Western Massachusetts Town Energy and Climate Action Guide

June 2008

Center for Ecological Technology (CET)

Northampton and Pittsfield, MA

CET

www.cetonline.org

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This guide is based in part on the Vermont Energy & Climate Action Network (VECAN) Town Energy and Climate Action Guide. CET gratefully acknowledges their generosity in allowing us to use their work as a model.

This guide was produced by CET with the generous support of The Jessie B. Cox Charitable Lead Trust. Their support has allowed CET to implement a "Climate Change Circuit Rider" initiative to help the rural communities of western Massachusetts devise goals and cost-effective strategies to reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions.

For information about the Climate Action Circuit Rider initiative, contact:

In the Pioneer Valley: Peggy MacLeod, 413-586-7350 x26 or peggym@cetonline.org

In the Berkshires: Nancy Nylen, 413-458-5688 or nancyn@cetonline.org

This guide is a living document. CET recognizes the growing network of energy and sustainability efforts underway in communities across western Massachusetts. Your comments and suggestions for successful community-based activities not presented in this guide are welcome.

Please assist us by making this guide a useful tool to help inform and advance energy-saving and greenhouse gas emission reduction strategies in western Massachusetts by sending your comments and suggestions to: Tomasin Whitaker at tomasin@cetonline.org

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About CET and the Western Massachusetts Town Energy and Climate Action Guide

Throughout western Massachusetts, communities like yours are taking steps to address climate protection, reduce energy consumption and invest in clean energy. Why? Because they benefit from more stable energy costs, economic and community development, pollution prevention, local improvements in public health and climate change mitigation.

For more than 30 years, the Center for Ecological Technology (CET), a non-profit environmental organization, has assisted communities with practical, affordable solutions to energy and waste management issues. Working with many towns and cities in the Berkshires and in the Pioneer Valley, CET has helped communities establish or enhance energy and climate action committees, cut energy costs, identify sources of incentives and grants, network with other communities, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. CET has received funding from the Jessie B. Cox Charitable Lead Trust and the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative for a Climate Change Circuit Rider Initiative to continue this work.

The purpose of this guide is to provide useful information and ideas on various energy-saving techniques, and suggestions for advancing them in your community. CET's aim is to help your town get started or take steps to become more effective, whether that is setting up an energy/climate action committee or strengthening an existing group. As part of the Climate Change Circuit Rider Initiative, CET will share strategies that other towns have used to estimate greenhouse gas emissions, set goals, and identify actions to reduce municipal energy use. We will help towns explore opportunities for investing in local, renewable energy and provide up-to-date information about funding and technical assistance available to your community.

Helping communities work collaboratively to share resources and successes

It is CET's intent to inspire and encourage communities and concerned citizens to implement successful strategies. To that end, CET invites towns and citizens to share ideas and resources for greater energy efficiency of buildings and operations, greater use of renewable energy sources, and reduced use of fossil fuels.

CET invites your active participation in the process of sharing solutions. CET is in the process of gathering information from towns in western Massachusetts and creating a clearinghouse of information for towns to learn from each other's achievements and challenges, and adapt or replicate successful strategies or programs. Please send your town's green achievements and lessons learned to **peggym@cetonline.org**.

Benefits of Forming
a Town Energy Committee or Climate Action Group

Dwindling oil supplies, high fuel prices, and a warming climate are problems that concern most Massachusetts citizens. Many are organizing to take action now to lower energy consumption, increase energy efficiency, and develop new sources of clean, renewable power.

Scientists predict that, by the end of the century, temperatures in New England will equal those of Virginia or Georgia. This "climate migration" will seriously impact Massachusetts's fall foliage, annual snowfall, and the maple syrup industry.

To date, more than 25 towns in western Massachusetts have formed energy committees or climate action groups. Groups range from the grassroots to municipally-appointed commissions, and are working to find creative solutions that save energy and money, reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and promote renewable energy sources.

Under Massachusetts General Laws (REF: www.mass.gov/legis/laws/mgl/40-8i.htm), towns in Massachusetts can choose to establish an energy resources commission to develop the town's energy resources. This enables towns to establish a fiscally independent commission that can appropriate money from a variety of sources and accept grants and other funding to implement a wide array of energy measures and programs.

Whether groups are officially-appointed or ad hoc/grassroots citizen groups, they can help inform municipal decision-makers on how to advance cost-effective strategies to save energy and reduce waste. By suggesting specific goals and objectives and implementation strategies, groups can foster sustainable development that benefits the community as a whole.

By implementing new initiatives and strengthening policies in communities throughout the state, Massachusetts can join states like Vermont and New Hampshire in setting a course toward a sustainable energy future.

