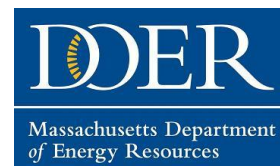




GREEN COMMUNITIES DESIGNATION AND GRANT PROGRAM



PROGRAM GUIDANCE

INTRODUCTION

The following guidance describes the Green Communities Designation and Grant Program process (pursuant to M.G.L.c. 25A §10).

Becoming designated as a Green Community provides grant funding to a municipality to support all or a portion of the cost of:

- studying, designing, constructing and implementing energy efficiency activities including, but not limited to, energy efficiency measures and projects;
- procuring energy management services;
- adopting energy efficiency policies; and,
- siting activities related to and construction of renewable energy generating facilities on municipally-owned property.

The Green Communities Designation and Grant process requires a sequence of steps:

- 1) **Prior to applying for designation, it is important for a municipality to review the Criteria Guidance documents to make sure that it is complying with the most recent guidance available.** To fully understand all five criteria, it is important to review all the detailed guidance for each criterion. Links to the web pages containing all Criteria Guidance documents are available in this document and at the [Green Communities Designation and Grant Program](#) page of DOER's website.
- 2) A municipality applies to DOER's Green Communities Division (the Division) for designation to demonstrate that it meets the five specific designation criteria. These criteria, along with documentation submission requirements, are outlined in this document. **Please note: if all the required documents listed are not included as part of the submission, the Division reserves the right to reject the application in its entirety.**
- 3) The Division reviews the application and determines whether a municipality meets the five criteria. The Division then informs the municipality of its decision. If designated a Green Community, the municipality then will be informed of the amount of its grant award.
- 4) The designated municipality submits a project proposal in the amount of its grant award.
- 5) The Division reviews the designated municipality's grant application and determines if the proposed projects are eligible for funding and are effective in terms of cost and energy savings.

This Program Guidance document is available at the [Green Communities Designation and Grant Program](#) page of DOER's website.

INSTRUCTIONS

Designation Application (Required)

To receive grant funding, the applicant first must be designated as a Green Community. To receive official designation as a Green Community, the applicant must complete the Designation Application and submit it to the Division for review. Once the Division has completed its review, it will notify the applicant whether it has been designated a Green Community.

Preliminary Consultation (Optional)

Those municipalities that wish to have their designation criteria reviewed prior to formally submitting a Designation Application may request a preliminary consultation with the Division. To receive a preliminary consultation, an applicant must submit an electronic request via email to its [Regional Coordinator](#). The request must specify which criterion or criteria for which the applicant is seeking consultation and include draft supporting documents. Preliminary consultation requests may be submitted at any time up until four weeks prior to the application deadline. Requesting a preliminary consultation early is recommended to allow time for Division review and consultation and for potential revision by the municipality before documents are presented for adoption at a Town Meeting.

Please note that comments by Division staff during a preliminary consultation do not represent designation approval.

Deadline for Designation Application

Designation applications for 2024 will be accepted in two rounds: June 21, 2024 and December 31, 2024. Applications must have all post-review issues resolved within six weeks after the deadline to be considered for designation.

To apply: Application is an entirely online process; no hard copies of any documents are to be submitted. Instructions for applying online are contained in this document. Contact your Regional Coordinator for access to the Green Communities Online Designation Application system.

Grant Application (Required for funding)

Once designated and informed of its grant amount, each Green Community is eligible to submit a proposal for the use of its grant award. Designated Green Communities must fill out a grant application (provided by DOER) and submit it for consideration. Award amounts will be based on available funds and a predetermined grant allocation formula.

Grant awards resulting from this process will be governed by 815 CMR 2.0.



Requirements for Becoming Designated as a Green Community

REQUIREMENTS FOR MEETING THE CRITERIA TO BE DESIGNATED AS A GREEN COMMUNITY

As outlined in MGL c. 25A §10(c), a municipality must do ALL of the following:

Participation by Municipalities Served by Municipal Light Plants

The Green Communities Act requires a specific path forward for municipalities served by municipal light plants that adopt the renewable energy charge to participate in the Green Communities Designation and Grant program. Some municipalities, however, do not clearly fit into the provisions of this statutory requirement because they are in the unusual situation of being served by multiple load serving entities - by an MLP as well as an investor-owned utility. DOER issued the following Guideline in May 2012:

Municipalities served by BOTH a municipal light plant and an investor-owned electric utility ARE eligible to apply for and become a designated Green Community.

