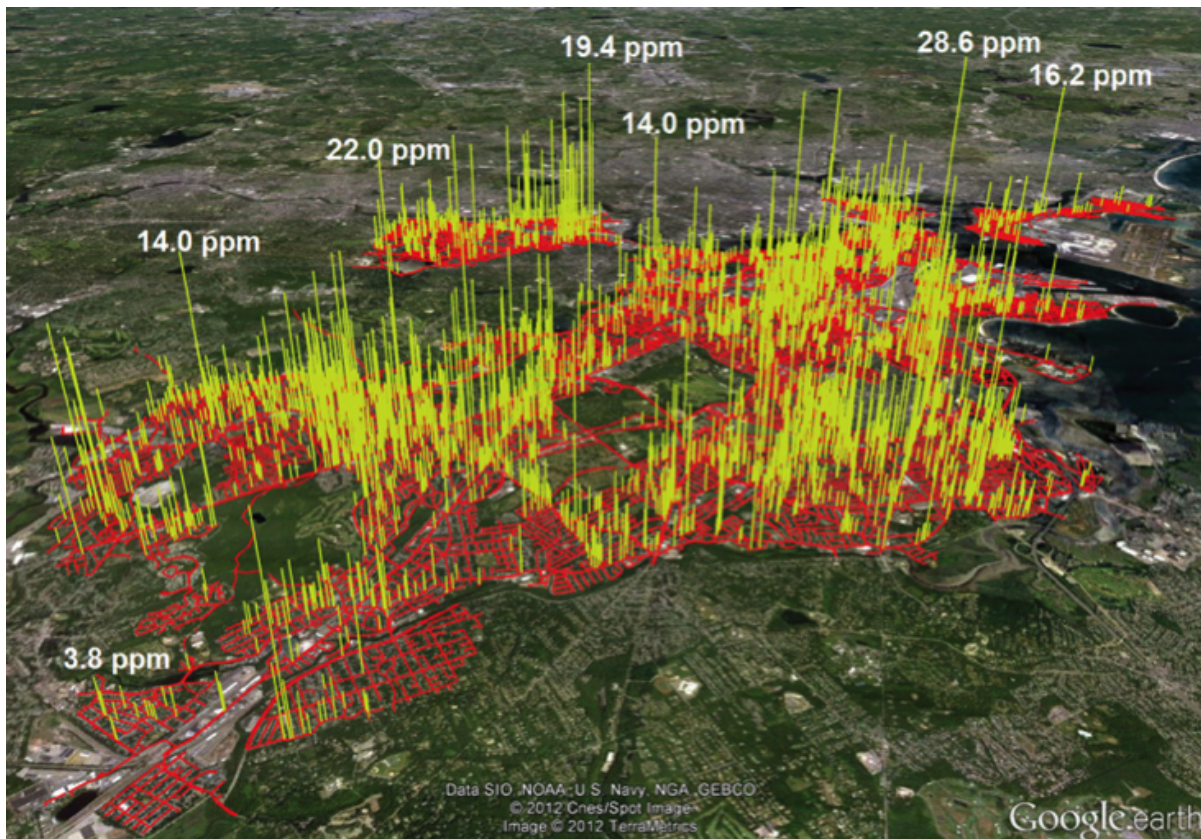
Attorney General calls for transition away from natural gas



Attorney General (AG) Maura Healey has called on the Department of Public Utilities (DPU) to open an investigation into the future of the natural gas industry as Massachusetts transitions away from fossil fuels and toward a clean renewable energy future by 2050. The [petition filed with the DPU](#) recognized the state's findings that the heating sector must make sizable reductions in its use of fossil fuels to achieve Massachusetts's legally binding statewide limit of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

The expected decline in fossil fuel demand as electrification increases will have profound impacts on gas distribution companies and will require them to make significant changes to their planning processes and business model. The AG recommends that the [investigation be conducted in two phases](#)—phase one focused on analysis forecasting future gas demand and the second focused on how to develop and carry out required changes in a way that protects gas consumers.

