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MASSACHUSETTS SIERRAN

Explore, Enjoy and Protect the Planet

Chapter Election Issue



MASSACHUSETTS
**SIERRA
CLUB**

Rockport Beach and Lighthouse

Letter from the Chapter Director

Dear Friends,

Amid the uncertainty we have all been experiencing: a society polarized along the lines of equality and science; the inability of our elected leaders to pass meaningful and aggressive climate justice policies; and the knowledge that many amongst us have lost loved ones, or watched them struggle through a bout of the novel coronavirus; the Massachusetts Sierra Club has met the challenges with a steady hand. As we enter into this quiet and reflective time of year, I feel proud of all the work that we have accomplished and excited about the groundwork we have laid in preparation for the year ahead.



Photo: Liz Lender

Facing the stark reality that we live in a society where a person's skin color, address, and wealth play a deciding role in their exposure to pollution, vulnerability to climate impacts, and access to food, healthcare, and other basic needs has brought a profound transformation to our priorities. Our members and supporters have joined us wholeheartedly and generously in our work to preserve a livable environment for future generations. We envision a world where everyone benefits from clean and renewable energy, where energy burdened and historically marginalized communities are made whole through a shift in our economy to efficiency, to equity, and to care.

Over the past year, we have further traveled on our journey to become a more inclusive, diverse, and just organization. We've created a roadmap towards becoming an actively anti-racist organization. We've created digital guides and tools to better bring us together during this physically distanced time. Our small staff works closely with many of you to help you advocate for the world you want to create. Together we are working to build the power to enact the solutions necessary to face the multiple crises of our time.

Through a focus on outreach this past year, we have added dozens of volunteer leaders, and hundreds of new and engaged supporters. The Chapter has a new team that is advocating to reduce plastics and toxics pollution. We have multiple political teams who have built a foundation towards supporting even more environmental champions to win races up and down the ballot. We added a communications team to raise awareness about the intersectional issues of our broad justice movement. There are volunteers representing us in issues ranging from offshore wind, climate finance advocacy, transit advocacy, preserving the tree canopy in Boston, enacting a net zero energy building code for Massachusetts, mosquito and pest control, and the list goes on. We have a team of volunteer researchers who are creating a public database of all municipal environmental and climate efforts across the state. Volunteers are teaching zoom classes on how to make quick and easy plant based meals. Our expanding volunteer teams are working with us to create a Sierra Club that is more representative of all people who live in Massachusetts. This is a Chapter of changemakers, and a community of which I am privileged to be a part.

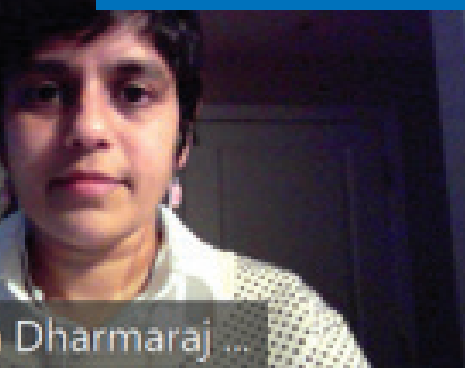
Another huge accomplishment this year has been the strengthening of our relationships with allies and new partners. We are working collectively to craft green new deal legislation for next session and build the movement to get it passed. We work with others to chart a just, equitable and realistic path off of fossil gas in Massachusetts. We have allies who teach us the concerns of their frontline communities, and which solutions to prioritize in our advocacy. What Sierra Club brings to the mix is a powerful, data driven grassroots organization whose policies are created by task forces of volunteer experts and ratified by discerning and engaged volunteer leaders across the country. As Sierra Club, we are allowed to advocate for solutions without depending on industries for funding. This is remarkable, and it is an honor.

Your financial support gives our Chapter the freedom, power and opportunity to fight for a better world, I thank all of you for being part of our team working to protect our environment and to ensure healthy communities for all. I know that in the current economic climate, it is no small statement that you choose to support us with your resources.

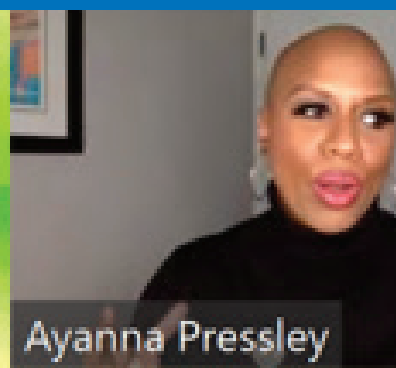
There is much to be done and I couldn't imagine a more exciting group with whom to build the future.

Gratefully yours,

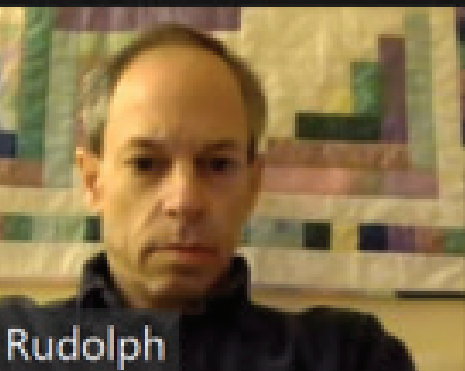
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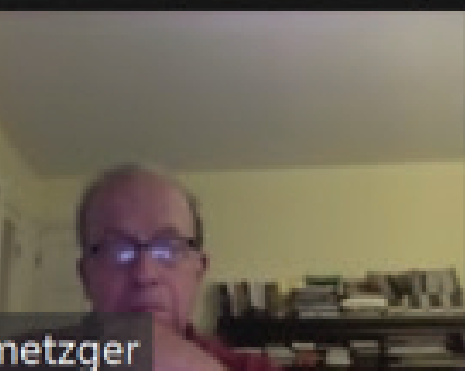
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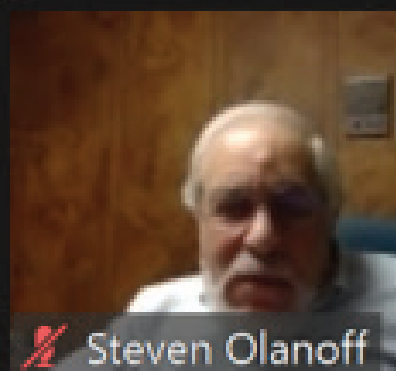
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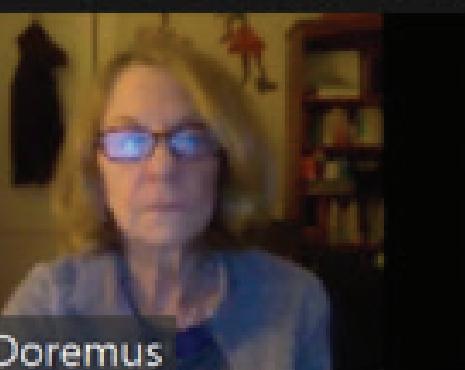
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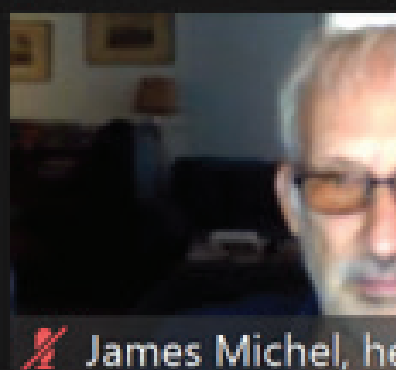
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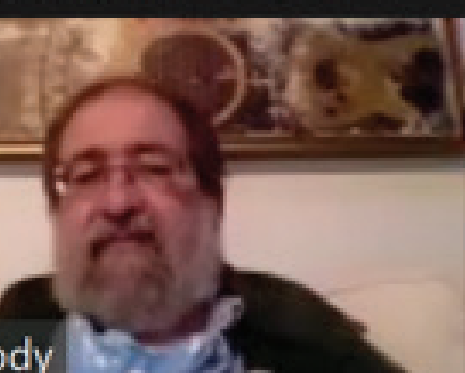
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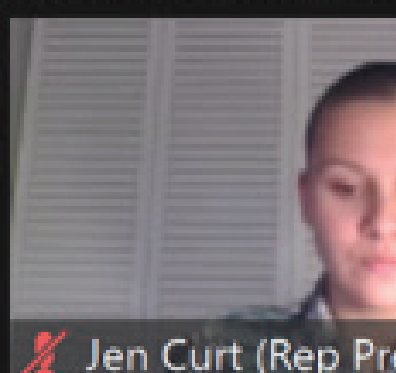
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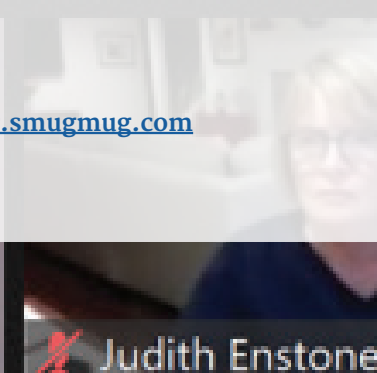
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Lee Meehan