Forming Community Energy Committees and Climate Action Groups

Forming a local energy or climate action committee is an important step and can be achieved in several ways. Groups can be large or small, set ambitious goals or take small steps. Outlined below are suggested steps and resources to help you form a group, plan a strategy and implement measures to help your community move toward a sustainable energy future. The Center for Ecological Technology (CET) is a resource to assist existing or forming committees through the learning curve towards greater effectiveness.

Communities have taken a variety of approaches to advance local energy projects and initiatives. Selected models and approaches, including organizations that can help, are suggested in this guide, and more will be added to CET's website as additional resources and approaches are identified and documented. Committees are encouraged to consider the best structure and approach for their desired project. For example, if your community is interested in conducting a community-wide inventory of greenhouse gas emissions it might want to include a group of municipal officials and volunteers.

Most efforts will include public education, outreach and advocacy. Several state-wide organizations can assist in building local support for policy reform at the local and state levels. Explore the 'Resources' section of this guide for an expanded list of helpful references.

Below are suggested steps to help achieve your project goals and objectives.

Getting Started

1. **Assemble an effective committee**

   The first important step is to identify citizens representing various constituencies in your community who are interested in working on energy and climate change issues. Secure their support and establish a coalition of partners who will lend capacity, diversity, and expertise to your efforts.

   Identify a project champion. Often the most successful projects occur when there is a community champion who helps to see the project through by providing vital outreach and public relations support.

   Identify an individual willing to chair the committee. This job includes calling meetings, drafting agendas, and keeping the process moving. This person could be the same as the project champion or it could be another energetic, committed citizen.

2. Select a committee structure that works for your town

There are numerous ways to approach this process. Choose the best group structure to advance your town's energy or climate action project. The structure of your group may depend on such factors as buy-in from your local government, the municipality's capacity to staff the committee, volunteer capacity, the complexity of the project, or the most strategic way to advance your short- and long-term goals. The three basic structures for committees are:

- Ad hoc citizen energy or climate action committee.

  Convene a group of concerned citizens with varied expertise, willingness to take on action steps, and a passion for the issue. Ad hoc citizen committees are grassroots organizations and are commonly formed when communities wish to accomplish finite tasks, yet they could also have comprehensive goals. Ad hoc committees can include town officials and representatives from business and other sectors.

  Subcommittee of an existing municipal committee, e.g. planning board

  Town policies and bylaws suggesting increased use of renewable sources (i.e., wind, hydro, solar and biomass) should be assessed with other resource values (i.e., wildlife, open space, views and recreation).

  Climate change will continue to have a direct impact on the region's diverse natural resources, and communities can play a role in mitigation efforts.

- Independent municipal commission or task force appointed by and responding to the Select Board or City Council. Towns in Massachusetts can elect to appoint a commission that may appropriate funds for the promotion and development of the town's energy resources. REF: *www.mass.gov/legis/laws/mgl/40-8i.htm*

When considering the best form for your community's energy or climate action committee, weigh the options. For example, an official town-appointed committee may have more legitimacy in the public's eye, more direct access to the Select Board, City Council, and Mayor, and a greater opportunity to obtain funding for initiatives. If the Select Board or City Council is not ready or willing to advance a proposed project initiative, however, it might be more beneficial to form an ad hoc committee. Or, if the planning board needs help exploring ways to advance renewable energy solutions or work towards incentives that promote greener building guidelines, a subcommittee might be the best fit. Ultimately, any committee structure you choose should help plan and implement achievable projects and lead to clear policies, goals, and objectives at the municipal and state levels.

3. Do your research and take stock

Energy and climate action committee members are encouraged to talk with municipal staff, officials, and decision-makers to identify opportunities and/or challenges. Find out who is responsible for decisions, what their standard process is, when they meet, and how you can provide input or get information. For guidance,

energy and climate action committees are encouraged to contact CET and to network with others on how to suggest appropriate actions and project initiatives.

Initial information gathering may uncover opportunities where the community might save energy and reduce their GHG emissions. Some communities choose to conduct a more formal inventory of energy use in the town (i.e., electricity, heating/cooling, waste, and transportation energy usage) through tools offered by organizations such as Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI). Having a baseline of data can be helpful later to track progress in energy savings and GHG emissions reductions.

Your committee can identify and document potential creative, cost-effective, and innovative solutions for your community to consider. Look at the town's official comprehensive planning document. When was it last completed? If it already has an energy chapter, what does it enable? If your group thinks the planning document needs to be more progressive in its vision, find out when the plan is due to be revised and get involved in the process.

Municipalities are not required to develop an energy or climate action plan, but there are many samples around Massachusetts that you could draw upon for their format and implementation ideas.