Natural gas pipelines linked to urban tree deaths

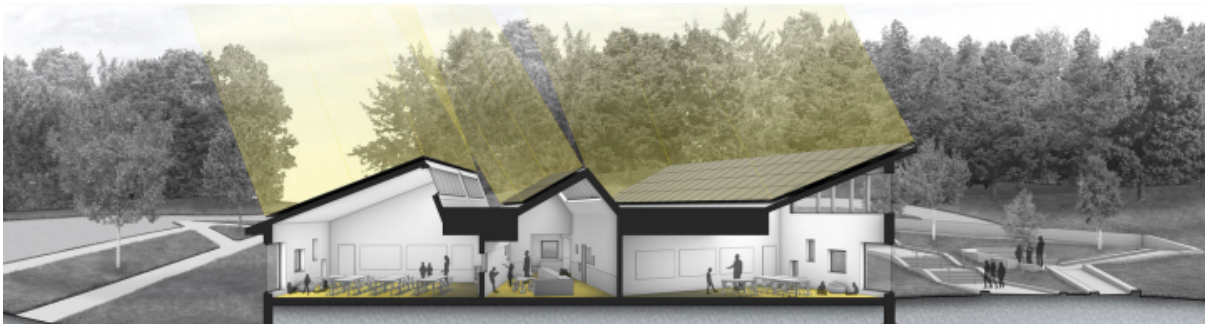


A [study](#) in Chelsea recently linked natural gas leaks from underground pipelines to tree deaths in densely populated urban areas. According to the authors, dead or dying trees were 30 times more likely to have been exposed to methane—a greenhouse gas estimated to be over 80 times more potent than carbon dioxide—in the soil surrounding their roots than healthy trees. The study measured soil concentrations of methane and oxygen around the trunks of 84 dead or dying trees and 97 healthy trees. Studying the health of trees in urban areas can indicate [gas leaks underground](#), as aging natural gas pipelines are often buried beneath streets.

In Chelsea, the effects of gas leaks amplify the city’s vulnerability — Chelsea’s proximity to Boston Logan Airport exposes residents to higher rates of air pollution, and its lack of trees and vegetation create a heat island, exposing residents to hotter temperatures. Poor air quality is linked to greater health issues, and Chelsea has the [highest rate of COVID-19 cases in the state](#), and is among the highest rates in the country.

Now, you can check locations of new and unrepaired leaks in your community by using this new [2019 gas leak map](#) released by Gas Leaks Allies and HEET. The maps show repeated leak patterns and leaks near schools, hospitals, and other areas of special concern.

NEEP releases zero energy school toolkit



The Northeast Energy Efficiency Partnership (NEEP) has released a [Zero Energy Schools Toolkit](#) to help communities reach their zero energy goals for their school projects. A zero energy building is one that is so energy efficient, that a renewable energy system on-site can meet the annual energy required for building operation. The toolkit provides best practices, resources, and other guidance for a number of key stakeholders, including school building committees, facility directors, business managers, superintendents, and interested citizens. Earlier this month NEEP held a webinar to share the toolkit and lessons learnt. You can access the webinar recording [here](#), presentation slides [here](#), case study on the [Fales Elementary School, Westborough here](#), and Q & A [here](#).

Old Colony expansion to use Passive House construction



A new apartment community for low-income seniors is being planned at Old Colony, a housing development in South Boston. The 55-unit expansion will use [Passive House](#) construction techniques, including heavily insulated walls, high performance windows, an efficient HVAC split system, and a passive solar array on the roof of the building. Passive House design creates homes that are more resilient to extreme weather events, which scientists predict will become more frequent and extreme each year due to the effects of climate change.

This new development is Phase 3C of the decade-long [Old Colony renovation project](#), which will bring hundreds of new, efficient units to South Boston. The renovation is

also credited with revitalizing the neighborhood, providing community spaces, gathering hubs, and a learning center for residents.