Please note that any community in this category must submit to DOER materials (such as letters from its utility and the board of its municipal light plant) documenting that the community receives service from both entities.

CRITERION 1: AS-OF-RIGHT SITING – RENEWABLE ENERGY (RE) / ALTERNATIVE ENERGY (AE)

A municipality must provide zoning in designated locations for the as-of-right siting of:

1. renewable or alternative energy generating facilities,
OR
2. renewable or alternative energy research and development (R&D) facilities,
OR
3. renewable or alternative energy manufacturing facilities

IMPORTANT LINK:

[Criterion 1 Guidance Documents](#)

Documentation Required to Meet Criterion 1

The following documentation must be provided as evidence that the municipality has met this criterion.

- Brief description of the qualifying section of the bylaw or ordinance that identifies designated locations
- Color copy of the zoning map that shows area zoned
- Applicable sections of the zoning bylaw or ordinance
- Important zoning definitions
- Relevant section of the use table and any key that will help DOER interpret the use table
- Any related local regulations applicable to facilities sited under the bylaw/ordinance—such as site plan review regulations—so that DOER can confirm that the related local regulations are non-discretionary; and
- For *RE/AE R&D and/or Manufacturing Facilities only*: yield calculations, either in the text of the letter provided by municipal legal counsel or attached.
- For *RE/AE R&D and/or Manufacturing Facilities only*: if meeting the criterion through *existing* bylaws or ordinances, applicants must provide a letter from municipal legal counsel certifying that the existing zoning complies with the RE/AE Facilities criterion. In terms of specific contents, the letter must cite and summarize the pertinent section of the zoning ordinance/bylaw.

CRITERION 2: EXPEDITED PERMITTING

A municipality must adopt an expedited application and permitting process under which Criterion 1 facilities may be sited within the municipality, and the permitting process shall not exceed one (1) year from the date of initial application to the date of final approval.

- The expedited application and permitting process applies only to proposed facilities that are subject to the Criterion 1 as-of-right siting provision.
- An applicant can meet this requirement by applying the expedited permitting process of MGL c 43D to these zoning districts.
- Having a 43D site is NOT a requirement. See below for “Local Expedited Permitting Process.”

IMPORTANT LINK:

[Criterion 2 Guidance Document](#)

Documentation Required to Meet Criterion 2

The following documentation must be provided as evidence that an expedited application and permitting process has been fully adopted for the Criterion 1 as-of-right zoned parcels.

Local Expedited Permitting Process

- Municipalities must provide DOER with a letter from municipal legal counsel affirming that nothing within the municipality's rules and regulations precludes issuance of a permitting decision within one year, along with the language addressing approval procedures and associated timing of any applicable bylaws/ordinances or regulations.
- The applicant should also include a color copy of the applicable map(s) showing that the areas where the expedited permitting applies coincide with the as-of-right zoned areas for Criterion 1. If appropriate, this map may be the same as the map provided for Criterion 1.

MGL c43D

- Municipalities must provide DOER with a certified copy of their City Council or Town Meeting vote designating the as-of-right zoned parcel(s) as a Priority Development Site.
- The applicant should also include a color copy of the applicable map(s) showing the areas where the expedited permitting applies.

CRITERION 3: ENERGY BASELINE / 20 PERCENT ENERGY REDUCTION PLAN

A municipality must establish an energy use baseline inventory for all municipal buildings (which includes school buildings, drinking water and wastewater treatment plants, pumping stations, and open spaces), vehicles, and street and traffic lighting. A municipality must also adopt a comprehensive five-year Energy Reduction Plan (ERP) designed to reduce that baseline by 20 percent after completion of a full five-years of implementing its ERP.

