

MVP Case Study

Municipality/Nonprofit Organization: Town of Weston, MA

Project Title: Weston Ahead Climate Action & Resilience Plan

Grant Award: \$100,000

Match: \$33,437.35

Community Overview:

The Town of Weston is a suburban community about 20 miles west of Boston. The town has a population of around 12,000 residents. The community is highly educated—82.8% of residents 25 and older have a bachelor's degree or higher—and is predominately white. The Town has one of the highest median household incomes in the state. People are drawn to Weston for its historical character, open spaces, and good schools. Its proximity to Boston and urban life paired with the pace of life and rural spaces draws people from across the region.

Description of Climate Impact:

Like most Massachusetts communities, Weston has seen an increase in the frequency and severity of intense storm events, flooding, drought, and extreme heat. These trends, which are predicted to worsen in the coming years, affect the health of the Town's residents, its natural resources, and its infrastructure. Annual precipitation is expected to increase by up to 6 inches by 2050, with 10 more days per year with precipitation of more than 1 inch. This increase in frequency of high-intensity rainfall events will result in an increased risk of flooding. Weston is also expected to see an increase in the number of days over 90 °F—up to 10-35. The combination of rising temperatures and more concentrated periods of precipitation is also projected to increase the frequency of short-term droughts. When taken together, these climate hazards will bring more power outages, damage to critical infrastructure, stress on local wetlands, and an increased risk of heat-related and vector-borne illness and disease. The *Weston Ahead Climate Action & Resilience Plan* seeks to reduce the Town's contribution to climate change and build resilience to the climate threats that are already upon us.

Project Goals:

The goals of the *Weston Ahead* planning process sought to bring the community on board with climate action by engaging, educating and empowering folks to take action. Due to COVID, some of the goals related to engagement and education had to shift and in the end were maybe not as effective as they would have been if in-person engagement was possible. Some of Weston's key project goals were to:

- Conduct a deep and equitable engagement process reaching Town Staff and 15% of Town residents in the planning process. A focus was on reaching the most vulnerable

(seniors, non-English speakers, and those living on a lower/fixed income) to understand the needs and priorities related to climate preparedness, resilience, and adaptation.

- Build common language to better communicate and collaborate across the community to identify solutions to prepare Weston for impacts of climate change.
- Help residents understand risks of climate change through educational events to ensure they are able to more safely manage climate impacts in a sustainable and healthy manner. Examples include how to manage for tick and mosquito illness, how to prioritize native species and manage for invasives, how to prepare for storm events impacting property damage and communications infrastructure.
- Incorporate nature-based solutions and strategies to ensure natural resources are preserved and enhanced through sustainable management practices and regulations; trails and protected open space create a connected network of healthy habitats and accessible recreation options; and air and water quality meet or exceed state and federal standards.
- Address climate change by reducing the Town's GHG emissions. The Town adopted the following specific emissions reduction goals, in line with the State decarbonization roadmap:
 - 100% renewable energy for municipal operations by 2035
 - 50% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2035 in the residential and commercial sectors
 - Zero net carbon emissions in Weston by 2050

Approach and Result:

Weston Ahead is the result of a collaborative effort involving residents, Town officials, and technical experts. Project leaders included:

- **Climate Resilience Working Group (CRWG):** Group of 30+ technical experts, Town staff, and community leaders who advised and supported the climate action planning process, and provided guidance on goals, priority actions, and implementation steps.
- **Town Project Team:** Town management, volunteers, and consultant team who organized the planning process and synthesized all public feedback to develop the final Plan. Kim Lungren Associates (KLA) was hired as the consulting team to facilitate the development of the Climate Action & Resilience Plan.