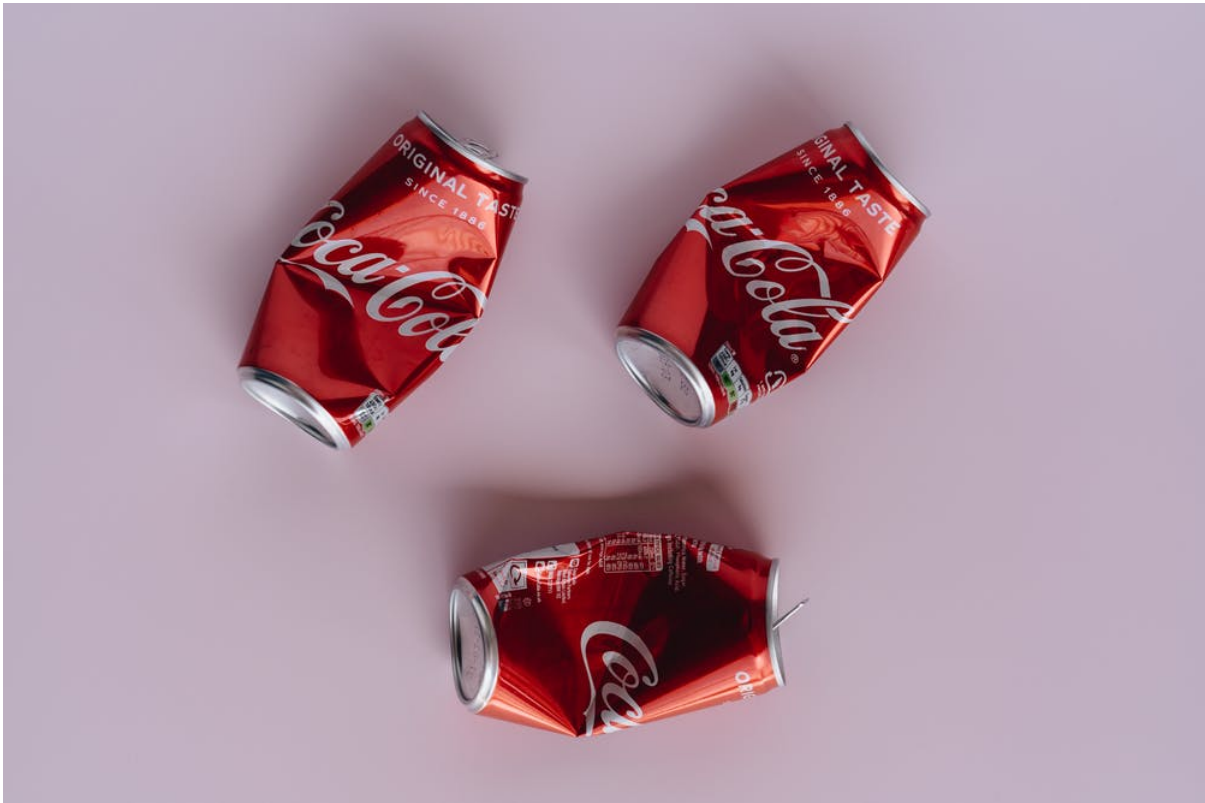
Weymouth Compressor Station air permit vacated



In June, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit [overturned the air permit](#) for the Weymouth natural gas compressor station, currently under construction. The state Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) will need to conduct a new analysis of what would be the best available control technology to limit air pollution. In his decision, Judge William Kayatta said the state did not follow its own procedures when it approved a gas turbine to power the compressor, rather than an electric motor, to cut emissions at the station. This decision likely will not stall construction, though Enbridge will not be able to operate the station without a valid air permit once construction is complete. Residents, local Town officials, and the [Fore River Residents Against the Compressor Station](#) (FRRACS) have been fighting the construction of the compressor for several years. Appeals to the air permit were filed by Weymouth, Quincy, Braintree and Hingham and a group of residents.

Toxics and Pollution

Massachusetts resumes enforcement of bottle redemption law



Massachusetts has resumed the enforcement of beverage container redemption requirements at retail location in a [two-step process](#) effective June 19. The enforcement was temporarily paused in March to manage the threat of coronavirus and to adjust staffing demands. Bottle redemption services will need to adhere to [protocols for the operation of essential services](#) including that customers/employees wear face coverings, post signage to remind customers to practice social distancing, and disinfect machines before proceeding to empty them. Customers visiting retailer redemption locations may be limited to redeeming no more than 120 deposit containers at a time and will need to ensure that all beverage containers are rinsed and free of contaminants.

Clean Transportation

Guidelines and funding for municipalities to adapt streets for pandemic response and recovery



As Massachusetts moves through its four phase reopening plan, municipalities across the state are making changes to their streets and other public spaces in order to ensure public health and economic vitality. [A coalition of 19 organizations have developed a set of guidelines](#) to help inform local plans for adapting street space in support of public health, safe mobility, and economic vitality.

