

Montague Energy Committee (MEC) Minutes 9/1/2026

Present: Sally Pick, Ray Sebold, Jason Burbank, Pam Hanold. **Guest:** Nate Card.

Designate facilitator and scribe: Sally.

Updates & Discussion with Chris Nolan Zeller

- Advocating for solar, battery backup at the Turners Falls Airport
 - Chris will ask Walter if Town interested in sending a letter to legislators, MA Dept. of Public Utilities regarding Eversource grid upgrades needed for solar. MEC offered to draft letter.
 - In talking with Bryan Campden recently, Chris was told by Bryan that developers might have an interest in installing battery backup, not solar.
 - Ray spoke with Claire Chang for ideas regarding grid constraints:
 - She suggested we ask Eversource if there's a way to use flexible interconnection.
 - Claire recommends the Town hire an engineering firm to figure out nuances of grid upgrades needed for PV array.
 - Recommended Solar Design firm in Harvard, MA.
 - Coop Power input? Ray decided to ask Claire Chang instead.
- Discussion on Town exploration of municipal electric aggregation.
 - Town Meeting approved aggregation.
 - Over 200 communities in MA have done it.
 - Developing a Montague Power Choice program and will submit plan to MA Dept. of Public Utilities (DPU).
 - DPU has ~4 months to approve after submitted.
 - A power broker was chosen to help town select supplier.
 - Several possible options for power sources that users can choose from, depending on what the Town decides:
 - Base tier with no renewable requirement.
 - Middle tier with some renewable energy (RE).
 - 100% RE.
 - Compared to ~36% in standard Eversource supply (solar, wind, small & large hydro, other renewables, as defined by Eversource, on bill info on power sources).
 - Ask Town to look at how supplier defines RE.
 - For example, are renewables from:
 - Long-established Texas wind that is not financing newer RE?

- MA Class I RE that helps finance new RE in New England?
- Other discussion, updates
 - Explained to Chris that MEC is not currently putting CLC as top priority and why.
 - Town supports continuing to pursue CLC but not currently prioritizing it.
 - Chris expressed concerns from Town that it has steep hurdles to attract builders.
 - Ray has looked at new homes recently built in town and sees that many have gone beyond Stretch Code requirements regarding energy efficiency and installation of electric heating/cooling (heat pumps).
 - He fears that developers for Farren may be more profit driven and not so interested in sustainable building.

How pursue new priority of outreach & education with practical energy & cost-saving ideas for residents, commercial entities?

Discuss ways to reach people, such as by:

- Social media.
- Tie into River Culture's outreach, energy-related cultural projects.
- Videos: Posted winsert assembling video on MEC webpage.
- Press releases, articles, some featuring local residents taking steps:
 - E.g. Using a smart meter to help save electricity & costs.
- Using a Kill-a-Watt meter from the Library of Things (already available?)
- Encouraging collective action
- Select board presentations
- Inviting guest speakers to MEC Zooms, such as Franklin Tech. and Greenfield Community College energy students and other energy experts to MEC meetings and promoting meetings
- Partner with & promote town & organizations on programs such as Winsert Community Builds: 9am - 1pm at Montague Town Hall Annex (located behind Town Hall at 1 Avenue A, Turners Falls) Saturday, September 26, Saturday, October 17 (Held at the Brick House), Saturday November 7.
- Other ideas?
 - How to grab interest?
 - Accumulated data from Mass Save program use available by town to show participation as a social norm.
 - Ray will send link.
 - Stats for Town, regions, MA?
 - Franklin Tech & GCC energy program?
 - Do they work with homeowners?
 - Do they study education & outreach?