In assessing your community, document the energy-saving and greenhouse gas reduction actions that may be underway or planned in your community by schools, officials, and town Boards. Find out what municipal projects are being proposed that may affect your community's energy use. For example, whether the community is planning to purchase any equipment, renovate an existing structure, build a new facility, or start a municipal planning or capital improvement project.

An assessment process will help identify opportunities and potential barriers to implementing best practices, draw upon green building standards, and use ENERGY STAR and resource efficient technologies.

Successful projects often fit into a broader municipal initiative or sustainability strategy and complement, not burden, those already underway. Projects that don’t impose undue financial costs on already strapped local governments are often easier to advance, but require creative thinking and broad collaboration that an energy and climate action committee could facilitate.

Energy and climate action committees can play a greater role in providing decision-makers with salient facts and information so that they establish and implement policies that are cleaner, greener, and save money. Offer solutions your municipality might not have considered. Investigate utility programs, grants, and other funding sources for projects and paybacks from savings on investments.

Put forward well-crafted proposals that clearly present actions and results to decision makers. For example, when the Select Board or School Board is considering purchasing equipment or making improvements to facilities and operations, make a

convincing case for energy efficiency measures and renewable energy systems through facts and cost-savings estimates.

4. **Set achievable goals — both short-term and long-term — and stick to them**

   Develop a list of goals and keep it short and to the point. As much as possible, align your priorities with the priorities of the governing body and other community leaders you are trying to influence. Remember that it is helpful to make connections to broader related goals and projects at the regional and state levels such as the Pioneer Valley Clean Energy Plan and the Massachusetts Climate Action Plan. Our Community Resource section contains a section on municipal energy plans and how energy committees can help facilitate implementation.

5. **Develop salient messages and a communications plan to disseminate them**

   The most powerful messages that will help your work gain traction are positive, clear and compelling. Make sure to connect your message with what other community members care about most. You may want to get input from people outside your committee before starting a broad based initiative or campaign to promote buy-in and cooperation across sectors.

   Know and articulate the different issues so that you can appeal to as broad a spectrum of public concerns as possible. People are motivated by and respond to a variety of different concerns such as conserving energy, supporting renewables, slowing climate change, saving money, protecting public health, creating "green" jobs, and reducing our dependence on fossil fuels and foreign oil.

   Once you have drafted your message, develop a clear communications plan that has support from everyone in your committee. Your plan might be multi-layered, and involve a broad group of stakeholders as well as the community. If you have a town meeting form of government, you have to consider their annual schedule and formal approach for getting things passed. Working within the system often results in more legitimacy in the public's eyes, more direct connection with municipal governing bodies, and greater access to financial support from the community and beyond.

6. **Dive in! Implement strategies and encourage action**

   Now that you've formed your committee, taken stock, gathered information, and established your goals, you can begin to implement your projects and strategies. How?

   - Initiate your projects and seek resources and funding as necessary.
   - Identify and secure creative funding opportunities to support the energy and climate action activities you want your community to implement.
   - Recruit new members and broaden your network of partners. Match your recruitment choices with the type of projects you undertake. Reach out to

business owners, the faith community, the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, Legions, and other important stakeholders to advance your projects.

- Periodically evaluate your progress, goals, and new opportunities.
- Celebrate your progress and recognize employers and others who are making great strides toward achieving shared goals.

How CET Can Support Your Community's Efforts

CET's goal is to support and empower energy and climate action committees throughout western Massachusetts to reduce dependency on foreign, non-renewable energy sources, reduce local GHG emissions, and move toward a clean energy future.

We can provide guidance for adopting an appropriate committee framework that will help implement local energy-saving and clean energy projects. CET will serve as an information and networking 'hub', and as time and resources allow, Circuit Riders will provide a variety of support to communities as they form and sustain energy committees.

Our "menu" of services includes:

- Sharing successful case studies and examples
- Offering direct, hands-on organizing and technical expertise
- Helping you adapt and develop useful tools, templates, and tested strategies to help make your community efforts more successful
- Helping connect local efforts to regional and state-wide initiatives to make cleaner, greener energy opportunities more readily available and publicly supported.

Lastly and most importantly, *YOU* are an important part of building a regional network of effective energy and climate action committees. To continually improve our services and our ability to support communities, please help us enhance our information clearinghouse by providing *your* feedback, ideas, and case studies.

Resources and Funding to Support Energy and Climate Action Initiatives

As part of the Climate Change Circuit Rider initiative, CET is assembling a clearinghouse of resources, case studies, and links to provide inspiration and information to towns. Please visit CET's website often for a growing list of helpful references at: www.cetonline.org/Community/MuniServices.php.