Municipalities are encouraged to apply for funding from two recently announced programs from [MassDOT](#) and the [Solomon Foundation](#) that are providing funding to municipalities to quickly adapt the use of sidewalks, curbs, parking and other elements of streets for COVID-19 response and recovery. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) is organizing a webinar on June 30 at 2 p.m. on how to navigate the MassDOT grant program. [Click here to register](#). Please share this with relevant staff and departments in your municipality. For additional resources check the [NACTO Streets for Pandemic Response and Recovery](#), [Smart Growth America: Complete Streets + COVID-19](#), and a recording of MAPC' recent webinar, '[Sharing Our Streets: Creating More Space for Safe Walking, Biking, and Outdoor Retail](#)'.

State electric vehicle rebate program expanded to include commercial and non-profit fleets



At the recent [ZEV Commission meeting](#), Massachusetts announced the expansion of the electric vehicle rebate program, [Massachusetts Offers Rebates for Electric Vehicles \(MOR-EV\)](#) to include commercial and nonprofit fleets. Company-owned vehicles, companies with vans, rental car companies, and companies that provide vehicles to employees instead of paying mileage, will be eligible to receive rebates through MOR-EV. Eligible vehicles must meet the same criteria as the current MOR-EV program which provides battery electric vehicles (BEVs) and fuel cell electric vehicles (FCEVs) up to a \$50,000 final purchase price with a \$2,500 rebate. Additionally, plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEVs) with an all-electric range of 25 miles or greater and with a final purchase price up to \$50,000 are eligible for a \$1,500 rebate. Municipal and state entities are eligible for the [MassEVIP Fleet incentives](#) to acquire electric vehicles and install charging stations for their fleets.

Sierra Club in partnership with 17 organizations has submitted [this letter calling on the Baker Administration to commit to bigger, bolder, and faster transportation electrification](#) centering those most impacted by pollution. Learn more about [electrification programs the administration is considering](#) and click here to see a [recording of the ZEV Commission meeting](#).

Commuter rail fares from Lynn lowered to subway rates



The MBTA is extending until August 31 its pilot program offering commuters from Lynn subway rates to take the commuter rail. This temporary zone change will help reduce crowding and promote social distancing on nearby bus routes and the Blue line as the Commonwealth reopens. It will also allow MBTA to collect ridership data related to the effects of temporary fare changes on relieving crowding.

The calls for reduced fares gained momentum last year when the MBTA board committed to electrifying the commuter rail system and running trains with 15 minute headways between key stations. The [board called for electric trains](#) to be first implemented on a stretch of the Newbury/Rockport line through Lynn, Chelsea and Revere, the Fairmount line and the Providence Line. Advocates hope that a boost in ridership will help make this fare change permanent.

