



# Boxborough Sustainability Policy

SELECT BOARD

Town of Boxborough, MA

## Intent and Purpose

The Select Board of the Town of Boxborough (the “Town”), recognizing the profound acceleration of climate change problems facing our community today, and our role in contributing to, managing, and adapting to these problems and associated escalating uncertainties, adopts this policy concerning the Town’s commitments to enhancing sustainability and resilience. This policy is intended to address the specific impacts of climate change that we are already experiencing, such as flooding, drought, and intense storms, and to anticipate future problems. The purpose of this policy is to support coordinated, ambitious, fact-based decision making and actions across all Town departments, committees, and groups, in an effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and achieve Net Zero emissions by 2050, as set out in the Massachusetts Clean Energy and Climate Plan for 2050<sup>2</sup>, and to prepare for and mitigate the effects of climate change on the Town.

This policy promotes the interests and needs of the Boxborough community as documented in a wide range of Town materials including the Boxborough 2030 Master Plan<sup>3</sup>, a 2020 Select Board Declaration<sup>4</sup>, a 2021 “Sense of Meeting” statement approved by the community at Town Meeting<sup>5</sup>, a 2021 town-wide climate change survey<sup>6</sup>, a 2021 Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness report<sup>7</sup>, and as part of the 2023 commitment made by the Town to become a Green Community<sup>8</sup>.

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## Definitions

**Adaptation** includes actions taken at the individual, local, regional, and national levels to reduce risks from today’s changed climate conditions and to prepare for impacts from additional changes projected for the future<sup>11</sup>.

**Greenhouse gases**, such as carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), methane (CH<sub>4</sub>), nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O), different types of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), and sulfur hexafluoride (SF<sub>6</sub>), trap heat and cause the average global air temperature to rise, thus changing weather patterns globally<sup>2</sup>.

**Mitigation** refers to measures to reduce the amount and speed of future climate change by reducing emissions of greenhouse gases or by increasing their removal from the atmosphere<sup>11</sup>.

**‘Net Zero’** generally refers to reducing greenhouse gas emissions to a level where any ongoing emissions are balanced by ongoing removals. The Massachusetts Clean Energy and Climate Plan for 2050 further defines ‘Net Zero’ on page 1 as “a level of greenhouse gas emissions that is equal in

quantity to the amount of carbon dioxide or its equivalent that is removed from the atmosphere and stored annually by, or attributable to, the Commonwealth; provided, however, that in no event shall the level of emissions be greater than a level that is 85 percent below the 1990 level<sup>2</sup>.”

**Resilience** is having the ability to anticipate, prepare for, recover from, and improve conditions after a significant disruption or shock.

**Sustainability** is meeting the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to thrive.

## Guiding Principles

The following five principles underpin this policy and provide a foundation for responsible, equitable, credible, interwoven, and future-focused sustainability and resilience efforts:

1. **Commit to climate education** – Enhance diverse community access to and use of the best available sustainability and resilience data and information
2. **Reduce greenhouse gas emissions** – Set data-driven goals and targets to achieve Net Zero by 2050
3. **Invest in resilience measures** – Improve opportunities to adapt and thrive in the face of climate change impacts
4. **Ensure equity in decision making** – Enhance participation in decision-making and prioritize the health, safety, and wellbeing of members of our community who are least able to prepare for or respond to climate change impacts
5. **Consider the co-benefits of investments** – Account for health, environment, and social wellbeing as part of the Town’s return on investments

## Goals and Actions

To achieve the above stated intent and purpose of this policy and adhere to the guiding principles, the following goals and actions will be pursued under the direction of the Select Board, or the Select Board’s designee(s):

### *Incorporate sustainability and resilience into Town decision making*

- The Town, in its actions, policies, budgets, bylaws, and purchasing decisions, will consider and strive to advance sustainability and resilience in keeping with the principles of this policy.

### *Enhance sustainability-focused planning in the Town of Boxborough*

- Support the Town to advance sustainability and resilience measures in keeping with the principles of this policy and in relation to all ongoing projects.
- Support grant writing and other fiscally-responsible efforts focused on advancing and implementing sustainability and resilience projects.

