

['We are among the leaders': Ashfield Town Meeting voters pass bevy of clean energy proposals](#)

Diane Broncaccio, Greenfield Recorder

Published: 05-05-2024 2:48 PM

ASHFIELD — When Bill Ryan moved to town 25 years ago, an old-timer told him, “In Ashfield, we only have two seasons: winter and the Fourth of July.”

“In my first year here, we had 120 inches of snow,” Ryan mused. “Not now.”

On Saturday, Ryan was among several Annual Town Meeting voters waxing poetic about weather changes on a glorious spring day — changes that seem to be heralding climate change in real time — and urging others to support three Energy Committee proposals to drastically reduce fossil fuel emissions in town over the next 26 years.

“I’m hearing fear, helplessness and powerlessness,” said Ryan. “It would be great if we can say to our children, ‘We are among the leaders. We are doing something.’”

By approving all three warrant articles, Ashfield is now in line to become one of the state’s first “Climate Leader Communities,” helping Massachusetts reach its greenhouse gas reduction goals.

The first article is a decarbonization resolution to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and transition to clean, renewable energy sources by 2050. The second calls for Ashfield to eventually replace old town-owned vehicles with more energy-efficient electric or hybrid vehicles whenever possible. And the third article calls for an early adoption of a specialized energy code that lays out new energy performance standards for any new building construction, effective January 2025.

Under this third article, mixed fuel residential and commercial buildings must be pre-wired for electric space-heating, water heating and electric appliances. Also, most structures must have some photovoltaic energy sources to meet certification standards.

The last article drew the most discussion because of concerns that a higher building cost would keep young people from moving to town.

“We’re a generation that is incredibly concerned about the climate, and we are incredibly broke,” said Tadea Klein. “I’ve been here for the transition, where you’re wondering if it will snow in May, to where you are wondering if we’re going to get any snow.”

Peter Curtis said he built an energy-efficient home eight years ago and now produces more energy than he uses.

“It cost me more money to build,” Curtis said, “but I have had no electricity costs for eight years.”

The Finance Committee voted 3-1 in favor of the three articles, because adopting the building code early will put the town in a strong position to earn sizable energy grants. Mark Burton, who voted against recommending the articles, said he was concerned about the economic consequences of adopting this stricter standard.

The new building code doesn't apply to current structures or to additions to them.

Budget

Townpeople readily approved all town budgets and requests for fiscal year 2025. These include:

- \$3.1 million for education costs. Ashfield's assessment to the Mohawk Trail Regional School District represents a 7.5% hike for the town.

- \$595,353 for general government.

- \$523,734 for public safety.

- \$915,562 for roads and public works.

- \$69,844 for health and human services.

- \$114,365 for cultural and recreation expenses.

- \$90,823 for total debt services. This includes a \$64,989 payment on the Highway Garage and paying off the full broadband debt interest of \$25,834.

- \$902,251 for the Broadband Enterprise Fund, paid entirely from subscriber fees revenues.

Override approved

The town will order a new \$325,000 Highway Department dump truck with an all-season body that comes with a plow, following a successful Proposition 2½ levy-limit override for \$225,000 that was approved on Saturday. The town had previously appropriated \$100,000 toward the vehicle purchase. Selectboard Vice Chair Steven Gougeon said the total amount needs to be accounted for before the town can order it.

The new vehicle might take a year or two before it is actually delivered. Meanwhile, town officials will look for other revenue sources, such as free cash surplus funds, to cover the truck costs instead of using the temporary tax hike that was approved Saturday by voters. The old truck to be replaced has emissions problems, Gougeon said.

Other articles

The town will spend \$20,000 to take the Belding Memorial Library off its septic system and put it on the town sewer. Selectboard member Thomas Carter said the septic system was installed before the town had its own wastewater treatment plant. After the septic system is removed, the town will pave the parking area behind the library.

Another \$12,500 will be spent on replacing Town Hall's computers with up-to-date models.

Voters agreed to start a Grant Match Stabilization Fund, with \$312,571. This money, in an account that can earn interest, will be set aside for future state and federal grants that require matching sums from the town. Because the town had to spend the rest of its American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) money by July 1, voters agreed to transfer that balance into operating costs for schools and appropriate the same amount into the new grant match fund.

Source: <https://www.recorder.com/-We-are-among-the-leaders-Ashfield-Town-Meeting-voters-pass-bevy-of-clean-energy-proposals-55011936>