Kannan (he/him) Eas...



Judith Enstone

Never Quit the Fight

By D.R. Tucker

"We pledge allegiance all our lives

*To the magic colors red,
blue and white*

But we all must be given

The liberty that we defend

For with justice not for all men

History will repeat again..."

—Stevie Wonder,
"Black Man," 1976



It was 1992 when then-Senator Al Gore warned of the impending climate threat in his landmark book "Earth in the Balance." It was also 1992 when Los Angeles exploded in anger after four white police officers were acquitted in the savage 1991 beating of Rodney King.

Too many of our fellow citizens ignored the lessons of 1992. Gore's warnings were dismissed as a "hoax," and police brutality and inequality were shoved to the bottom of America's list of key issues.

Now, twenty-eight years later, America's streets and the planet itself are on fire. We no longer have the luxury of ignoring warnings. Those who were not yet born in 1992 are on the streets today, demanding an end to both police violence and pollution's viciousness--and asking why those of us who were alive in 1992 didn't fight harder, didn't push further, didn't demand more. Young people have a right to be angry at those who, years ago, failed to use their voices and their votes to protect future generations.

This moment--this rebellion against police pain and what President Obama once called ["the tyranny of oil"](#) represents the demise of delay. We can't wait twenty-eight more years for polluters to stop poisoning us, for the political establishment to stop ignoring us, and for law enforcement to stop beating and killing us.

The fight against carbon pollution and police cruelty are two separate battles in the same war--a war we must win if we are ever to have peace. Climate change and police brutality are two manifestations of the same malevolent ideology--the malevolent ideology that protects privilege and secures

supremacy, the malevolent ideology that insists only some people deserve civil and human rights, the malevolent ideology that is determined to maintain a form of economic and environmental apartheid for as long as possible.

Racial justice requires climate justice, and vice versa. In light of the multiple tragedies of this year, we reaffirm our commitment to winning the fight for a stable climate and for tangible equality for those who have been denied liberty and justice for far too long. It's not enough merely to assert that black lives matter; one must fight back against the forces that believe black lives, black lungs and black bodies don't matter and never did. Now more than ever, we are determined to defeat those forces once and for all.

In his 1967 speech "Beyond Vietnam," Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. [declared](#), "Now let us rededicate ourselves to the long and bitter, but beautiful, struggle for a new world. This is the calling of the sons of God, and our brothers wait eagerly for our response. Shall we say the odds are too great? Shall we tell them the struggle is too hard? Will our message be that the forces of American life militate against their arrival as full men, and we send our deepest regrets? Or will there be another message--of longing, of hope, of solidarity with their yearnings, of commitment to their cause, whatever the cost? The choice is ours, and though we might prefer it otherwise, we must choose in this crucial moment of human history."

We choose to fight those who wish to poison and abuse our bodies in the name of power...and we'll keep fighting until we win. Future generations are depending upon us to win. It will be a moral atrocity if we let them down.

Community Connections and Advocacy

By Emma Brown,
Massachusetts Sierra Club
Communications Associate

The COVID Pandemic has changed the way we live, play and work. It is a new reality and one that we have adopted out of necessity in which our homes are also our offices, schools, social spaces, and more. The Massachusetts Sierra Club—like so many of our allies—pivoted to virtual advocacy, recognizing that our advocacy work never stops, even in a pandemic.

Our work and communications shifted to Zoom, a video, audio, and a wireless screen-sharing platform that enables connections within the community. It allows interested members and supporters to begin or continue advocating for a healthy environment and social justice. The team at the Massachusetts Chapter set about developing a [Zoom Guide](#) to help new users and longtime volunteers learn this technology in order to gather virtually. We then introduced a weekly virtual event called Advocacy Hour enabling members and supporters a weekly forum to keep up with issues, join new and ongoing campaigns, ask questions about the Chapter's efforts, and get involved. The weekly event is a popular favorite where chapter leaders and staff share campaign updates with volunteers eager to get involved, and current and new volunteers can directly connect with one another. Be sure to check out Advocacy Hour every Wednesday at 5:00 p.m. If you'd like to attend, please register [here](#).

Enjoy these volunteer experiences:

I initially got involved with the Sierra Club to advocate for clean transportation and clean energy, but it quickly broadened my horizons to more issues and opportunities. I became a volunteer right around when Advocacy Hour events were introduced to the Massachusetts Chapter. Being able to interact with Chapter leaders and other volunteers made it so easy to get involved, share ideas, and jump into specific advocacy actions that excited me. Becoming a Sierra Club volunteer has shown me that I can actively bring positive change to my own community and that I'm not alone in wanting to do so! – Tara N.



The Advocacy Hour events are great! I want to believe that I would go through the updates myself every week, but I know better than that. Having a time set aside specifically for that, means I actually do it. What's more, is that it's really helping me to feel connected to the organization. I'm a new volunteer, so didn't get to meet any other members before quarantine, but now I look forward to seeing folks on Wednesdays and learning about what they've been doing. – Katie N.

When I joined the Sierra Club back in 2017 I was thrilled to find out there was an office in Boston. I've always been passionate about protecting nature, and I wanted to fight climate change. I started the Plant-based Planet Team in May 2019, to encourage people to reduce or eliminate animal food consumption.

Because I am now home on furlough due to the pandemic, I'm able to attend Advocacy Hour every week. Besides allowing me to advocate for several issues, it gives me a routine and I meet people who share my concerns about the environment.

What I like most about the Sierra Club is its comprehensive approach to environmental protection and justice. In fact, it's hard to think of an environmental issue that the Sierra Club does not work on. By volunteering, I feel like I'm having an impact on many issues that affect both nature and humanity. As a woman, I feel that the Sierra Club is a safe space that welcomes my input and participation. In addition to being fulfilling, volunteering for the Sierra Club can be fun, because you get to meet interesting people committed to making the world a better place. – Sara S.

Charting a Path off of Heating Gas for Massachusetts: the 2030 Clean Energy and Climate Plan and DPU Docket No. 20-80

The 2008 Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA) calls for the Governor's Administration to regulate all sectors of the economy that contribute to our greenhouse gas emission (ghg) inventory. This is to be done through the setting of interim ghg reduction targets, and developing Clean Energy and Climate Plans (CE-CPs), which are to be updated every five years.

Currently, the Baker Administration is developing its 2030 CECP, the draft of which will be released in late December along with the Massachusetts 2030 ghg reduction target. Activists across the state, including the Sierra Club, are watching this generation-shaping climate policy development closely, and we will be asking you to provide input into the public comments and listening sessions to be held in early 2021.