IMPORTANT LINK:

[Criterion 3 Guidance Documents](#)

Documentation Required to Meet Criterion 3

The municipality must provide a copy of the Energy Reduction Plan for reducing energy consumption by 20 percent in five years across all municipal buildings, school buildings, municipal and school vehicles, street and traffic lighting, drinking water and wastewater treatment plants, pumping stations and open spaces owned by the municipality. At a minimum, the Plan must include the following information:

- Identification of the inventory tool used
- Identification of the baseline year used
- The energy baseline, broken down by buildings, vehicles, water/sewer and streetlights.
- *Specific energy conservation measures* to be implemented to achieve reductions of at least 15 percent, the energy reductions to be achieved, the basis for the projected energy reductions, and a timeline with milestones to implement measures and achieve required energy reductions.
- *General strategies* to achieve 5 percent or less in energy reductions.
- Documentation that both the municipal government and local school district have adopted the energy reduction plan. If a regional school district is included as part of the designation, documentation that the regional school district has adopted the plan must be included. See Criterion 3 Guidance, "Energy Reduction Plan Guidance," for more details.

CRITERION 4: PURCHASE ONLY FUEL-EFFICIENT VEHICLES

All Departments in the municipality must purchase only fuel-efficient vehicles for municipal use whenever such vehicles are commercially available and practicable.

IMPORTANT LINK

[Criterion 4 Guidance Documents](#)

Documentation Required to Meet Criterion 4:

The following documentation must be provided as evidence that the municipality has met this criterion:

- Copy of the policy or other mechanism adopted for purchasing only fuel-efficient vehicles
- Inventory of all vehicles (model, year, estimated MPG) including local school district vehicles, with exempt/non-exempt status indicated.
- A replacement plan for non-exempt vehicles with fuel-efficient vehicles
- Documentation that both the municipality and the local school district have adopted the fuel-efficient vehicle policy. If a regional school district is included as part of the designation, documentation that the regional school district has adopted the fuel-efficient vehicle policy must be included. See Criterion 4 Guidance, "Guidance and Model Policy for Purchasing Fuel Efficient Vehicles," for more details.

CRITERION 5: MINIMIZE LIFE-CYCLE COSTS

A municipality must require all new residential construction over 3,000 square feet and all new commercial and industrial real estate construction to minimize, to the extent feasible, the life cycle cost of facilities/buildings by utilizing energy efficiency, water conservation, and other renewable or alternative energy technologies.

The recommended way for cities and towns to meet this requirement is by adopting the Stretch Code (225 CMR 22 and 23). **Note:** *There is no minimum 3,000 square foot threshold for new residential construction if your municipality adopts the Stretch Code. All new residential construction, irrespective of size/square footage, will be subject to the Stretch Code.*

Towns are advised to adopt the Stretch Code as a general bylaw at Town Meeting. Cities are advised to adopt the Stretch Code by general ordinance voted by City Council.

Should a community choose to not adopt the Stretch Code and choose to use another standard, the community must provide evidence that this alternative standard minimizes the life cycle energy costs for new construction and is enforceable by the community. *While this option exists, no municipality has successfully met the requirements of Criterion 5 in this manner.*

IMPORTANT LINKS

[Criterion 5 Guidance Documents](#)

Documentation Required to Meet Criterion 5

The following documentation must be provided as evidence to verify that the municipality has met this criterion:

Stretch Energy Code

The municipality must provide documentation of the city council or town meeting vote adopting the Stretch Energy Code. Documentation of votes taken prior to December 23, 2022 should refer to the MA Board of Building Regulations and Standards (BBRS) regulation 780 CMR 115.AA. Votes taken after December 23, 2022 should refer to 225 CMR 22 and 23. **The vote must include the effective date of the Stretch Energy Code.**

PLEASE NOTE: As of December 23, 2022 780 CMR 115.AA is no longer in effect. **The municipality MUST adopt 225 CMR 22 and 23**

Alternative Local Process

The municipality must provide documentation of the standard adopted, the mechanism in place for requiring this criterion for new construction, and documentation of how this standard provides reduced life cycle energy costs.

NOTE: Municipalities planning to meet this criterion through a local process are encouraged to submit a description of the process, with supporting documentation, in advance of applying for designation. In this way, the Green Communities Division can provide feedback on the acceptability of the identified process for meeting this criterion.