### *Develop and adopt a comprehensive Climate Action Plan*

- The Town will develop and adopt a comprehensive Climate Action Plan<sup>9</sup> that compiles specific, detailed and measurable sustainability and resilience goals, objectives, measures, strategies, responsible parties, and timelines to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and achieve Net Zero emissions in 2050, as set out in the Massachusetts Clean Energy and Climate Plan for 2050.
- The development of this Plan must be a collaborative effort led by a task force composed of key Boxborough decision makers; this includes the Town Administrator with support from other key

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Town staff members, and representatives from the Select Board and other relevant Town boards, committees, and commissions.

- This Plan will be developed with broad-based participation and input from community groups, businesses, and members of the public.
- Specific efforts must be made to incorporate input into Plan development from residents who have diverse backgrounds, interests, and needs, in alignment with guidance from the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) Environmental Justice Council (EJC) <sup>10</sup>.
- The Plan should specifically address key elements of climate action such as education, energy, the built environment, mobility, community resilience, biodiversity and the natural environment.

*Provide annual reporting and regular updates on sustainability and resilience efforts*

- Annually, at the time of preparing the town budget, the Sustainability Committee, in collaboration with the Town Administrator, and/or the Administrator's designee, will present a report to the Select Board on progress toward the goals and actions laid out in this policy, and any subsequent policies and plans developed in relation to it.
- This policy should be reviewed by the Select Board, Sustainability Committee, Town Administrator, other staff, and community stakeholders, and regularly updated to reflect emerging opportunities and challenges associated with a rapidly changing climate and the impacts on the Town.

## References

1. Town of Boxborough Select Board. (2021, April 12). *Boxborough Sustainability Policy*. <https://www.boxborough-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/1424/Boxborough-Sustainability-Policy-PDF>
2. Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. (2022, December). *Massachusetts Clean Energy and Climate Plan for 2050*. <https://www.mass.gov/doc/2050-clean-energy-and-climate-plan/download>
3. Town of Boxborough and Metropolitan Area Planning Council. (2016, January). *Boxborough2030 Master Plan*. <https://www.boxborough-ma.gov/243/Master-Plan-Boxborough2030>
4. Town of Boxborough Select Board. (2020, November). *Declaration*. <https://www.boxborough-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/1425/Boxborough-Select-Board---Climate-Change-Declaration>
5. Town of Boxborough Massachusetts. (2021, June 12). *Warrant and Proceedings – Annual Town Meeting*. Article 40: Sustainability Committee Sense of the Meeting Statement. <https://www.boxborough-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/2306/ATMFY22-minutes-final?bidId=>
6. Boxborough Sustainability Committee. (2021). *Boxborough Climate Change Survey: Summary of Results*. <https://www.boxborough-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/1339/Boxborough-Climate-Change-Survey-Results-PDF>
7. Town of Boxborough. (2021, February). *Community Resilience Building Workshop: Summary of Findings*. [https://www.boxborough-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/1244/Boxborough-MVP-FINAL-Report-02\\_22\\_2021pdf](https://www.boxborough-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/1244/Boxborough-MVP-FINAL-Report-02_22_2021pdf)
8. Town of Boxborough Massachusetts. (2023, May 8). *Warrant and Proceedings – Annual Town Meeting*. Article 41: Green Community Renewable Energy Trust Fund Surcharge.

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10. Environmental Justice Council (EJC). (Accessed March 8, 2024).  
[https://www.mass.gov/orgs/environmental-justice-council?\\_gl=1\\*\\_12ibwh5\\*\\_ga\\*MTM4NjlyNTgxMS4xNzA0MTkzMTgz\\*\\_ga\\_MCLPEGW7WM\\*MTcwOTkxMTk3NC4yLjAuMTcwOTkxMTk3NC4wLjAuMA](https://www.mass.gov/orgs/environmental-justice-council?_gl=1*_12ibwh5*_ga*MTM4NjlyNTgxMS4xNzA0MTkzMTgz*_ga_MCLPEGW7WM*MTcwOTkxMTk3NC4yLjAuMTcwOTkxMTk3NC4wLjAuMA).
11. US Global Change Research Program. (2018). *Fourth National Climate Assessment*.  
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This policy revokes and replaces all previous policies on this topic including the policy titled *Boxborough Sustainability Policy* approved on 4/12/2021.