The project team took the following steps to develop *Weston Ahead*:

Baseline Assessment & Goal Setting

- Reviewed existing plans and policies and baseline performance data in Weston and completed a GHG Inventory

- Established goal statements articulating what Weston hopes to achieve across five planning elements

Action Identification

- Compiled action ideas via public surveys, interviews, CRWG meetings

Action Prioritization

- Evaluated actions using Guiding Principles to determine priority actions
- Conducted technical focus groups with key Town staff and community members

Implementation Steps Development

- Articulated steps, timeframe, level of effort, and champions to implement key actions in the form of detailed implementation blueprints

Final Plan Development

- Compiled all inputs and summarized process outcomes in final Plan document

Communication Support

- Created a project brand
- Produced a promotional video that is highlighted at www.westonahead.org
- Developed regular social media posts
- Developed promotional/engagement material for plan launch, gathering community input, ongoing awareness building and implementation

Community engagement and input were critical to the success of the Weston Ahead planning process. Below are some highlights from the project's engagement efforts:

- 493 responses to 3 online surveys
- 65 stakeholders engaged in interviews/focus groups
- 1 Climate Leaders training
- 1 Climate Action Toolkit published
- 6 Town newsletter mentions
- 80+ social media posts
- 31 working group members

Lessons Learned:

Given that this project was conducted entirely during the COVID-19 pandemic, the project team learned the value of being adaptive and creative. Group brainstorming meetings that would normally have been in person with materials such as post-it notes and markers to organize our thinking were adapted to be online. The team explored new technologies and were able to rise to the challenge, crowdsourcing ideas and feedback just as well online as in person. This

adaptive and creative approach laid a strong foundation for the implementation of the plan, which will require a bold approach to combat climate change.

Examples include:

- Use of zoom meeting platform with breakout rooms for large group meetings, facilitated by KLA staff, and the use of screen share, Google Jamboard to collect comments and facilitate discussion.
- Use of Zoom to host small group Focus Group discussions to gather input for the CARP blueprints
- Use of Metroquest survey platform to gather feedback on priorities for CARP strategies and actions, including a map asking for ideas for alternative transportation and e-vehicle infrastructure.

Additionally, the greenhouse gas inventory and other background research revealed key areas that Weston will have to focus on to become a more sustainable community, as well as strengths they can build on to achieve their goals. The analysis revealed high water usage and high rates of natural gas consumption in Weston homes. Conversations with local experts and residents revealed high levels of engagement in sustainability topics. Diving into the Weston community's strengths and weaknesses allowed the project team to craft highly specific actions that are particularly suited to the Town as well as develop a robust Climate Action Toolkit for Residents.

Partners and Other Support:

Town of Weston Lead

- Leon Gaumont, Town Manager

Volunteer Leads

- Phoebe Beierle, Sustainability Committee, Permanent Building Committee Representative
- Katharina Wilkins, Sustainability Committee, Select Board Representative

Community Resilience Working Group

- Charles Young, Purchasing
- Christopher Fitzgerald, Recreation Department
- Dana Orkin, Planning
- David Soar, Fire Department, Fire Chief
- Gary Jarowski, Facilities
- Jackie Liu, Weston High School
- Jacquelyn Jackson, Public Works
- Jeff Barz-Snell, Sustainable Weston Action Group, First Parish Church
- Jim Polando, Permanent Buildings Committee

- Joel Angiolillo, Weston Forest and Trail Association
- Justin Woodside, Fire Department
- Kara Fleming, Public Information Officer
- Laurie Bent, Select Board Chair
- Manuel Cifuentes, Regis College
- Marilyn DelDonno, Cambridge School of Weston
- Michael Goulding, Police Department, Chief of Police
- Michele Grzenda, Conservation Commission
- Mignonne Murray, Council on Aging
- Pallavi Kalia Mande, Charles River Watershed Association
- Pam Hess, Land's Sake Farm
- Rachel Stewart, Weston School Committee
- Rudy Ruggles, Weston Emergency Reserve Corps
- Sandra Gonneville, Conservation Commission
- Stephen Fogg, Public Works
- Thomas Cullen, Public Works
- Tony Flynn, Volunteer
- Wendy Diotalevi, Board of Health

Branding Subcommittee

- Alyson Muzila, Sustainable Weston Action Group, School Committee
- Laurie Bent, Select Board, Chair
- Liz Steel, Sustainable Weston Action Group
- Michele Grzenda, Conservation Commission
- Sandy Kendall, Sustainability Committee

Consultant Team

- Kim Lundgren Associates (KLA)
 - Talia Fox
 - Kari Hewitt
 - Kim Lundgren
 - Xico Manarolla
 - Maggie Peard
 - Michael Steinhoff
 - Annie Suttle
- Scouter Design
 - Terri Courtemarche

Project Photos:

Attached.