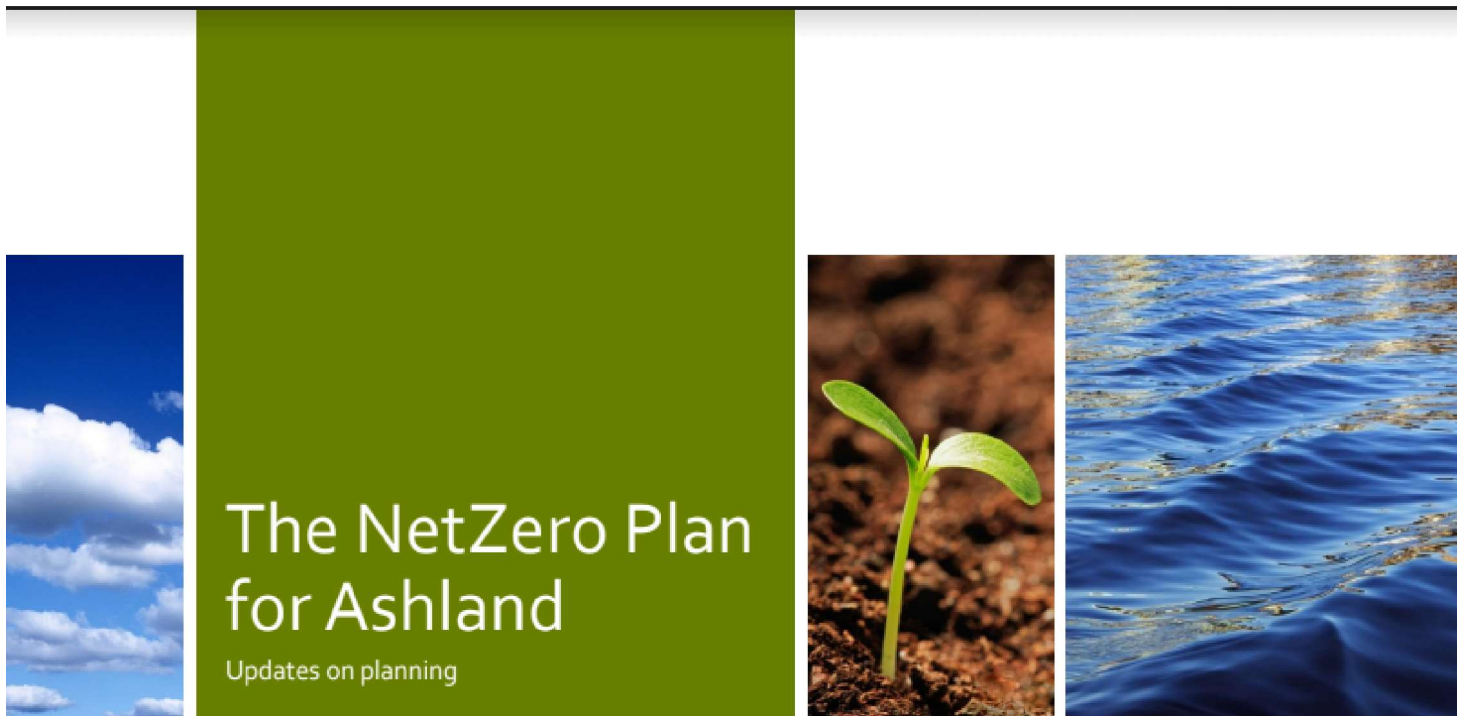


Ashland Sustainability Committee Seeks Community Input on Net Zero Plan



By Cynthia Whitty

Ashland residents made a commitment to achieving net zero in the fall of 2019 when they passed a resolution to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2040. Net zero refers to achieving a balance between the amount of greenhouse gas emissions produced and the amount removed from the atmosphere. (netzeroclimate.org/what-is-net-zero)

To achieve this goal, the Ashland Sustainability Committee is seeking feedback from the community on a plan. Residents can find the plan on the group's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/AshlandSustainability) and the town website, www.ashlandmass.com/972/Net-Zero-Resolution.