Until now, the Baker Administration has done little to comprehensively lower emissions from the buildings sector. Indeed, [reporting released by the Baker Administration](#) in November shows building sector emissions rising each year since 2016. This is not surprising as we still have incentives for switching to fossil gas in our MassSave plan, and we have no meaningful regulation to stop construction of new buildings powered by gas; or to tighten the envelopes of the state's existing housing stock.

Upon prompting from Attorney General Maura Healey's office, the Massachusetts Department of Utilities (DPU) recently opened a docket (No. 20-80) requiring the gas utilities to develop a plan to meet the GWSA's emissions reductions targets – including achieving net zero emissions by 2050. This is significant because up until now, the DPU has not been factoring climate impacts into regulatory decisions on energy infrastructure or generation projects.

The inevitable result of gas utilities being required to participate in meeting the state's climate goals is that gas companies will be forced to either transition their business models to provide truly clean non-combustion thermal energy as delivered in heat pumps, and possibly through [geomicrodistricts](#), or to shut down.

The process of shutting down or converting utility business models needs to be planned out to ensure



that the transition takes place in a just and equitable manner. Wealthier communities and residents will make a relative quick transition to cleaner, cheaper and safer renewable heating technologies. However, without prioritization, low income, environmental justice, communities of color, and energy burdened residents who currently bear the brunt of the dirty energy economy will not have the same resources available for the transition. What this means is that as more wealthy customers abandon the gas system, there will be a smaller number of poorer customers left with a large, expensive, failing, and dirty energy system whose operational and repair costs will increasingly grow.

Besides providing resources for these poorer residents to transition to clean energy, our gas utility planning must support impacted workers and communities that currently benefit from the fossil fuel economy. As electrification, weatherization and renewable thermal jobs are created, we must have training in place for those who work in the fossil fuel industry so that they can transition to equally good paying and stable jobs that will be coming with this new energy economy.

Finally, an urgent concern is that both the 2030 CECP and the DPU Docket No. 20-80 processes must not delay the implementation of strong ghg emission reductions policies. For instance, the DPU 20-80 order asks for the plan to be delivered in March of 2022.

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Legislative Recap on Climate and Energy

By Paul Dale

The Massachusetts Legislature Must Act with the Urgency the Climate Crisis Requires

We have a challenge. Our state House of Representatives is undemocratic and is not responding to the reach of action we need to appropriately address the scale and scope of the climate crisis. The 2019–2020 legislative session, like the one before, has been marked by halting, incremental progress at best and inactivity at worst. Climate advocates, including environmental organizations, businesses, faith-based groups, and youth watched as bills at the top of their priority list died in committee with no explanation.

The current legislative cycle began January 1, 2019. As per usual, most climate and energy bills are assigned to The Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy Committee (TUE). Over 130 bills went to the TUE, but as of November 2020, none of them have become law. The next session starts in January 2021, and we need to respond.

The Speaker of the House Robert DeLeo, and by implication his leadership team, is the major barrier to progress. The Speaker appoints committee chairs and has an outsized role in determining which bills move forward. But vested interests have powerful lobbies that work behind the scenes and our entrenched House leaders resist progress. The result is timid or no progress on key issues such as phasing out fossil fuels, lowering transportation emissions, and enacting environmental justice protections. The Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA), passed 12 years ago, is the last major successful climate bill to become law!

There has still been steady pressure on the legislature to do something about the climate crisis and environmental justice. Sierra Club works closely with Mass Power Forward, a grassroots coalition of over 200 groups, as well as community organizations, clean energy businesses, faith groups, neighborhood health and safety advocates, and Massachusetts families, to fight for an equitable pollution-free future. Our focus has been threefold:

1. Enact environmental justice (EJ) protections for historically marginalized and impacted populations
2. Begin a rapid statewide transition to 100% renewable electricity by 2035, and 100% renewable energy for heating and transportation sectors by 2045 with aggressive interim targets on the way to those goals
3. Ensure equitable investments of state revenues in 'green' infrastructure to immediately reduce our reliance on fossil fuels

In January of 2020 the Senate passed a strong climate bill. Six months later, House leadership released their own

version on July 29, just days prior to the typical end of the formal legislative session on July 31. Neither the public nor rank and file legislators received advance notice about the bill's contents. In fact, State Representatives were given less than five hours to read, analyze and file amendments. It appeared that House leadership wanted to push the bill forward without debate or modification. To their great credit, many Representatives jumped and over 100 amendments were filed, including one to enshrine environmental justice protections in law. This amendment passed and was added to the bill, but the vast majority of sponsors were pressured to withdraw their amendments.

Currently there is a House-Senate conference committee tasked with combining the House and Senate bills, but the committee discussions are secret, so there is no transparency. If past behavior is any guide, the final bill will most likely be a reduced, watered down version of the two bills. However, we hope the conference committee will act to retain the best elements of both bills.

The GWSA requires a 25% reduction in emissions by the end of this year. The latest data shows we are unlikely to achieve this, and we have had 12 years to do so. We must see at least a 50% reduction in our greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 to be on track with the minimum obligation that science requires to fend off the worst impacts of climate change. Achieving a 50% reduction by 2030 will be more challenging and harder every day that goes by. Wildfires in California, floods in the Midwest, hurricanes in the East, we can no longer kick the climate crisis solutions down the road. Major legislative action significantly beyond whatever we get this year is needed in 2021, particularly in the transportation and building sectors.

To see action, voters need to contact their state representatives and senators every month. Repetition and follow through is key! Put a reminder in your calendar. Make sure they know that your critical concerns are achieving at least 50% emissions reduction by 2030 and that the benefits, not further harm, accrue first to communities already bearing the brunt of environmental and public health impacts. Make your voice heard! Ask that your representative talk directly with Speaker DeLeo and that your Senator talk directly to Senate President Karen Spilka. Urge your elected officials to write climate or environmental justice articles for the local paper or social media. The Sierra Club can help.

You can also join us in collaborating with new allies in labor, environmental justice, housing and transportation to build a broad based movement for our future.

Share this information. Ask your relatives, friends, and neighbors to call each month; help build a sustained movement, not just a moment.

Voting to Save the Climate



While 2020 was an incredibly chaotic election, the most impactful change was, of course, the election of Vice President Biden. In Massachusetts, Vice President Biden defeated President Trump by a nearly two-to-one margin, winning even a handful of right-leaning towns that voted for the President in 2016. President-elect Biden's commitment to aggressive climate action will be a full one eighty from the current administration's approach. Even if the Biden administration is unable to muster legislative support needed for a broad investment in green infrastructure, the executive branch has ample opportunities to reduce our nation's emissions. The President makes EPA appointments, his administration determines clean energy regulatory standards, he has the power to accelerate the adoption of offshore wind, and rejoin the Paris Climate Accord to name a few examples. In Massachusetts, we will seek to capitalize on this momentum to push for corresponding state and local policies.

Election Results

That being said, despite a chaotic election at the national level, state elections will likely not result in much change in the status quo. In Massachusetts, Democrats will continue to dominate state and federal offices in 2021-2022. After his contentious primary, Senator Markey coasted to an easy victory, Massachusetts re-elected all eight of its incumbent U.S. Representatives in uncontested

or nominally contested races, and the only change in the state's congressional delegation is that Newton City Councilor Jake Auchincloss will replace outgoing Rep. Joe Kennedy in the 4th congressional district.

