

# An Act **F**or **U**tility **T**ransition to **U**sing **R**enewable **E**nergy

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The FUTURE Act – S.1940 / H.2849

Sen. Cynthia S. Creem, Reps. Lori Ehrlich and Christina Minicucci

Co-sponsored by all 3 of Arlington's State legislators:

Sen. Cindy Friedman, Reps. Sean Garballey and David Rogers

## **Context:**

Mass. has the second oldest gas distribution infrastructure in the U.S. It is beset with leaks. Those leaks (1) waste consumer's money (we pay for all the lost gas in Mass.), (2) pollute our air with toxic chemicals that are bad for our health, (3) continually release the GHG methane which is a potent driver of climate change; (4) kill nearby trees; (5) and occasionally cause explosions.

In Mass., the cost of replacing the oldest, especially leak prone pipes runs to billions of dollars. The estimate is about \$9 billion. Experience with the new plastic pipe being used to replace the old cast iron and steel types shows that it breaks more easily. In fact, we've already had some serious leaks from the breaking of those plastic pipes. [1]

Fixing leaks and replacing gas lines takes a lot of time, costs a lot of money, and you're still left with a system that will continue to leak. There is no way that you can have all those pipes coupled together and not have leaks. And that system is transporting an explosive product with hazardous contaminants.

Right here in Arlington, we can see from the last several years that, even with gas leak repairs and some pipe replacement, the number of gas leaks has increased from 177 in 2016 to 313 this year. And these are just the leaks that

National Grid knows about and has reported. We know from research that there more. The situation is similar across the state.

To quote Lori Ehrlich, one of The FUTURE Act's sponsors, "It makes no sense to keep burning an explosive gas in our homes when it is putting both us and the climate in danger." [2] The FUTURE Act was written to respond in the short term to the dangers of living with gas and in the longer term to move everyone in our state, including the gas utilities, off gas and onto renewable sources or energy.

The FUTURE Act provides for both

## **Triage & Transition**

**Triage:** In the short term, strengthens safety standards for existing gas lines & regulations for identifying and responding to gas leaks.

**Transition:** creating a path for gas utilities in Massachusetts to move away from selling natural gas to selling alternative, renewable energy sources.

The FUTURE Act provides support for municipalities as well as for the gas utility industry. We know the utilities are an important player in our state economy. The goal is not to kneecap them but to help them move to the future.

If passed, The FUTURE Act would make Mass. the first state with a roadmap for gas utilities to make this kind of change. The technologies already exist to make this possible – geothermal microgrids can provide heating and cooling for local networks of buildings – residential, commercial, and industrial.

In fact, the Gas Leaks Allies are hosting a related event at Boston University on October 28. Deeply technical in nature, it will include people formerly in the gas and oil industry who figured out that drilling for geothermal heat makes a lot of sense. They will be talking about geothermal microgrid systems they designed and installed which are already up and functioning.

In the evening, there will be a larger event, also at Boston University, to introduce a wider audience to geothermal microgrid technology and applications. I look forward to extending invitations.

The FUTURE Act also includes specific supports for municipalities, including:

1. Rapid informing of local fire and police chiefs as soon as leaks are found;
2. Expedited scheduling of leak repairs;
3. Better coordination with communities around leak repair followed by detailed project completion reports;
4. More winter patrols of pipelines under our streets because freezing ground causes the pipes to shift and increases the potential for leaks;
5. Making it easier for communities to be reimbursed for loss of trees due to gas leaks,

Additional advantages for municipalities are laid out in one of the attachments you received with the resolution.

Mass. communities that have already signed a resolution in support of The FUTURE Act **include Brookline, Cambridge, Lincoln, Newton, and Somerville**. Other communities in the process of considering such a resolution include **Acton, Boston, Hopkinton, Wellesley, Wellfleet, and Worcester**.

**Wrap-up.** It is my hope that the Arlington Select Board will join these other communities in signing a non-binding resolution in support of The FUTURE Act.

Thank you.

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[1] <https://www.itemlive.com/2019/08/05/ehrlich-state-needs-to-transition-off-natural-gas/>

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By Brucie Moulton  
Arlington Mothers Out Front  
Sustainable Arlington