- Ask Town to help raise awareness?
- Work together with energy aggregation to spread info?
- Announcing education at BOS meetings.
 - Encourage them to talk re EE on an ongoing basis, incorporate into their general discussions.
 - Suggest key points:
 - If discussing:
 - Energy efficiency, renewables.
 - Things that require energy.
 - Renovations with grants.
 - Ask BOS if this is something they're interested in personally.
- Developer who is putting in Habitat homes building to Specialized Code.
 - Least expensive both to build & operationally.
 - Habitat has presented updates to BOS.
 - Could ask Megan McDonough of Habitat if she would present BOS re energy efficiency, building costs/savings, what others can do to renovate?
- Share MEC updates with Walter, and MEC committee member would make updates to BOS.
- Potential topics to focus on:
 - Ways to use Smart meter to help lower electric bills & energy use.
 - Challenging perceptions about energy-related issues.
 - Mass Save/Community Action program, rebates.
 - Simple, low-cost DIY projects like: installing door sweeps, installing weatherstripping in doors & windows, using replaceable cord caulk to seal window air leaks.
 - Others?

Approved May 12 & July 7, 2026 Meeting Minutes.

Discussion on becoming a Climate Leader Community. Tabled.

Updates on decarbonization plans for town buildings.

- Discussion regarding Specialized Stretch Code:
 - How sort out conflicting perspectives on Specialized Code?
 - Spray foam insulation has high total Global Warming Impact.
 - Report on discussion with building expert. (Ray & Sally)

- Invite Paul Lipke to talk about likelihood that spray foam insulation would be used to meet Passive House standards for required for 12,000+ SF buildings under Specialized Code?
- Reach out to local builders about their practices, how they meet Stretch Code, would meet Specialized Stretch Code, concerns, their questions?
 - Brief report on conversation with local builder. (Sally)
 - Discuss ideas re educating builders about Specialized Code.
 - Promote free Mass Save contractor trainings.
 - Other trainings?
- Recommend that Town projects require spray foam insulation installer be a third party certified company and that the on-site installer be a certified installer, to avoid problems that are expensive & hard to fix retroactively? (Peter Yost & another builder require that for projects they oversee.)

State & federal level energy-related policies & legislation updates

Updates on MA climate legislation, including climate bank and climate bill.

- The following bills are in conference committee (legislature extended deadline past end of session (July), for these to be finalized:
 - Energy bill: House & Senate bills do not include proposed Mass Save cuts or large gas pipeline expansion.
 - Mass Ready Act: (Environmental Bond Bill) improvements to protect natural and working lands and infrastructure resilience to climate disasters included in House & Senate bills.
 - Climate Bank: Environmental Bond Bill requires a report be issued by 1/1/27 by MA Energy & Environmental Affairs to legislators on climate bank concepts.

Energy Related Town Facility Updates, including Schools. Tabled.

- Potential MEC input for Farren site development.
- Further discussion on the possibility of putting PV panels on the roof of the DPW & the Public Safety Complex, potentially with battery backup, and EV chargers for residents.
- MA Embodied Carbon Intergovernmental Council recommendations:
 - Municipalities not required to follow recommendations but can decide to:

- Require Environmental Product Declarations (EDPs) for building and road project RFPs.
- Use state model embodied carbon procurement from Mass Dept. of Transportation (DOT) & Division of Capital Asset Management & Maintenance (DCAMM).
 - Green Communities will lead municipalities on embodied carbon.
- Harmonize municipal recommendations from Mass Climate Action Network (MCAN) for building RFPs.
- HERS raters & embodied carbon:
 - Now able to recommend low embodied carbon building materials.
 - HERS score credits, incentives can drive low embodied carbon material use, according to MA 100 Home embodied carbon study.
- Organize education for builders & residents on embodied carbon in building materials (especially as Farren plans being developed?)

Other topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours in advance of meeting.

- Chris Mason expressed interest in re-joining MEC.

Announcements (no discussion).

- MA legislature moved forward in Senate & House with Act to improve outdoor lighting, conserve energy & increase dark-sky visibility, but it does not appear to have been passed into law.

Plan agenda, date for next meeting. Next meeting Tuesday, Sept. 22, 2026, 4:30-6pm.