In 2020, only two incumbents were defeated in Democratic primaries: Jim Welch (Hampden Senate) and David Nangle (17th Middlesex House). In the case of Welch, our endorsed candidate Adam Gomez won. Nangle, who is currently facing federal charges for fraud, lost a three-way race to Vanna Howard. Lisa Arnold, the Sierra Club-endorsed candidate in the race, came in third. However, Sierra Club-endorsed candidates won five open seat races. Erika Uytterhoeven (27th Middlesex House), Steve Owens (29th Middlesex House), Brandy Fluker Oakley (12th Suffolk House), Meg Kilcoyne (12th Worcester House), and Adam Scanlon (14th Bristol House) will all be sworn in to the 192nd Massachusetts General Court in January 2021. Overall, seventeen new State Representatives and State Senators will be joining the Massachusetts legislature. Democrats netted one additional seat in both chambers, bringing their majority in the Massachusetts Senate to an eye-watering 37-3. Despite Republicans' losses, it is notable that they still managed to fend off a number of strong challenges across the state in a year where Democrat top-of-the-ticket candidates dominated statewide.

Continued on page 8

Unfortunately, these electoral changes will likely not change the dynamics of our State House. Not one member of the current State House or Senate leadership teams will be leaving this year, despite multiple (unsuccessful) primary challenges. The House, which has historically favored an incremental approach to climate and environmental policies, will very likely continue to be reticent to pass the far-reaching bills that would ultimately allow the state to embrace the much-needed urgent transition to a clean energy economy.

Challenges

This election happened under unprecedented circumstances that certainly impacted the viability of many of our endorsed candidates. There were five main factors that combined to make the political landscape especially tough for challengers and first-time candidates.

1. Primarily, the COVID-19 pandemic created a number of unexpected issues. For example, candidates like Jordan Meehan, who declared early in 2020, sought to leverage grassroots power by activating a younger, more diverse cohort of voters. However, since campaigns were unable to use typical door-to-door tactics, they had to rely instead on less effective phone banking, literature drops, and mailers.
2. Turnout exceeded all expectations in both the primary and general elections, likely due to both the push for vote-by-mail and the interest in the top-of-the-ticket races. Turnout broke all-time records in both the primary (1.7 million) and the general election (3.5 million). In some districts, this meant massive spikes in turnout, throwing off candidates' predictions and planning. For example, in Meehan's Allston/Brighton State House District, 4,513 voters voted in the 2018 primary. In the 2020 primary, 7,858 people voted — a staggering 74% increase in a single election cycle.
3. Both high turnout and lack of typical in-person campaign tactics served to compound the advantage of incumbency. High turnout means that more "low information voters" cast ballots. These are folks who are less likely to pay attention to local races and lean towards incumbents who generally have better name recognition. In the case of the Allston/Brighton race, one of the polling locations was actually named after the incumbent.
4. Additionally, opposing forces worked hard to protect incumbents in many key primary races. The Massachusetts Majority PAC, an entity affiliated with Charlie Baker, "spent \$154,687 in August [2020] backing

22 candidates – 18 Democrats and four Republicans, mostly for state legislative seats. Nineteen of the PAC's candidates won, including three Democrats and two Republicans who were running for open House seats..." [\(source: Commonwealth Magazine 9/2/20\)](#)

5. Lastly, the decision to make September 1st the state primary day created confusion for renters moving on that day. Many who moved that day were unclear if they were supposed to vote in their old district or their new one. While the expansion of vote-by-mail created new, safe ways for voters to cast ballots, it presented challenges as well. For example, in the primary, there was only one ballot drop box for the entire city of Boston.

Our Program

The Sierra Club's Massachusetts political program has grown tremendously in the last three years. Our Chapter went from making endorsements in a handful of local races in 2017 to, in 2020, making 50+ endorsements in municipal, state, and federal races. The Chapter has added a Political Action Committee (PAC), an Independent Expenditure Action Committee (IEAC), a volunteer-led voter outreach team, and a political internship program to build our electoral power across the state. In so doing, we have expanded our volunteer teams who engage in political work from just a single team that handles endorsements to multiple teams, each with a specific focus: fundraising, digital communications, and outreach to Sierra Club members.

Moving forward into 2021, we are hopeful that we will have some relief from the pandemic, but regardless, our aim will be to continue to invest in local community organizing. By building local power at the grassroots level and supporting small local activist teams, we will continue to win local victories and build momentum for the statewide policies we so desperately need. At the same time, we plan on scaling up the political volunteer teams that currently exist to engage deeply in the upcoming municipal elections in 2021, including a Boston mayoral and city council race, and governor's race in 2022. In each of these races, electing a climate champion could make all the difference.

To get involved in our political work, go to sc.org/massvolunteer and sign up or contact Jacob Stern (jacob.stern@sierraclub.org), Massachusetts Chapter Deputy Director.

Adding Dead Trees to the Long List of Gas Hazards: Gas Leaks Destroy a Precious Community Resource



[Asphyxiated copper beech in Newton MA](#) Photo by Bob Ackley & Nathan Phillips

By Maxine
Gunther-Segal

There are numerous reasons to make an immediate move away from gas as an energy source. The first is that its extraction, delivery, and consumption produce significant amounts of methane, a greenhouse gas that causes an estimated [34 times more climate warming than CO₂](#) over the course of a century. Even worse, [recent research shows](#) that the gas industry produces significantly higher quantities of this potent greenhouse gas than previously understood.

Other serious consequences of using gas as a primary energy source:

So-called “unconventional gas development” like fracking, used to recover shale gas, [causes air and groundwater pollution](#) that poses severe health threats to those living near the sites.

- Fracking contaminates drinking water systems, destroys wildlife habitats and natural resources, impacts public infrastructure and services, and costs taxpayers millions in road repair.
- Natural gas line infrastructure accidents are unacceptably common. The use of natural gas creates the constant threat of destructive and potentially lethal gas explosions, like the Merrimack Valley gas explosions in 2018.

Natural Gas and Trees

In addition to negative effects on the environment, public health and safety, and the economy, extensive research shows that by killing trees, gas leaks also create indirect threats to our collective well-being.

Trees are an essential resource for the communities in which they grow. They [mitigate pollution](#), improving air quality by removing particulates and filtering pollutants like ozone, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, and sulfur oxides. They ameliorate urban heat islands, protecting more vulnerable populations by reducing the risk of dehydration and heat exhaustion. [Planted thoughtfully](#), trees can cool the air anywhere from 2 to 8 degrees Celsius, reduce the need for air conditioning by 30 percent, and decrease winter heating bills by 20 to 50 percent. This lowers energy costs as well as carbon emissions.

Access to urban green space [improves mental and physical health outcomes](#), too, lowering stress levels and consequently improving overall health. [This is an issue of equity](#)—the fact that disadvantaged populations typically live in neighborhoods with reduced access to green space further exacerbates already serious health inequalities.

Understanding the Science

According to Nathan Phillips, a Boston University professor who has conducted [many studies on the subject](#), decades of research reveal the relationship between gas leaks and tree damage. In [one study of urban street trees in Chelsea, MA](#), for instance, the root zone of dying trees was thirty times more likely to contain detectable levels of soil methane than that of healthy trees.

The underlying cause of this tree damage comes down to oxygen—specifically, the lack thereof. Oxygen is required for tree root metabolism, both sustaining existing roots and growing new ones. When “natural” gas infiltrates the soil around the roots, it displaces oxygen. Some soil microbial species will overgrow as they use any available oxygen to metabolize the fuel’s energy-rich methane. This compounds the deoxygenation of the soil, which eventually kills trees.

Gas leaks are shockingly widespread. At the end of 2019, there were 15,728 unrepaired gas leaks in MA. Home Energy Efficiency Team (HEET) [maps all MA gas leaks](#); a glance at these maps reveals the pervasiveness of unrepaired gas leaks across our state.

Who’s Taking Action, and How Can You Help

Since 2018, the Multi-Town Gas Leaks Initiative has endeavored to work with National Grid to address these

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Project Update: Municipal Climate Leadership



While the Massachusetts state government favors an incremental approach to dealing with the climate crisis and the Trump administration was literally moving in reverse, Massachusetts cities and towns are leading the charge on clean energy and climate issues. Since 2017, the Massachusetts Sierra Club's "Climate Leadership Project" has sought to empower municipal leaders' efforts to increase clean energy commitments in their own communities. Well over two hundred municipal leaders have participated in one of our workshops or summits in the past three years.