East-West Rail continues to face hurdles

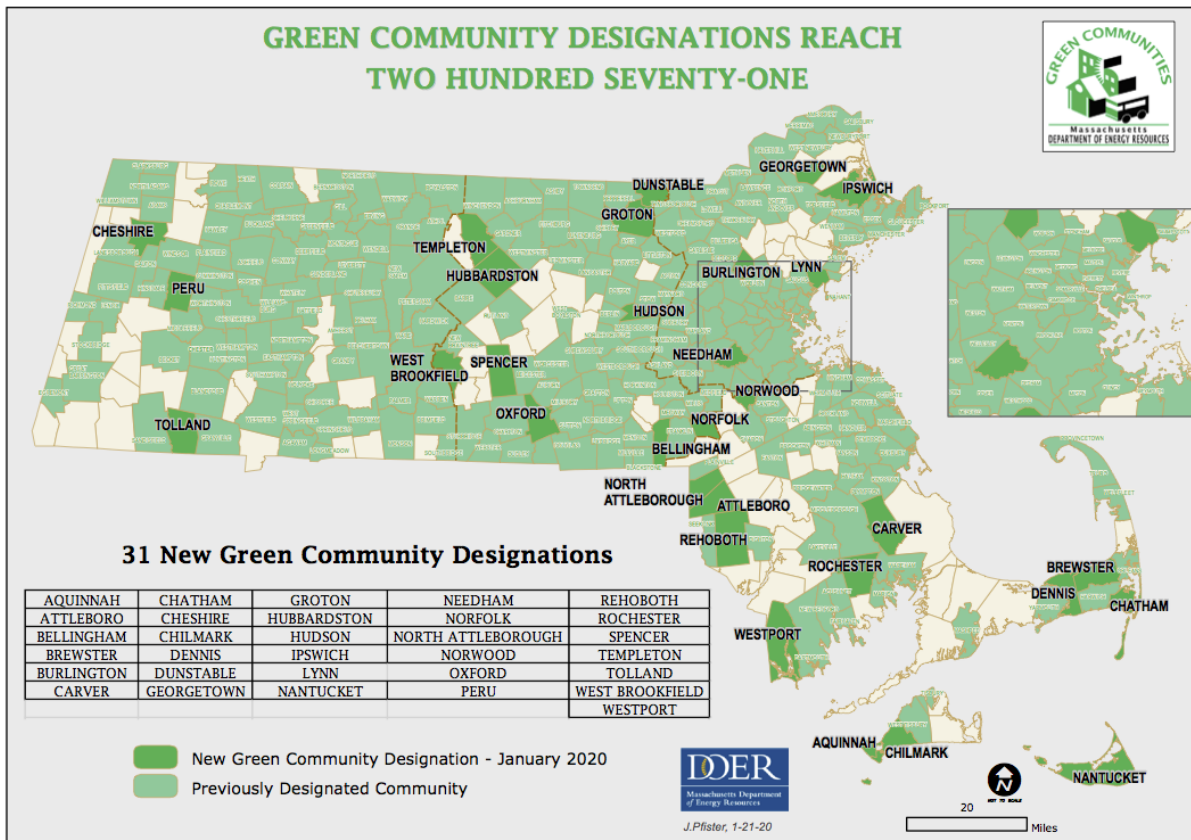


At a recent virtual town hall to discuss the feasibility of an [East-West rail system](#), the Department of Transportation (MassDOT) [presented updates](#) to the six alternatives under consideration. The six possibilities announced in February range from high-speed rail to a combination of rail and buses. Stakeholders have since raised concerns about high costs and low ridership estimates and are in favor of a rail system that uses existing rail tracks, citing the enormous expense of high speed rail, and the slow speeds of bus and rail combinations.

MassDOT has shared that currently, all options are too expensive and fail to meet the federal funding requirement of a cost-benefit ratio of 1 or higher. The [East-West rail advisory committee](#) is expected to narrow the field of options from six to three, which will then be analyzed by MassDOT in much greater depth. A final report will be released in the fall.

Grants

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.

Grants available for municipal vulnerability preparedness



[Planning Grants](#) are now available through the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs [Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness](#) (MVP) grant program. Grants will help Massachusetts cities and towns plan and implement key climate change adaptation actions for resiliency.

This grant will allow communities to define extreme weather and climate change-related hazards, use this MA specific [climate change clearinghouse](#) to understand how their community may be impacted by climate change, create vulnerability assessments, and implement action plans. Applications for Planning Grants are accepted on a rolling basis until Friday, August 7 at 4pm.

Resources and Reading List

- [Anti-Racism Resources](#) - The Massachusetts Sierra Club is committed to being an actively anti-racist organization. Climate justice and racial justice are inextricably linked, which is why we stand in solidarity with the [Movement for Black Lives list of demands](#), and why we will continue to learn from and fight alongside racial justice organizations. There will be no climate justice without racial justice.
- [Racism is Killing Planet](#) by Hop Hopkins, Director of Strategic Partnerships, Sierra Club
- [Safe Streets are Not Safe for Black Lives](#), Destiny Thomas, Bloomberg CityLab
- [We Don't Have to Halt Climate Action to Fight Racism](#), Mary Annaïse Heglar Huffpost
- A new Sierra Club report, "[Millions of Good Jobs: A Plan for Economic Renewal](#)" based on a new economic analysis that quantifies the jobs that would be created by a holistic economic renewal plan to tackle the overlapping crises of public health, unemployment, inequity, and climate change.
- [The declining role of natural gas power in New England](#) - New report by Acadia Center that concludes that under current plans and laws, New England's reliance

on natural gas to fuel power plants could drop from 45% to approximately 10% of its electricity needs in 2030, making any investment in new gas pipelines or plants unnecessary and therefore costly.

- [Resources from MassDEP's Reduce and Reuse Working Group](#)
- [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](#).

Subscribe to the Newsletter

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

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