



Activists push Western Mass cities and towns to stop using fossil fuels

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The John W. Olver transit center in Greenfield is a zero-net-energy facility built with federal stimulus funds. Climate activists gathered there Friday and said they would push all municipalities in Massachusetts to adopt "100 percent renewable energy." *(Mary Serreze photo)*

By [Mary C. Serreze](#)

Special to The Republican

GREENFIELD -- Climate activists gathered at the John. W. Olver Transit Center said Friday they would push all cities and towns in Western Massachusetts to commit to 100 percent renewable energy.

Municipalities should dump all fossil fuel use and "implement concrete projects" recommended by Mass Power Forward, members of the coalition said at their campaign kickoff.

"With the fears of what's happening at the federal level, it feels like the local level, which has always been important, is even more important now," said Carol Oldham, director of the Massachusetts Climate Action Network.

Volunteers with "Franklin County Continuing the Political Revolution" will hold a series of workshops this spring to educate local officials, said Bob Armstrong, a member of the group.

Greenfield Mayor Bill Martin was the only apparent municipal leader at the event, which was well-attended by local members of Mothers Out Front, Climate Action Now, 350 Massachusetts, and other organizations.



04/14/17 - Greenfield Mayor Bill Martin speaking at a Mass Power Forward event at the John W. Olver Transit Center. The coalition will push localities to commit to 100 percent renewable energy. *(Mary Serreze photo)*

Martin described Greenfield's energy initiatives, and praised the state's "Green Communities" program with its grants, incentives, and technical assistance. He said Greenfield was the first community statewide to install solar panels on a capped landfill and as such pioneered the process.

"In Franklin County, local is our mantra," said Martin.

Nancy Hazard of Greening Greenfield said a 100-percent renewable policy is not only possible, but "the roadmap to a vibrant economy."

In 2008, Greenfield conducted an audit and found that residents, businesses and government spent \$86 million on energy, with 80 percent leaving the community, Hazard said. She said the solution is to "electrify everything," reduce energy use by 40 percent, deploy new technologies, and produce more power locally.

Hazard said each person in the United States uses twice as much energy as a person in Europe, and that Massachusetts can meet its needs with wind, solar, and hydro.

Rep. Paul Mark (D-Peru) said he supports the effort. He said states and localities must lead on issues of climate change, despite who is sitting in the Oval Office.

"I thought we had gotten to the point, finally, where people realize there is science to back this up," he told the crowd. "Then we had a really interesting election, and suddenly the debate (on climate change) has been revived."

Mark said local action not only complements state action, but pushes state action.

Adele Franks of Northampton said members of Climate Action Now and Mothers Out Front are helping local officials "figure out how to green the grid," how to incorporate energy efficiency into new buildings, and how to finance clean energy projects.

Franks praised Northampton Mayor David Narkewicz for his commitment to clean energy, but opined that "it's not nearly enough."

Under Northampton sustainability officer Chris Mason, municipal energy use has been cut by 25 percent, [according to](#) the city. A full megawatt of solar capacity is scheduled for residential rooftops, and a 3.3-megawatt municipal solar array is being developed. Northampton, which [committed](#) to a clean energy future in 2008, has retrofitted government buildings, converted streetlights to LED fixtures, installed electric car chargers, and more.

Franks said two dozen "energetic volunteers" will help Northampton take the next steps, and are also working with Amherst.

Joel Wool of the Boston-based Clean Water Action said his group works on Beacon Hill to push for environmental legislation, and also maintains and builds a local network.

The campaign, which seeks "100 percent renewable energy" commitments from mayors, city councils and town governments, "is a direct response and a direct challenge to the Trump agenda," said Wool.

Wool said when communities and states model clean energy policies and practices, it can have a national impact.

The coalition has compiled a lengthy checklist for towns and cities.

Local governments are advised to complete energy audits, implement energy efficiency in municipal buildings, convert streetlights to LED fixtures, complete a greenhouse gas inventory, create a climate action plan, hire a sustainability manager, install solar panels, build bike lanes, purchase electric vehicles, plant trees, pass "no idling" bylaws, adopt "community choice aggregation," and more.

Renewable energy projects have faced opposition in some Franklin County towns.

In Shutesbury, neighbors relentlessly battled a proposed solar facility on Pratt Corner Road, and plaintiffs sued the town in federal court. In Wendell, a solar array on Wendell Depot Road -- first proposed in late 2015 -- only gained Conservation Commission approval on April 4.

Some at Friday's meeting distributed flyers claiming state officials have devised a secret plan to "subsidize dirty biomass energy" through a bill that would support the regional forest economy. They decried efforts by cash-strapped rural school districts to replace old oil burners with wood-pellet furnaces.

Yet despite targeted opposition to energy projects, more and more solar arrays are being built in Massachusetts by municipalities, government agencies, universities, utilities, and private industry, simply because it makes sense from a business standpoint.

An Obama-era federal tax credit meant to encourage solar projects remains valid through 2022. The state's energy department recently extended its Solar Renewable Energy Credit program until it finalizes a replacement program. Also, the actual cost of building solar facilities has been going down.

Some solar plans remain on hold, stuck on waiting lists for "net metering" allocations. Solar advocates have asked Gov. Charlie Baker and the Legislature to further lift the net metering cap that they raised in a 2016 energy bill.