Sierra Club and Environment Mass worked together with a group of committed mayors, led by Somerville Mayor Joseph Curtatone, Worcester Mayor Joseph Petty, New Bedford Mayor Jon Mitchell, and Easthampton Mayor Nicolle LaChapelle to release a statement of support calling for Massachusetts to begin a rapid transition to 100% renewable energy for all uses, including electricity, heating, and transportation, by 2045, as well as an accelerated timeline to achieve 100% renewable energy for the electric sector.

In January 2020, Sierra Club participated in a Massachusetts Municipal Association Annual (MMA) panel discussion at a gathering of hundreds of municipal leaders from all across the state. Deputy Director Jacob Stern facilitated presentations by Carol Oldham of Massachusetts Climate Action Network, Eugenia Gibbons of Green Energy Consumers Alliance, and Mark Sandeen, a Lexington Select Board member. Topics included embracing community choice energy programs and building electric-powered energy efficient schools.

In February, we hosted one of our last in-person events of the year, Newly Elected Municipal Officials Climate Leadership Workshop. We gathered in our Boston office with approximately a dozen newly elected municipal champions for a climate workshop, plus others who attended via Zoom. The purpose of the workshop was to share information about opportunities to act on clean energy and climate issues, while continuing to build a network of municipal climate leaders across the state.

What's next?

Following the COVID-19 outbreak in March of 2019, we were forced to pause some of our climate leadership work. However, we are very excited to share the future of our municipal advocacy.

Climate Research Team

In September 2020, we launched a climate research team who will work to put together a new training for members of the public and municipal officials. This new volunteer team has been diving deep and learning about a number of key issues. Most notably, helping to identify and share resources for municipal climate action. With the public health and economic Covid-19 crises, we're working with municipal leaders and volunteers to identify and communicate state programs to support climate action. Especially now, green investments can lower emissions while stimulating economic investment and creating jobs. We're excited to leverage the power of this new Climate Research team to build power to influence the Governor's 2020 Clean Energy and Climate Plan by bringing in

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Municipal Climate Leadership continued from page 10

municipal stakeholders to advocate for aggressive clean energy goals and investment.

Municipal Climate Resource Network

This same team is busy at work researching environmental and climate efforts in municipalities across the state. The goal here is to create a public facing database that can help point municipal climate action planners to other municipalities who are working on the same issues. The idea is to create a resource network for environmental and climate action planners across the state.

Want to stay up to date?

Despite the uncertainty of the pandemic, cities and towns across Massachusetts continue to make tremendous strides to reduce their carbon footprint and eliminate the use of polluting single-use plastics. Every month our Chapter puts together an e-newsletter that highlights key clean energy victories and ongoing campaigns across the state.



You can visit <https://www.sierraclub.org/massachusetts/climate-leadership-newsletter> to read older issues and subscribe!

Gas Leaks Destroy continued from page 9

numerous gas leaks and, eventually, end our reliance on natural gas. The Initiative is made up of community advocates and elected and appointed officials, including representatives from HEET, Mothers Out Front, Metropolitan Area Planning Council, and municipalities. One of its working groups focuses specifically on the deleterious effects of gas leaks on trees.

According to Robert Ackley of Gas Safety Inc., just because a tree has begun to deteriorate due to a gas leak, it is not a lost cause. Ackley suggests, “Rather than have gas companies pay for a dead tree, let’s save the living tree. Let’s get them to fix the leaks around the trees. When you have a large, mature tree . . . you can’t get that tree back.”

Persuading gas companies to fix gas leaks can be challenging. Companies may refuse to make repairs if the leak rate does not surpass a certain threshold. But this criterion is fundamentally flawed—Arlington Town Manager Adam Chapdelaine, who works with the Multi-Town Gas Leaks Initiative, explains that existing metrics for grading the severity of gas leaks account for neither the health of trees nor for public health more generally. For this reason, the gas leaks and trees working group is pushing the legislature and the Department of Public Utilities to amend these regulations.

Advocacy remains a crucial means to urge recognition of the science, ensure legislators support fixing leaks, and gain resources for further studies and data collection. If you want to get involved, [join our Advocacy Hour](#), and if you have more questions, please [contact Deb Pasternak](#).

Spotlight on Boston's Community Choice Electricity Program

Photo by Cheryl Empey



In 2019 the City of Boston updated their [Climate Action Plan](#), outlining strategies to accelerate decarbonization in all sectors (buildings, transportation, electricity, and waste) in order to achieve its goal of being carbon-free by 2050.

Focusing on the electric sector, one of the primary strategies identified to transition to a carbon-free and resilient energy supply, is implementation of community choice electricity. Community Choice Electricity (CCE), also known as municipal aggregation, is a way for cities and towns to purchase electricity on behalf of their residents. The program will allow the City to leverage its purchasing power to provide more renewable energy than the state requires utility companies to buy, and will give residents a trusted option to power their homes and businesses.

[Research on CCE programs](#) across the state of Massachusetts has proven it to be the single most effective way for municipalities to aggregate their electricity buying to stabilize rates and increase access to renewable energy for residents of all incomes. It also increases demand for renewable energy in the local economy, opening up opportunities for job creation in the clean energy sector.

After a multi-year process beginning with authorization by the Boston City Council in 2017, the City of Boston's Community Choice Electricity plan was finally approved by the state of Massachusetts' Department of Public Utilities this summer, enabling the City to begin implementation. This is a critical victory

for climate in the City of Boston, and one to be shared amongst many advocates, stakeholders, and members of the public who have participated in the process, with much credit to our partners at Boston Climate Action Network and the Green Justice Coalition who organized a strong campaign to achieve this huge win.

As a member of the City's CCE working group, the Massachusetts Chapter helped design the guiding principles for the program which include: reducing carbon emissions, prioritizing new and local renewable energy projects, providing affordable and stable electric rates, delivering benefits and economic opportunities to environmental justice communities, and strengthening community protection around electricity supply.

Prioritization for renewable energy acquired through the aggregation program will be given to projects sourced in Boston first, then Massachusetts, if outside of Massachusetts, within New England, or where additivity can be demonstrated elsewhere.

With a goal of launching the program early in 2021, all residents of the City of Boston on basic service will automatically be opted in the program. There will also be an option to opt up to 100% clean electricity.

We are continuing to work with the City and advise them in the implementation process. If you're interested in getting involved in this campaign, contact our Boston community organizer Michele at michele.brooks@sierraclub.org

What's Happening on Cape Cod!

Sierra Club Cape Cod Group - 2020 summary report

By Keith Lewiston,
Executive Committee Chair, Cape Cod Group

The Sierra Club's Cape Cod Group (CCG) is dedicated to applying the organization's mission "explore, enjoy, and protect the planet" locally. Our focus is moving the Cape toward 100% clean energy, protecting our local waters, land, and wildlife through community education about contaminants of emerging concern, like PFAS, and promoting zero waste best practices, such as local plastics bans and pay-as-you-throw measures.



About the Executive Committee

- ExCom has five elected members: Chair Keith Lewison (Sandwich) and Vice-Chair Chris Powicki (Brewster), both up for reelection this fall. Three new members were elected in 2020: Madhavi Venkatesan, PhD (Brewster), Morgan Peck (Chatham), and Sam Bechtold (Barnstable). Diane LeDuc (Harwich) is our appointed secretary and David Dow, PhD (Falmouth) is treasurer.