Resources for Towns

- **Massachusetts Climate Action Network (MCAN)**

  www.massclimateaction.org - A network of local and state-wide chapters dedicated to halting the threat of global climate disruption both locally and regionally. Conferences and other trainings are offered.

- **Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI)**

  www.iclei.org/index.php?id=7305 - Offers carbon emissions software to estimate municipal emissions, form carbon reduction plans and take steps to implement, monitor and report progress. ICLEI has access to case studies from hundreds of local governments both nationally and internationally, and promotes performance-based, results-oriented campaigns and programs.

- **Massachusetts Technology Collaborative (MTC)**

  www.masstech.org - The MTC promotes clean energy technologies by providing financial assistance to individuals, businesses and communities to maximize the environmental and economic benefits of wind, solar, and other renewable resources. The MTC's Renewable Energy Trust has several programs that offer grants to towns for community renewable energy projects.

- **Clean Air-Cool Planet**

  www.cleanair-coolplanet.org - Works with municipalities, universities, colleges and businesses to assess GHG emissions and encourage actions to reduce them. Annual conferences and other learning resources are available.

- **Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC)**

  www.pvpc.org - A consortium of municipal governments that have banded together under the provisions of state law to address problems and opportunities that are regional in scope. The PVPC worked with Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) and area energy experts and stakeholders to produce the Pioneer Valley Clean Energy Plan, which identifies clean energy opportunities throughout the region.

- **Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG)**

www.frcog.org – A regional organization offering a programs, products and services in areas such as energy conservation, land use and economic development, both on the municipal and regional level, to the 26 rural towns of Franklin County, in the upper Connecticut River Valley in the western part of the state.

- **Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPCP)**

  www.berkshireplanning.org - A regional organization serving the 32 cities and towns of Berkshire County, sponsoring a forum for regional energy issues and assisting communities with zoning bylaws related to siting renewable energy projects.

- **Berkshire Renewable Energy Collaborative (BREC)**

  A group of educators, environmental and business leaders and citizens whose mission is to increase energy efficiency and the responsible use of renewable energy in the Berkshire region.

  This information is being reformatted for incorporation into CET's website. The current address is: www.cetonline.org/brec%20website%2012_05/about.html –

Funding Sources for Starting an Energy Committee

- **New England Grassroots** Environment **Fund (**NEGEF)

  www.grassrootsfund.org - This fund is designed to foster and give voice to grassroots environmental initiatives in Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. The Fund's Small Grants Program provides grants to up to $2,500 to fund community involvement in a wide array of projects addressing environmental issues, with the aim of increasing civic engagement, local activism, and social change.

- **MA Climate Action Network (MCAN) Wolfe & Rita Climate Action Grants**

  http://massclimateaction.net/resources.html - MCAN chapters can apply to receive a supplementary source of funding to pursue climate action projects. The Wolfe & Rita Climate Action Projects Fund provides MCAN chapters with grants of up to $1000 per year for climate action projects and activities.

Promoting Wider Community Involvement

- **Massachusetts Interfaith Power & Light**

  http://mipandl.org - Offers religious congregations a means of reducing energy consumption and lowering operating costs, such as providing members with free energy assessment for buildings and action-based initiatives for congregants.

- **The Low Carbon Diet**

www.empowermentinstitute.net/lcd – A step-by-step program developed by the Empowerment Institute to help households work in teams to calculate their "carbon footprint" and make a action plan to lose 5,000 of their annual carbon emissions.

- **10% Challenge**

  www.10percentchallenge.org - A program similar to the Low Carbon Diet started by Burlington Vermont to challenge individuals, businesses, and municipalities to reduce GHG emissions by at least 10 percent. The program is Vermont based but offers online emissions calculators, programs, resources and tools to encourage voluntary actions.

Advocacy – Policy Reform at the Local and State Levels

- **Clean Water Action**

  www.cleanwateraction.org - A national non-profit with a strong Massachusetts office working for clean, affordable water, and climate action to stop global warming and strengthen our economy by taking bold action now to build a clean, efficient and renewable energy future for our nation.

- **MassPIRG**

  http://www.masspirg.org – A non-profit promoting consumer interests in the Bay State, working in the areas of pollution prevention, conservation, recycling, safe cleaning products and reduction of GHG emissions through a stronger public transportation system.

- **Sierra Club - Cool Cities Program**

  http://coolcities.us - All over America, local governments are moving forward with innovative energy solutions that curb global warming, save taxpayer dollars, and create healthier cities. Communities are taking action to help solve global warming, with solutions that range from hybrid vehicle fleets in Charlotte, to green buildings in Austin, to homes powered with renewable energy in Seattle. These local leaders are providing "roadmaps" to help move America toward a safer and more secure future.