

Vehicle use tops Marblehead's greenhouse gas report

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Posted Jan 24, 2018 at 12:56 PM

Updated Jan 25, 2018 at 4:30 PM

Sustainable Marblehead cautions 'we're at a threshold moment'

Sustainable Marblehead is interested in preserving the town's history, but to do it, John Livermore said "we have to sustain our future."

Livermore, executive director of Sustainable Marblehead, presented a Greenhouse Gas Inventory Report to the Board of Selectmen during a recent meeting.

"We're at a threshold moment," he said. "We really have to make a choice."

Sustainable Marblehead formed last year as a "community organization that supports initiatives that reduce carbon emissions and increase quality of life in Marblehead."

At the top of the organization's to-do list was trying to determine the town's carbon footprint. Using data and guidance provided by a number of town departments along with the Electric Light Commission, National Grid, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council and other organizations, John Walters, a Massachusetts Clean Energy Center intern, working with Livermore, compiled the report.

Livermore called it a baseline against which the organization could mark future progress in reducing emissions.

The key findings in the report shows that vehicle transportation is the largest contributor to the town's total emissions with 29 percent followed closely by natural gas with 25 percent. Livermore attributed natural gas use to mostly heating. Burning home heating oil represents 19 percent of the town's carbon emissions.

"About four out 10 homes still heat with oil," he said.

Emissions from electricity came in at 18 percent, while airplane travel, based on statewide averages, makes up 5 percent, landfill waste emissions 3 percent and waste and waste water at 1 percent of the town's emissions.

Livermore told the board the study presents some challenges, but challenges also equal opportunities.

"There are lots of opportunities for change," he said. "We can do something about emissions."

In his recommendations, Livermore said the town should partner with Sustainable Marblehead and other organizations to come up with specific targets and actions to reduce the communities emission levels. He also recommended launching an effort to convert fossil fuel burning technologies to electric technologies such as electric vehicles and ductless heat pumps.

Advocating for "mindful transportation" such as carpooling, bikes, trains, buses, ferry service and even walking is another way to potentially cut down on emissions. And lastly Livermore urged residents, business owners and municipal leaders to expand efforts to reduce emissions by embracing energy reduction strategies such as weatherizing homes and businesses and taking simple steps to reduce the use of electricity, gas and oil.

"I know this might be small, but we did make a big effort to make sure buses turn the motor off and don't sit and idle," said Selectman Jackie Belf-Becker, chairman.

"That certainly helps," Livermore said.

Streamlining a method for businesses, town departments and other sectors to submit their own energy use data to keep the report updated would also be useful.

“All studies show that reducing emissions now is vastly more cost effective to doing it down the road or not doing it at all,” Livermore said adding it also brings health benefits and community building. “Obviously the end game is to have a livable planet.”