Education & Advocacy Efforts

- The CCG continues to participate in the Sources, Transport, Exposure & Effects of PFASs or STEEP program led by the University of Rhode Island, the Silent Spring Institute, and Harvard's School of Public Health) as a community partner examining PFAS (or poly- and perfluoroalkyl substances: large, complex and expanding group of manufactured chemicals that are widely used to make various types of everyday

products, e.g. cookware, clothes, carpets) in Cape drinking water. More information: [STEPP website](#).

- The 350/Sierra CCG campaign to convince the Cape Cod Commission (CCC) to amend the Cape Cod Regional Policy Plan (RRP) to focus on climate mitigation reached preliminary success this summer. The group's involvement will continue to ensure the CCC fulfills its pledge to amend the RRP by January 2021. See local media coverage: [CAI radio's website](#).
- The Group continues to support efforts to pass Municipal and Commercial Single Use Bottle Bans at fall town meetings across the Cape. ExCom member Madhavi Venkatesan, PhD has led the effort. The campaign has led the majority of the Cape's fifteen towns to enact municipal single use plastic bottle bans, and one has already adopted the commercial single use bottle ban. For information: [Sustainable Practices website](#).
- The Cape Sierra Club continues to foster youth activism and is collaborating with Mass Audubon to hold our third youth climate action summit this school year. Summit One created the opportunity for youth to hold a town hall style meeting with regional decision makers on climate change. Last year's summit successfully incorporated the arts, student-led presentations, and a guest appearance by U.S. Congressman William Keating all motivating youth to get more engaged in the struggle for climate justice. Local media coverage of the 2019 youth summit can be found on [CAI radio's website](#) and the [Cape Cod Time's website](#).



Plastics are Hazardous Waste: Rethinking Recycling

An interview with Clint Richmond

By Celia Doremus

Clint Richmond serves on the Massachusetts Sierra Club Executive Committee and leads the chapter's work on Plastics, Toxics and Solid Waste. He is an appointed member of the Solid Waste Committee in Brookline and is leading the chapter's new Toxics and Plastics Reductions team. Clint recently discussed the reality of plastic recycling and the extreme toxicity of plastics to our health and the environment. He says we must rethink and readjust our relationship with plastics and plastic removal.

We asked Clint to talk about the history, the science, and what can be done to solve this massive problem.

Q. So what's the problem with plastics?

A. Plastics are petrochemical solids. They rely on the extremely damaging and toxic processes of fracking and drilling.

Q. How are plastics different from other materials?

A. Plastics are synthetic so nature cannot absorb them. Plastics don't biodegrade so they become permanent litter or landfill. In addition, microplastics from microbeads, releases of pellets from manufacturing (called "nurdles"), mechanical wear from product usage (think tires or clothes) and litter will always be an insoluble contaminant throughout our natural environment.

Q. What are the human health problems with plastics?

A. Plastics should be classified and handled as hazardous waste! Plastics and their additives can be extremely dangerous chemicals. The most complex and toxic resins that we see in packaging are **polystyrene and polyvinyl chloride (PVC)**. Plastic manufacturing is very risky to people especially industrial workers and the **surrounding communities**, which is an environmental justice issue.

Q. What is the trend with plastics?

A. Fossil fuel consumption is declining and needs to decline to meet climate goals. Unfortunately, the federal government has subsidized oil exploration and consumption for decades. The Trump Administration has worked to expand it, even **using COVID relief dollars as bailout aid**. These subsidies help keep the price of fossil fuels low, which keeps the price of virgin plastic low. The low materials cost makes plastic more competitive than alternative materials. At the same time, the industry is investing in plastics and other **petrochemicals to help grow fossil-fuel markets** so the prospect for **eliminating plastic is not looking good**.



Q. So the plastic problem continues to grow. Is recycling the solution?

A. Recycling started in the 1970s when we separated glass by color, aluminum cans and newspapers. Then plastic came along and became a significant part of the waste stream. So people said let's recycle it even though there was no system or market for doing so. Ultimately this has not worked, giving the false idea that we had solved a problem that had already gotten out of control.

Today, more and more plastics are being produced and only a small percentage of certain types are being recycled. You'll see figures like 5-10% of plastics are being recycled, which is much lower than for natural materials such as paper which averages 66%.

Recycling plastics is futile. There are too many types of plastic and too many products to separate. Plastic is very light, so it takes a large number of items to make a bale. Currently, food and beverage packaging is the only form of plastic that consumers can recycle. There are a lot more types of plastics than the numbers 1-6 that we see in food packaging. When plastics are combined with other types of plastics or other materials and made into products such as pens, disposable diapers, electronic devices, shoes or automobiles, etc. they become virtually impossible to disassemble or separate. Other products are too small and flimsy to recycle such as toys (e.g., Silly String or Legos), band aids, bottle tops, and single-use utensils to name a few.

Many materials, like Styrofoam, even if separated, cannot be recycled and eventually will contaminate the soil and water or be ingested by animals. We have a gigantic problem and we cannot recycle our way out of it for reasons that include the constant increase in plastic production; consumer preference for plastic goods; [the plastic industry lobby](#); and the limited recycling infrastructure.

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Rethinking Recycling continued from page 14

Q. How does plastic relate to the climate crisis?

We need to recognize the upstream impacts of plastic production. Namely:

- Plastics are petrochemicals and rely on the production of natural gas and oil.
- Natural gas leaks during extraction and plastic manufacturing.
- Some chemicals used in plastic production are potent greenhouse gases.
- Demand for plastic is extending the need for oil and gas wells.

Q. There has got to be a shift in how we think about plastics and recycling right? It is not about separating stuff, putting it on the street, and having it hauled away?

A. The last thing we want to do is worry about the plastic we have accumulated. We need to find solutions at the federal, state, municipal, and finally, personal level, in that priority. When you think of the 3 R's of recycling, recycling is the last resort after reducing and reusing. So therefore, personal responsibility is the least effective and lowest priority for making change.

On the state and local level, lawmakers will need to sponsor a host of bans to stop usage and therefore eliminate some of the production. Bills that ban plastic bags, polystyrene, straws, balloons, beverage bottles have been passed in 140 municipalities across the state. But even then, when you think about the wide array of plastics being used and disposed of, bans serve mostly to raise awareness of the problems.

Q. What can we as individuals do with our plastic reduction efforts?

A. We need to change our orientation when it comes to plastic. We need to admit and accept that plastic is a bad material as it is currently constituted. Think of plastic as hazardous waste, which is what it is -- composed of millions of different forms of toxic synthetic materials you cannot destroy. We need to say "Stop recycling plastic".

Changing the consumer thought process will be slow. People think plastic recycling is the acceptable answer to single-use. It is not. We have been duped into thinking that recycling this toxic material will make the world a better place.



Q. Anything at the federal level?

A. At the federal level the **Break Free from Plastic Pollution Act** of 2020 (T. Udall and Kit Clark) makes product (e.g., packaging, paper, single-use, beverage containers, or food service) producers fiscally responsible 'for collecting, managing, and recycling or composting the products after consumer use'. The very fact that this bill is being put forth is great -- an indicator of the growing awareness of this plastic debacle.

Q. If you were king, Clint, what would you do about this problem with plastics?

A. First, we need to get rid of plastic recycling and not waste our time trying to figure out how to recycle all the different forms of plastics. Plastic recycling has been a failure that costs towns and cities a huge amount of money.

Second, use more natural materials: glass, metal, paper. We can push back on consumer product companies and retailers. Ask them for sustainable products. Packaging-free stores are an interesting idea, but I do not know if they will catch on enough.

Third, let's initiate more and more bans which will help raise awareness and create human behavioral change. Work with lawmakers and regulators to institute plastic bans and fees.

Fourth, much like the climate crisis, which requires a fair price for carbon, we need a price on plastics. Let's develop policies, like extended producer responsibility that will encourage using more natural products, accountability for getting rid of toxins, improved packaging design, government partnerships and more.

Finally, if we really followed the precautionary principle like we should, manufacturers would need permission to use plastics and other petrochemicals just like they do for pesticides.

