

MARBLEHEAD REPORTER

Sustainable Marblehead: Marblehead's vision to address the climate crisis

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Something amazing happened last week. The Board of Selectmen unanimously endorsed the Green Marblehead Committee's vision to achieve carbon neutrality as outlined in its report, Marblehead Climate Vision, Charting a Path to Carbon Neutrality by 2040. This is very good news for the health and safety of our community and future generations.

Sustainable Marblehead congratulates the Board of Selectmen for taking this important step, particularly board Chair Jackie Belf-Becker and Select Board member Judy Jacobi, who served on the Green Marblehead Committee before her death and was a stalwart supporter. We also want to recognize Town Administrator Jason Silva, who secured the funding for the committee to do its work. Having a vision is a key step toward creating a plan to achieve the town's stated goal, as expressed by voters at Town Meeting in 2018, to transition to "100% carbon-free energy, including in energy production, building energy use, and transportation, and moving with fiscal responsibility and all deliberate speed to achieve this goal."

Last year, Silva and the Board of Selectmen secured a technical assistance grant from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) to create the Green Marblehead Committee (GMC). The committee was established to explore opportunities to reduce and eventually eliminate greenhouse gas emissions and establish a climate action vision for Marblehead. The 11-member committee includes representatives from the Board of Selectmen, the Marblehead Municipal Light Department (MMLD), and various town departments, and two members from Sustainable Marblehead. Brooks Winner from MAPC's Clean Energy Group facilitated the work.

The GMC used Sustainable Marblehead's Greenhouse Gas Inventory Report, published in January 2018, to establish a baseline for emissions by sector. (To read the report, visit <http://sustainablemarblehead.org>.) MMLD provided data on municipal energy

consumption, identifying our schools and other large municipal buildings like the Abbot Library and the Mary Alley Municipal Building as the town's largest energy users.

The visioning document also includes information about MMLD's efforts to increase the percentage of renewable energy in its portfolio and incentives available to Marblehead residents to help them save energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Community input was an important part of GMC's process. The committee received 455 responses to an electronic survey that gauged residents' concerns and priorities on climate action. The survey was followed by a communitywide climate visioning session held via Zoom. Among the top priorities identified by residents were requiring new construction to be highly energy efficient, making existing buildings more energy efficient, improving town infrastructure to support walking and biking, planting street and park trees, and working with utilities to repair gas leaks.

The GMC report identifies four next steps:

- 1.** Establish a greenhouse gas emission target of net zero emissions by 2040. In 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), made up of leading climate scientists from around the world, warned that we can only continue to burn fossil fuels at our current rate for another 10 years before carbon accumulating in the atmosphere pushes the earth beyond a climate tipping point beyond which it cannot be reversed. This gives us only a short window to transition to carbon-free living.
- 2.** Develop a net zero action plan, which Marblehead is already in the process of doing. The town and MAPC recently received notification that they have been awarded a planning assistance grant from the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs to join with other municipal light plant communities (communities that have their own electric light departments) to translate their visioning statements into net zero action plans.
- 3.** Hire a sustainability manager or incorporate these job functions into the job descriptions of other existing staff. While the town does not currently have funding for a sustainability manager position, town officials have indicated that they are open to a public-private partnership to help raise funds for such a position. A staff person dedicated to climate action and sustainability, when hired, would be responsible for helping the town transition to carbon-free sources of energy and securing grants necessary to support energy use reduction, clean energy, and sustainability initiatives. Recognizing the number and weight of responsibilities that town employees are already

carrying, we feel strongly that hiring a sustainability manager will be essential to successfully carrying out the goals outlined in GMC's visioning document.

- 4.** Continue the work of the Green Marblehead Committee to guide the town and ensure that progress is made in achieving carbon neutrality by 2040.

Sustainable Marblehead would like to thank the Green Marblehead Committee for its commitment to completing the first phase of its efforts to ensure Marblehead's future. We hope that our town's residents and businesses will join us in supporting their work. To read the complete GMC report, please visit <https://marblehead.org/home/news/marblehead-climate-vision>.

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