Community Invited to Public Forum, April 13

A public forum for discussion and feedback will be held on Wednesday, April 13 at 6:30 p.m. The event will be held both online and in person in the Ashland Library's Community Room. Registration to attend is required. Details are available on the town website, www.ashlandmass.com/972/Net-Zero-Resolution. "Engagement from all stakeholders is critical at this stage to ensure we incorporate feedback and refine this plan to be cohesive, just, and equitable," Ashwin Ratanchandani, chair of the Sustainability Committee, says. "Climate change is affecting the entire world. It is up to all of us – every continent, country, state, city, and town – to make the necessary changes to address our environmental impact. The net zero plan is designed for the Ashland community to do its part and help support its residents with a more sustainable, healthy community. We have set 2040 as our net zero target as a town, and this plan will help us achieve that goal."

Impact on Residents and Businesses

Ratanchandani says the net zero plan is designed to strategically advance Ashland's sustainable practices as a town. Achieving net zero is going to require engagement, education, investment and transformation. By being more proactive and thoughtful in our planning, we can not only make our transition easier, we can also position the town as a leader in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. This plan is designed to make Ashland a thriving community for decades to come and to elevate the health, safety, and prosperity of its collective residents and businesses.

In order to reach net zero by 2040, the town will need to take action in five major areas:

1. Our Energy Supply

- Ensuring we have a clean and renewable supply of energy allows us to break the dependence on fossil fuel.
- We are currently at about 18 percent renewable energy in our electric grid, the latest climate bill passed by the state mandates an increase of 3 percent per year going forward.
- The plan calls for continuing to expand the use of renewable energy in town and in our region.

2. Our Homes and Buildings

- As the greatest source of emissions based on the GHG (greenhouse gas) survey this has to be a major focus area.
- Activities in this section include increased energy tracking, improving efficiencies, incentives and investment to transition away from fossil fuels.

3. How we get around

- As a suburban community we have a high dependence on passenger vehicles, the most polluting means of transportation.
- Strategic town planning, pedestrian infrastructure, electric vehicles and investment in public transport are the key activities in this area.

4. Smart zoning and planning

- Given MA's regulatory structure, there are limits to what can be accomplished only at the local level.
- Actions here include long term planning, adoption of net zero codes, incentives for efficient, fossil-free building, regional collaborations and active advocacy at the state and federal level.

5. Environment

- Our built and natural systems work together to provide resilience to climate change and expand social and environmental benefits to all.
- The focus in this area is on waste reduction and protecting our natural resources to mitigate inputs and impacts of climate change.

How can we achieve these goals?

"Collective success needs collective action," Ratanchandani adds. "The Town of Ashland is special. It has a rich diversity alongside a caring community. We have an amazing opportunity to continue to position

Ashland as one of the best places to live not only in Massachusetts but the entire country. But that future prosperity will be contingent on our ability to make real progress to lessen our environmental impact. And it will need the help of all residents and businesses. While the plan focuses on major areas, we have also outlined a personal checklist for individuals to reduce their carbon footprint.”

Ratanchandani encourages all Ashland residents to contribute to the discussion, follow the Ashland Sustainability Committee on Facebook to subscribe to its email newsletter, and if possible, volunteer to help us convert this plan into action. “We welcome all residents to join us on this journey. It is going to take all of us.”

Ashland’s Net Zero Plan

The town of Ashland adopted a resolution in the fall of 2019 to achieve net zero emissions by 2040. The Ashland Sustainability Committee was then tasked with creating a plan to achieve this goal.

The Sustainability Committee’s first step was to complete a greenhouse gas inventory for the town; findings were presented to the Select Board in July 2020. That inventory found that the town created 155,000 Metric Tons of CO₂e* in 2017, the bulk of that comes from residential buildings and transportation. The committee has leveraged the findings of the greenhouse gas inventory to research strategies most likely to help us achieve the 2040 goal.

In order to reach net zero by 2040, the town will need to take action in five major areas. (See the article, Ashland Sustainability Committee Seeks Input on Net Zero Plan.)

Learn more

The Sustainability Committee will present an overview of the plan and seek public input at a forum on April 13 at 6:30pm at the Ashland town library.

The committee is seeking feedback to finalize the plan and volunteers to help in each of the five areas. To learn more or to get involved email sustainability@ashlandmass.com.