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Rethinking Recycling continued from page 15

Q. Any other thoughts?

A. Plastic is so ubiquitous. It is everywhere, from the huge, like a building, right down to the binkies our babies use. So, we must be patient but dogged in our efforts.

Q. How do we put this into the context of the larger solid waste challenge?

The good news is that as people we are becoming more and more aware that plastics are an intractable problem, and

that industry does not have a solution nor is it seriously looking for one. There is no corporate responsibility. Manufacturers and retailers have transferred all the cost of getting rid of plastic to us, the consumers and our local governments.

We must look at the deeper responsibility society has to this challenge. There are [models in Europe](#) and Canada that we can use; the EPA needs to step up. We, as a country have not really done anything, and most people have not yet recognized the truth about the size and toxicity of plastic.

Charting A Path continued from page 5

As the Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change scientists made clear in 2018, we have only until 2030 to roughly halve our current climate emissions. As rising building sector emissions currently constitute about 33% percent of Massachusetts climate emissions, this 2022 deadline actually pushes off the work that should be happening right now. The obvious first steps are to stop building new buildings powered by gas – **(there is plenty of information about high efficiency and electrified buildings now being at cost parity for construction)**, and also to start doing cost benefit analyses for all gas pipeline repair vs. conversion to electrification. These two policies could be put in place to

day and, in addition to immediately starting to lower emissions, would significantly save money in the overall cost of transitioning off of fossil gas over the next thirty years.

Both the DPU's 20–80 docket process and the Baker Administrations 2030 CECP public comment period must be robust with all stakeholders, including impacted community member input, to make sure that the transition off fossil gas takes all of these issues into account. If you want to learn more about these important climate policy developments, join us weekly on Wednesdays at 5 pm for discussion at the [Chapter's Advocacy Hour](#).

With a goal of launching the program early in 2021, all residents of the City of Boston on basic service will automatically be opted in the program. There will also be an option to opt up to 100% clean electricity.

We are continuing to work with the City and advise them in the implementation process. If you're interested in getting involved in this campaign, contact our Boston community organizer Michele at michele.brooks@sierraclub.org

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Flattening the Climate Curve In Central Mass

by Natascha Finnerty



People remember where they were when Kennedy was shot, or on 9/11. I remember where I was in October 2018 when the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) — and 6,000 scientists — reported that the world has 12 years to halve the pumping of greenhouse gases (GHG) into the atmosphere to avoid warming the planet to the point of irreversible damage.

I was in Europe and upon hearing this news I felt panicked and grief stricken at the short 12 year timeline. Earth Day was created 50 years ago and we are still fighting polluters and damage to the environment. 12 years is half the age of my daughter, who is just starting out her adult life. I was convinced that the U.S. would respond to the environmental needs of our planet. Surely, the report would be taken seriously. Instead, it seemed like another one-day news cycle, without any consequence.

The implication of the IPCC report and the U.S. government's lack of response spurred me to educate myself and become an advocate. I read environmental books and attended trainings by experts like the Sierra Club Massachusetts Chapter, 350.org, and the Sunrise Movement. After our training, the Sierra Club Mass. Chapter then instructed trainees to “go out into the world” and spread the message. So I decided to start a regional group in Central Mass., The Nashoba Valley Climate Coalition (NVCC), which was conceived out of a need for coordination between individuals, different levels of government, and businesses to reduce greenhouse emissions.

While the window for early action to prevent the climate crisis has closed, we can seize the opportunity to lessen its impact and prevent further damage by reducing our carbon footprint now. NVCC is taking action to meet the 45% reduction of GHG by 2030, per the IPCC recommendation. Here are some highlights of steps we've taken to get started:

Growing Green Infrastructure

- **Transportation Innovation:** We first tackled reducing GHGs caused by transportation by highlighting new

models of hybrid and electric vehicles at an “Auto Innovation” car show, that we held at a local ice cream shop. EV owners and staff from local auto dealerships educated the public about electric vehicles — while eating ice cream! We also encouraged biking and carpooling by starting a bulletin board for people in town who wanted to carpool to Cambridge, and working with the town to plan where we can add bike lanes and sidewalks. Our next projects include installing three more EV chargers at the high school, and replacing an older gas transport van with a new EV model.

- **Government Partnership:** As one of the earliest [Green Communities](#), Lancaster has a town administrator with the experience and knowledge to accelerate municipal climate initiatives. We were able to help residents reduce GHGs from buildings by applying for a grant with Mass Save® to run a campaign for home energy assessments, weather insulation, heat pumps, and other actions. More than 65 households have electrified their heating with heat pumps since we began the project. Additionally, we will receive grant money from National Grid to help pay for the installation of a solar system at the Community Center and lighting sensors in our schools.
- **Advancing Solar Progress:** We are moving forward with our solar system aggregation campaign. We were mentored by Bolton Local, Bolton's environmental group who's “Solar Sprint” program enabled homeowners to take advantage of Federal rebates for installing solar panels. We were able to quickly secure ten residential solar system installation contracts in the first month.

Coming Together for Change

- **Creating Community:** NVCC committed to hold monthly education programs about the climate crisis, and widen the community of residents engaged in this work. In May 2019, we introduced “Open Town Meeting” training sessions, along with an environmental movie series at the local church and library.
- **Community In Action:** We restarted Lancaster's Energy Committee, which had not met in two years, to help facilitate community climate action. Through the pandemic we've helped keep the momentum of our community action going by attending weekly Sierra Club MA Chapter virtual Advocacy Hour meetings to learn about timely ways to take action from home.

- **Educating Youth:** Thanks to generous donations, NVCC hired two interns this summer to help us improve participation in our Mass Save® energy campaign by contacting landlords and small businesses by mail. The interns investigated interest in food waste issues and created our website, nvclimate.net.

Working to Build an **Interconnected Regional Rail System**

Connecting the dots is literally the key; North-South Rail Link is critical

By Robert Kearns

Faced with the reality of climate change and the vulnerabilities of communities, exacerbated by COVID-19, it is time to create a transportation system for the 21st Century. A well-connected transportation system made up of zero emission buses and an electric rail will slash pollution, eliminate fossil fuel dependence, and make our cities safer.

Our vision of a zero-emission public transportation system needs the support of Governor Baker and the state legislature in order to become a reality. Studies show that air pollution, attributed largely to our transportation system, has caused chronic health conditions in the state, particularly in environmental justice communities. With COVID-19, the same populations are being hit the hardest by the worst public health crisis in a century.

Transportation causes over 43 percent of all emissions in the Commonwealth. This is the largest and the fastest growing source of air pollution in the state.

According to the Union of Concerned Scientists' study on roadway pollutants, Asian American, African American and Latino residents of Massachusetts are exposed to fine particulate matter (Pm 2.5) air pollutants on average 36, 34 and 26 percent more than white residents.

A recent Harvard study shows that residents living in areas with high Pm 2.5 pollutants, attributed to vehicles, are facing disproportionately high coronavirus death rates.

Regional Rail and the North South Rail Link (NSRL) are essential to the success of the region's transportation system in supporting our goals to reduce emissions under the Global Warming Solutions Act. Not only will a connected regional electrified rail system create major efficiencies and increase ridership, it will also help improve air quality.

Currently, the entire MBTA Commuter Rail system runs on diesel fuel. Diesel produces greenhouse gases that warm our planet and toxic particulates that pollute our air. Massachusetts is the only state in the Northeast Corridor lacking electrified commuter rail. The NSRL will require clean electric trains in the tunnel and regional rail would transition lines to superior faster electric multiple unit trains. We can eliminate harmful diesel locomotive emissions, while improving public health and train service.

