



**Becoming a “Green Community”:
Action Requested at Town Meeting**
Energy Action Committee

“Green Community” Primer



- **What Is It?**
 - Mass Department of Energy Resources (DOER) designation that makes a municipality eligible for grants for various energy initiatives
 - Initial grant varies based on available funds, # of applicants, and a grant allocation formula (\$125,000 base plus a population/per capita income formula – max of \$1MM)
 - Subsequent grants are available annually for which a proposal for specific project(s) must be submitted to DOER

- **Other Green Communities**
 - 25 additional municipalities designated in December 2017, for a total of 210 Green Communities in Massachusetts
 - Abington (\$164,900), Duxbury (\$139,705), and Wellesley (\$137,250) among those newly designated
 - Except for Hull, Hingham is surrounded by Green Communities

- **Requirements?**
 - 5 Criteria: (1) As-Of-Right-Siting (Zoning Designation for Renewables); (2) Expedited Permitting, (3) Energy Baseline & 5-Year Energy Reduction Plan; (4) Fuel-Efficient Vehicle Purchase Policy, and (5) Stretch Code Adoption

Is a Vote at Town Meeting Required?



- **Town Meeting Vote only Required for Stretch Energy Code (Criterion 5) Adoption**
 - Hingham’s existing Light Industrial zoning regulations, as informally agreed by Mass DOER, and prior adoption of Ch. 43D: Expedited Permitting, satisfy criteria 1 and 2, respectively
- **What Is the Stretch Energy Code?**
 - Very similar to the current base energy code
 - Requires new home and large commercial building construction to follow the performance path of the standard building code (i.e., is more flexible); does NOT apply to residential additions, renovations, and small commercial construction
 - Most contractors already voluntarily follow the performance path in Hingham, so no significant impact expected on local building officials in terms of training or time
 - Building Commissioner, Michael Clancy, is in favor of Hingham’s adopting the Stretch Energy Code
- **The Energy Action Committee is requesting that the Selectmen move forward with a warrant article for Stretch Energy Code adoption in Hingham, in order to position Hingham to apply for Green Communities designation in 2018**
 - A sample warrant article and bylaw is available online through MassDOER:
<https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2016/10/nt/guidance-criterion.pdf>

What Are the Obligations & Costs?



- **Time and Effort to Conduct the Energy Baseline (Criterion 3)?**
 - All Hingham natural gas accounts are already in the MassEnergyInsight (MEI) system, and HMLP electric use data is being uploaded into MEI
 - MEI will generate a Baseline Report once the data and account assignments are completed
 - Technical assistance grant from MAPC may be available; MassDOER staff also available to assist
- **Costs to Implement 20% Energy Reduction Plan (Criterion 3)?**
 - Theoretically, the cost should be zero: If projects using Green Communities grant dollars don't achieve the 20% reduction in 5 years, Mass DOER will continue to work with the Town to find and pay for projects that will help Hingham to achieve the 20% goal
 - The 20% reduction is a goal—not a fixed requirement to maintain Green Communities status
 - Green Communities grants can supplement/offset energy efficiency projects in any Capital Plan
- **Will the Fuel-Efficient Vehicle Purchase Policy Add Costs (Criterion 4)?**
 - Some limitations in repurposing exempt vehicles for non-exempt purposes
 - Other towns facing this issue opted to use a Green Communities grant for new vehicle leases
- **Annual Report Costs & Manpower?**
 - Additional hours likely required to facilitate the annual report; Green Communities Division and MAPC are available for assistance (MAPC through META Grants)
 - A Green Community designation in 2018 first requires an Annual Report in December 2020.

Experience of Other Towns?



- The EAC has reached out to several South Shore municipalities to gauge experience with Green Communities status, e.g., Cohasset, Hanover, Rockland, Scituate, and Weymouth
- Reactions have been overwhelmingly positive (no negative reactions)
- Estimates of ongoing support range from one person at approximately 2-3 weeks per year or 0.05 FTE to one person at several days a month
 - Higher estimates resulted from the application for, and receipt of, additional grants
 - Additional FTE costs are often \$0.00 because grants have covered these costs
- Fuel-Efficient Vehicle Purchase Policy has not resulted in additional expenses, and grants have been used to acquire new vehicles
- Any negative reaction to Stretch Energy Code adoption only occurred during the adoption effort; no negative reactions afterward
- Hanover has been a Green Community for over 7 years (since program's inception); at 5 year mark, Hanover achieved a 15% reduction, not 20%
 - No adverse reaction resulted; Mass DOER only wanted to see progress toward the goal

Pros & Cons Summary



Pros

- **Minimum \$125,000 grant; actual grant likely higher**
- **META grant available to assist with energy baseline**
- **Grants can be used to offset additional costs from reporting requirements and fuel-efficient vehicle policy impacts**
- **Subsequent grants possible (e.g., Hanover has received over \$1MM in its 7 years in the program)**
- **\$\$ saved resulting from energy reduction efforts**
- **Additional savings may be available from investor-owned utilities for projects that save on natural gas usage**
- **Hingham's designation puts it in good company with neighbors and peers**

Cons

- **Additional reporting obligations**
- **Some limitations on repurposing of departmental vehicles**
- **Creating energy baseline for oil usage not readily able to be uploaded into MEI**
- **Adoption of Stretch Energy Code may slightly increase building costs (but Hingham already doing much of this anyway)**

Next Steps?



- **Submit warrant article for Stretch Energy Code adoption by January 20th deadline**
- **Hold a public meeting on Stretch Energy Code prior to Town Meeting**
- **EAC to continue to engage other towns on Green Communities experience**
- **EAC to continue engagement with School Committee to address Green Community potential impacts on the School Department**
- **May – June: apply for MAPC META grant for assistance with energy baseline and reduction planning**
- **July 2018: submit preliminary application to Mass DOER for advice**
- **Fall 2018: submit formal application for Green Communities designation**
- **December 2018: Mass DOER finalizes whether Hingham awarded designation**