

HEALTH, LIFESTYLE, NEWS

MARBLEHEAD, NORTH SHORE ENERGIZED BY SALEM STATE FORUM

BY DAILY ITEM STAFF | November 15, 2017



Lawrence Lessard, Director at Achieve Renewable Energy, a Beverly solar, wind and geothermal company. (Courtesy Photo)

SALEM -- More than 75 state, municipal, and student leaders gathered at Salem State University to discuss how the North Shore can move to 100 percent renewable energy from sources like solar and wind.

The North Shore for 100% Renewable Energy Summit featured speakers from local and state government, businesses, and community organizations sharing their perspectives on the pathway to a future powered entirely by renewable energy. State Senators Joan Lovely and Bruce Tarr attended, along with city councilors, town planners, and community leaders from across the region.

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“Today’s event is an opportunity for people who are engaged in thinking, and acting, about our energy future to come together to discuss how we can make a positive impact to the threat of climate change,” said John Livermore, Director of Sustainable Marblehead and Founder of Healthy Home, Healthy Planet. “As coastal communities, we have front row seats to the impacts that are presented through climate change. Sustainable Marblehead and Healthy Home, Healthy Planet are committed to working with our local leaders, businesses and community organizations to identify and implement solutions that will benefit our community and decrease our carbon footprint.”

“The North Shore can lead the way to 100 percent clean, renewable energy,” said Meghan Hassett, Campaign Organizer for Environment Massachusetts Research & Policy Center. “Local communities, businesses, and institutions have already made so much progress on clean energy and energy efficiency. We should build on that progress and charge ahead toward a 100 percent renewable future.”

The North Shore has one of the oldest operational solar fields in the country. Greenergy Park in Beverly produces about 94,000 kilowatt hours per year of energy from its 3,000 panels.

In recent years, North Shore communities have made rapid progress in expanding clean energy and reducing fossil fuel consumption.

The towns of Beverly, Salem, Swampscott and Gloucester all recently received more than \$200,000 in grants from the state’s Green Communities program to improve the energy efficiency of municipal buildings and schools. Gloucester’s Clean Energy Commission Chair, Linda Stout-Sanders, spoke at the Summit of the energy savings and economic benefits of Gloucester’s wind turbines and municipal aggregation program.

Salem recently became the first community in Massachusetts to commit to achieving 100 percent renewable energy. Salem has already undertaken efforts to reach that goal, including creating a bike program, expanding bike paths to other communities, installing electric vehicle charging stations, converting light fixtures to LED, creating a solar energy co-op and introducing mandatory recycling. Salem State Professor John Hayes and MassPIRG Students at Salem State were in attendance to discuss the community organizing that made Salem’s 100 percent renewable resolution possible.

“The enormous challenge of climate change demands action,” said Salem State President John Keenan. “As an educational institution, Salem State University has an obligation to foster scientific understanding and to engage with the larger North Shore community on sustainable solutions such as renewable energy.”

Communities across the North Shore are working to adopt 100 percent renewable energy goals, including Ipswich, Marblehead and Medford. Beverly’s Chair of the Clean Energy Advisory Committee, Fred Hopps, is working with Mayor Cahill to pass a similar resolution to Salem in support of 100 percent renewable energy.

“In the wake of several extreme weather events, the Commonwealth must proactively prepare and plan for the effects of climate change,” stated Lovely. “We need to ensure that Massachusetts remains a leader in renewable energy technology and continue to confront the effects of climate change with purpose and the seriousness this issue warrants. Events like this one, the North Shore for 100 Renewable Energy Summit, help make sure that these issues are in the forefront as we work together to position Massachusetts as a national and global leader in renewable energy.”

The summit comes as officials consider whether to make Massachusetts the first state in the nation to commit to a goal of 100 percent clean, renewable energy economy-wide. The 100% Renewable Energy Act, filed by Sen. Jamie Eldridge and state Representatives Sean Garballey and Marjorie Decker, would power Massachusetts with 100 percent renewable electricity by 2035, and require 100 percent renewable heating and transportation by 2050.

So far, 58 legislators have signed on in support of the 100% Renewable Energy Act. The Legislature’s Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities, and Energy held a hearing on the bill on Sept. 19.

“Moving towards renewable energy sources is an important and effective strategy to save money, help our environment and promote good health. Massachusetts is leading on this front because we have worked collaboratively towards a strong combination of laws, regulations, incentives and public awareness efforts that have created a culture that prioritizes the goal of reducing a reliance on nonrenewable energy sources,” said Tarr.

A growing number of U.S. cities, states, corporations and institutions are also considering commitments to 100 percent renewable energy. In addition to Salem, five cities and towns in Massachusetts — Amherst, Cambridge, Leverett, Framingham, and Lowell — have adopted a goal of 100 percent renewable energy. Nearly 100 major companies have made a similar commitment, including Apple, Walmart and LEGO.

Additionally, advocates and coalitions across Massachusetts are working to establish a Community Empowerment program. Bills filed by Senators Julian Cyr, Marc Pacheco, and House Speaker Pro Tempore Pat Haddad would allow cities and towns to buy more renewable energy on behalf of their residents, at a stable and predictable cost.

“As we wrestle with the impacts of climate change and the need for energy independence, pursuing a clean energy future is vital to the future and wellbeing of our planet as well as our national security,” said Lawrence Lessard, Director of Achieve Renewable Energy.

“We’re proud of our leadership and progress in Salem, but we need to do more regionally and across the state to push for energy efficiency and renewable energy,” said Rev. Jeff Barz-Snell of First Church in Salem. “The more cities and towns, campuses, and businesses that embrace our vision of a 100 percent clean energy future for our communities, our planet and our health, the more we can accomplish working together to achieve that vision. In addition, our state leaders need to do more to support local efforts and communities and families of any income level taking part in the clean energy transition.”

Following President Trump's decision to withdraw the United States from the Paris Climate Agreement, interest in climate action at the local level is growing. Hundreds of American cities, universities, and businesses have said they will continue to take action to meet the targets of the Paris agreement.

Global warming is already having a major impact on Massachusetts. Extreme snow and rain storms have become 81 percent more frequent in Massachusetts since the 1940s, a trend linked to climate change. At the same time, droughts are expected to become more severe as temperatures warm. A recent study showed that sea levels could rise by 7 feet or more in the Boston area by the end of the century, which would cause major flooding and erosion in coastal communities.

Air pollution from fossil fuels is also a major health concern. Communities across Massachusetts experienced 196 days with elevated smog pollution, which can contribute to asthma and other respiratory and cardiovascular problems.

"Renewable energy progress is always a win-win-win, for our health, our economy, and our climate. With federal officials moving in the wrong direction, it's up to local communities to lead on clean energy," said Hassett.