The NSRL would increase ridership by 300%, according to the MADOT. Transit riders would have access to all rail stations in the system with only one transfer. A regional rail system could increase frequency of electric trains to arrive every 15 minutes, which would



eliminate long waits between trains, add increased travel flexibility and allow for physical distance between passengers.

With more convenient travel options it is no wonder that [studies also show that the NSRL could take over 55,000 auto trips off the road daily](#). The NSRL would make it easier for people to travel in the region without owning a car and driving on congested highways.

At the end of last year, [MBTA Fiscal Management Control Board passed resolutions for regional rail](#) as a part of the [MBTA's "Rail Vision" plan](#). The resolutions included important commitments of electrifying the Providence, Fairmount and Newbury/Rockport Line to Lynn. However, they failed to address the NSRL.

Our vision is for full electrification and connection with the rail link, a complex effort facing many hurdles to completion. The first step is to protect the path of the NSRL from future development on the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway. Underground parking garages or foundation structures – a shortsighted possibility – could be constructed, blocking the rail tunnel from being built. Protecting the right of way needs to be done immediately, before it is too late.

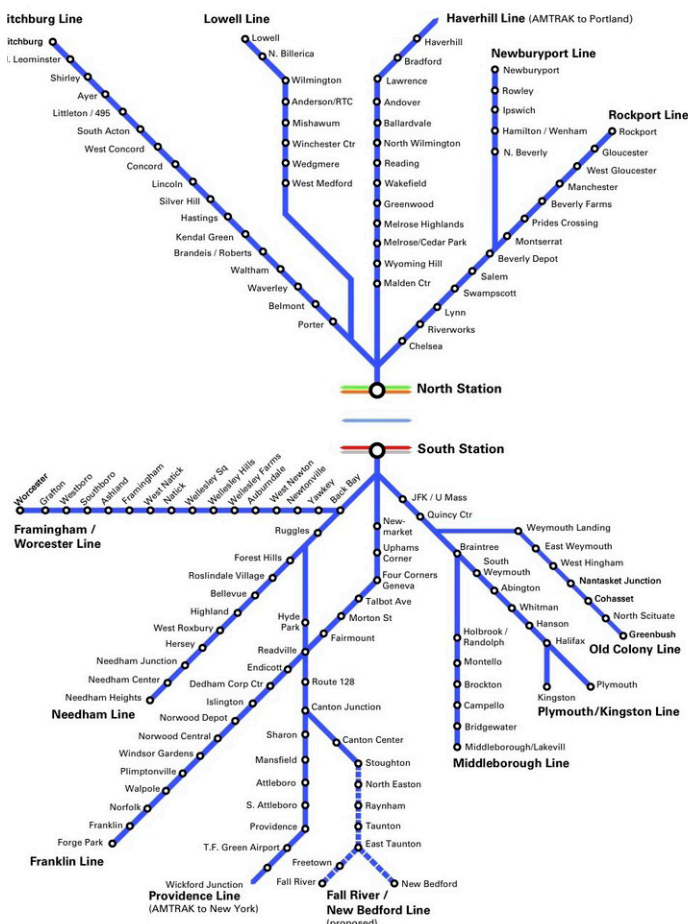


Connecting formerly bisected rail systems is being done in cities everywhere. In Los Angeles -- a city notorious for its lack of public transportation infrastructure -- the regional Connector Project is connecting bisected rail lines underneath downtown LA. In the early 1980s, Philadelphia completed a similar project, and cities including London, Stockholm, Ottawa, Zurich, Barcelona, and Hong Kong are all working towards, or have finished, rail link projects. The world is riding public transportation into the future and Boston needs to follow suit.

Short sighted critics worry about costs and continue to stall the project. A 2017 [cost estimate](#) by the Harvard Kennedy School of Government put the NSRL at a cost of \$3.8 Billion. However, because the NSRL is situated on Amtrak's Northeast Corridor, federal dollars through the Federal Railroad Administration and the U.S. Department of Transportation can be used for the project as part of improvements to this important federal rail corridor. Political will, not money, is the real issue.

Additionally, NSRL and regional rail construction improvements would provide for thousands of good paying union jobs which are essential for a New Deal scale recovery, necessary to revitalize the economy in the wake of the COVID-19 economic collapse.

Now is the time for regional rail in Massachusetts. You can help by joining the Transportation Committee. [Contact John Kyper at jkyper47@gmail.com](#), and stay tuned for more actions.



Climate and Housing Justice: Why We Can't Win One Without the Other

By Michele Brooks

After decades of the environmental movement being narrow-minded, single-issue focused and self-serving, we're beginning to see a shift in environmental organizations like Sierra Club towards being more intersectional. We're making strides by building intentional relationships with advocates in racial and social justice, women's rights, immigrant and indigenous rights, labor rights, housing justice, and more.

This work is not easy and we certainly have a long way to go as we seek to build trust with other movements and become better allies, but we remain committed to doing this work because in order for the transition to a clean energy economy to be just and effective, frontline communities and those who are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and pollution must lead the way. For far too long, access to clean energy has been catered to wealthier white communities, while communities of color and low-income folks continue to bear the brunt of climate pollution and suffer the impacts of our dependence on fossil fuels.

At Sierra Club we believe that the only way we will succeed in our vision for a world that provides clean air, clean water, and the right to a safe and healthy environment as essential human rights – is by coming together across movements and building a strong coalition to make this vision of the future our reality.

In my work as a clean energy organizer focused in the City of Boston, much of my time has been spent working with partners to advocate for equitable policies that will help the City to achieve its goal of being carbon-free by 2050. Our primary focus has been on the buildings sector, which accounts for approximately 70% of the city's greenhouse gas emissions. In doing this work, we have begun to form partnerships with advocates in the affordable housing and housing justice to fight for affordable, green buildings that are net-zero-carbon emissions.

The City of Boston is in the midst of an affordable housing crisis. Low-income, people of color, immigrant and working class communities are being displaced by the onslaught of luxury developments going up across the City because our government continues to prioritize revenue from new development over the needs of its most vulnerable communities. At the same time, a majority of the luxury developments are being constructed use fracked gas, fueling the climate crisis and adding to the City's greenhouse gas emissions.

There is no better example of this than the Suffolk Downs redevelopment in East Boston. Sited on the historic Suffolk Downs race track, this will be the largest private development the City has ever seen. With 10,000 units of housing, it will almost double the size of the neighborhood in East Boston. Yet only 13% of the units are designated to be "affordable" and the developer's definition of affordable is significantly higher than the annual median income of most families in East Boston. In addition to this, there has been no commitment from the developer towards net-zero-carbon emissions. With a projected buildout period of 20 years, this is unacceptable. The City commissioned [Carbon-Free Boston report](#) from 2019 states that in order to reach carbon neutrality by 2050, all new buildings must be net-zero-carbon emissions now.

Furthermore, East Boston is an environmental justice community with some of the dirtiest air in the city, mainly due to transportation and industrial emissions from the airport and major industries in the neighboring City of Chelsea. You can literally taste the diesel in the air. Adding more pollution to this community with gas-guzzling buildings is unacceptable.

The Massachusetts Chapter has joined in solidarity with the [PUEBLO](#) (People United in East Boston for Liberating and Organizing) coalition to demand a better plan for this development that includes 50% affordable housing with a minimum of 20% at 30% AMI (Average Median Income) for the neighborhood, and all phases of construction to be Net-Zero-Carbon emissions.

We don't need more luxury housing in the City of Boston! We need more housing that is truly affordable to the East Boston residents—and residents across Greater Boston—who are being evicted and displaced because of the rising cost of rent, and we need it to be constructed to a net-zero-carbon standard.

At Sierra Club, we believe that housing, clean air, and a healthy community are human rights. We recognize that our issues of housing justice and climate justice are interconnected in the struggle for an equitable and just world. We see that the issues of rising sea levels and rising rents both contribute to displacement in our communities. We believe that protecting our planet starts with protecting our people.

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