MUNICIPALITIES SERVED BY MUNICIPAL LIGHT PLANTS (MLP)

For municipalities served by MLPs, one of the following must apply to be designated a Green Community

- The MLP must have adopted the renewable energy charge; or
- The municipality must be served by an investor-owned electric utility in addition to the MLP; or
- In multi-jurisdictional MLP territories, the municipality must have adopted the renewable energy charge

Documentation Required

The municipality must provide evidence that one of the above applies. This can include:

- Documentation from the Massachusetts Renewable Energy Trust or Massachusetts Clean Energy Center verifying that the MLP, or (in the case of a municipality in a multi-jurisdictional MLP) the municipality has adopted the renewable energy charge
- Documentation from an investor-owned utility that it serves customers within the municipality's borders



Online Instructions for Designation Application Process

First Step—The city or town designates a single Point of Contact and provides to its Regional Coordinator the name, title, phone, email address, and legal address of city or town including zip code. The single Point of Contact receives an email invitation to the online application system. Follow the link provided in that email and create a member profile and password.

When the Point of Contact logs back into the system with his/her username and password, he/she will be directed to the Online Designation Application System. He/she will see a welcome message and navigation links in the left-hand column— “Instructions” and “Proceed to Fill Out Forms,” as well as some Tabs along the top. Click on either to expand the navigation menu, and click on any title to view information or alternatively click on a Tab.

Second Step—Log in to become familiar with the online system and the five (5) criterion forms. Click on “Instructions” and “Proceed to Fill Out Forms” to expand the navigation menu or use the Tabs along the top. Click any titles to see more information.

If you want to practice using the system, you can do so without using the <Submit> button and nothing will be saved. **Please submit each form only once.**

Third Step—Have ready in electronic form all the information and supporting files for each criterion. If possible, use a high speed (broadband) Internet connection rather than a dial-up connection, which could be frustratingly slow for uploading files.

If you do not see your city / town name on any of the forms or have any other problems or questions, please contact Jane Pfister (jane.pfister@mass.gov)

You do not have to submit all the criterion forms in the same online session but must submit them one by one. You cannot return to a partially completed form to change or add files. Each time you log in, you will see blank forms, even if you have submitted them previously. Do not worry - the information and files are saved to the online system when you see the confirmation page after each successful submission of a form.

For each form, choose your city / town name from the drop-down list, the first field in each form. Usually, multiple documents support a criterion. Please submit them as separate PDFs, rather than combined into a single file. For each file, begin the file name with city / town name, followed by criterion abbreviation (CR1, CR2, CR3, CR4, CR5), then wording that makes the content of the file clear.

For each designation criterion, you will upload one or more supporting files. You will see six (6) green "File Upload" lines on the bottom of each form.

To attach a file, click on <Browse> button to browse on your computer, select the file, then double click on it. You can repeat the process on each green line. If you have more than six (6) files for a criterion form, create a Compressed (zipped) file. Upload and name the compressed files the same way you named and uploaded single files.

When submitting a form, you may receive the following message: “This form is non-secure - do you still want to send it?” This is just informational and nothing to worry about. Answer <Yes>. You’ll go to a confirmation page if the submission was successful.

Each time you submit a form, you will get redirected to a confirmation page that your submission was successful. You will also get an email message confirming that DOER's Green Communities Division has received the submission and the number of files uploaded with it.

Creating a Compressed (zip) file

1. Put all the files (e.g. more than six) you want to attach somewhere on your computer where you can see all of them at the same time (e.g. in one folder).
2. Select all the files you wish to include by holding down the <Ctrl> key as you click each one. They will all be highlighted in blue.
3. Right click any of the highlighted files (put your cursor over one of the files and click the right button on your mouse or other pointing device).
4. Select <Send To> (about half way down the pop-up menu).
5. Select <Compressed (zipped) Folder/File> from the next pop-up menu.
6. Find the new file. It will have the name of one of the files you selected (in step 3), but with a .zip extension (e.g. Energy Reduction Plan.zip).
7. Rename the file to conform to DOER requirements. Right click the file name and select <Rename> (near the bottom of the menu).
8. Change only the name to the left of the period (i.e. keep the .zip extension). Begin with city/town name, followed by criterion code (CR1, CR2, CR3, CR4, CR5), then wording that makes the content clear.

Fourth Step—Review the Form and upload files listed there. If everything looks good, use the <Submit> button to submit the form. You will see a confirmation page if successful. You can then choose another criterion form to work on or log out and return later. If you are only practicing, do not use the <Submit> button and nothing will be saved to the online system. **Please submit only ONE form per criterion.**

If you need to submit additional files, make a change, or have any other problems or questions, please contact Jane Pfister (jane.pfister@mass.gov). Each time DOER receives a criterion form, you will receive an email within one business day confirming a successful submission and the number of files uploaded with it.