



Renewable Communities

Massachusetts cities and towns
leading the way to 100% renewable energy

Somerville: Climate Forward plan

Somerville is vulnerable to coastal flooding due to its proximity to the Mystic River, which separates the city from nearby Medford and Everett.¹ This vulnerability, along with other climate-related risks, prompted Mayor Joe Curtatone and other officials to assemble the city's first comprehensive plan to address climate change.² Somerville Climate Forward, released in November 2018, lays out a series of actions that can be implemented over the next 5–10 years to reduce the threat of global warming.³

After conducting a greenhouse gas inventory in 2016, city officials, activists, and community leaders joined together to lay the foundation for the current plan. Through working groups, 75 residents and stakeholders identified 13 priority areas of action, each including action steps.⁴

As a largely residential city, 65% of Somerville's greenhouse gas emissions come from the energy used to provide heating and electricity to buildings.⁵ The plan identifies two avenues to reduce emissions from buildings: incentivizing new buildings to be built to highly efficient net zero standards, and improving the efficiency of existing buildings. In the short term, the plan proposes to use the city's zoning authority to encourage the use of passive design elements (such as increased insulation, shading, and the orientation of windows) to reduce energy demand in new buildings. These features would also help to keep the building comfortable for occupants in the event of climate-related natural disasters that could cut off energy supplies.⁶

Additionally, the plan envisions the creation of a rental energy disclosure requirement, which would provide information on the energy efficiency performance of an

apartment before tenants sign a lease. A policy like this could encourage landlords to improve the energy efficiency of their properties to make them more appealing to potential tenants, an important step in a city where the majority of residents are renters.⁸

Somerville Climate Forward aims to shift residents away from fossil fuel transportation. Switching to electric vehicles will play a role, but the plan also calls for getting more residents to travel by public transportation, walking, or biking rather than driving.⁹

Finally, the plan calls for a transition toward 100% renewable electricity by continuing and improving the city's municipal aggregation program and advocating for stronger clean energy policies at the state level.¹⁰

1. "City Announces Wide-sweeping Climate Action Plan," Scout Somerville, 11 July 2019, <<https://scoutsomerville.com/city-announces-wide-sweeping-climate-action-plan/>>.

2. "Somerville Climate Forward launch packs Greentown Labs," Julia Taliesin, Wicked Local Somerville, 3 December 2018, <<https://someriville.wickedlocal.com/news/20181203/somerville-climate-forward-launch-packs-greentown-labs>>.

3. *Somerville Climate Forward: Somerville's Community Climate Change Plan*, City of Somerville, November 2018, <<https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/programs/somerville-climate-forward>>.

4. Ibid.

5. "City Announces Wide-sweeping Climate Action Plan," Scout Somerville, 11 July 2019, <<https://scoutsomerville.com/city-announces-wide-sweeping-climate-action-plan/>>.

6. *Somerville Climate Forward: Somerville's Community Climate Change Plan*, City of Somerville, November 2018, <<https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/programs/somerville-climate-forward>>.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.