

History of Town Meeting

Vermont's town meetings are one of the longest-thriving institutions of direct democracy in the world today. Vermont is one of only three or four US states with a relatively intact town meeting tradition. Among these states, Vermont's town meeting tradition is the most dynamic, with very broad participation of town residents, not just those who are consistently active in local politics.

The vitality of Vermont's town meeting tradition was significantly enhanced in the early 1980s, when 159 out of 237 Vermont town meetings responded to the escalating arms race with the Soviet Union by approving resolutions in support of a freeze on nuclear weapons production. This initiative sparked the development of a national Nuclear Freeze movement, which eventually pressured a reluctant Ronald Reagan administration to resume, and eventually accelerate, arms control negotiations with the Soviets. Since the 1980s, Vermont town meetings have included lively debates over issues such as acid rain, nuclear power, the US war on Iraq, proposals to impeach George W. Bush, and many others. During the early 2000s, activists launched an effort that led to 85 Vermont towns, and a total of 120 across New England, passing resolutions opposing the use of genetically modified organisms in agriculture. In 2013 and 2014, a broad coalition of environmentalists worked to enlist Vermont towns in opposition to plans by an Exxon-Mobil-owned oil pipeline company to transport highly corrosive and toxic material from Canada's Alberta Tar Sands through northern Vermont.

All these efforts have contributed to the continuing importance of Vermont's town meetings. When scores of towns pass resolutions on matters of national and global significance, it frequently helps jump-start broader organizing efforts around these issues. Well-coordinated town meeting efforts can help bring a new issue or concern to the center of public attention statewide, and beyond.

Contact information:

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www.350vermont.org



**(re) generate
new
solutions**

Building Momentum for Alternatives to Fossil Fuels



Steps to Passing a Resolution in Your Town

- 1** Contact the 350Vermont office to get names of others in your area and for ongoing resources and support.
- 2** Gather friends and allies to help plan your effort, whether at house parties, node meetings, or other public or private gatherings.
- 3** Confirm petition wording with your group, and print petitions in the proper format (or ask us to print some for you).
- 4** Recruit others to help, and begin collecting signatures. Attend a group-canvassing day. Remember to give yourselves enough time to collect the required number of signatures by the due date.
- 5** Contact your Town Clerk to find out how many signatures you need (usually 5% of your town's registered voters), and the town's due date for those signatures (usually mid-to-late January).
- 6** Find out more information about 350VT's (Re)Generate New Solutions Campaign. Consider organizing an educational forum or film showing, perhaps with others from nearby towns.
- 7** Practice public speaking with your friends, during node meetings or at 350VT public speaking trainings.
- 8** Communicate with town officials, and related groups and businesses in your town, to assess their concerns and seek their support.
- 9** Learn about the Town Meeting process, plan your presentation, and prepare for any unexpected circumstances or issues that may arise.
- 10** Get out the vote! Encourage your friends and allies to come out to Town Meeting Day and support the resolution.
- 11** Report the results of your Town Meeting vote to the 350VT office, along with the final language that passed in your town.

Mad River Community Solar Farm*

Mad River Community Solar Farm is a community array that utilizes the innovative member-owned concept created through Aegis' development of the Boardman Hill Solar Farm. Each member owns between 3 and 87 solar panels.

The array consists of a total of 616 solar panels and is located in Waitsfield, Vermont.

The members democratically manage the array through the formation of an LLC comprised of all members. The LLC members each own their share of the solar equipment in the system, providing member-owners control over their investment and retaining eligibility for key tax credits and incentives.

The electricity generated by the solar array will substantially reduce annual electric costs for its members. The REC's (renewable energy credits) associated with the array are retired, making this a truly "green" project.

* This description is from the Aegis website: <https://www.aegis-re.com/mrcsf-1>

Rural Community Transportation

Transportation has been identified as the leading contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in Vermont. It will require a great deal of innovation to reduce the emissions from transportation. Rural Community Transportation (RCT) was first created through a grant from the Federal Urban Mass Transportation Administration, to coordinate Medicaid transportation services from Lyndonville. Eventually, services were expanded to include the general public. RCT is a transportation provider that uses all modes of transportation including buses, cars, taxis, vans, and volunteer drivers, and provides four FREE shuttle routes and five FREE shopping routes, connecting rural communities in the Northeast Kingdom and Central Vermont. RCT is making mass transit accessible in remote rural areas.



Regenerative Agriculture Solutions

Many Vermont farmers are implementing regenerative agricultural practices. The incorporation of regenerative agriculture will help Vermont meet its goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and is one of many solutions we can support in making the transition towards a renewable energy economy. The basic principles of regenerative agriculture incorporate holistic and sustainable approaches into farming practices. Growers focus on building organic matter in the soil, by cover cropping, and by limiting tillage and the application of chemical fertilizers. Many studies from around the world are demonstrating the carbon sequestration capabilities of regenerative ag. Implementing these approaches in Vermont will also help greatly to improve water quality in our lakes and rivers.

Photo: "The Red Bus," <http://www.riderct.org/>

Local Success Stories

Hinesburg vs. Vermont Gas

A group of residents from Hinesburg banded together in early 2016 to attempt to stop the seizure of their public lands, Geprags Park, for the fracked gas pipeline. In a David versus Goliath struggle with Vermont Gas, the group, called Protect Geprags Park, succeeded in protecting their park from destructive surface pipeline construction, and Vermont Gas was forced to use horizontal drilling. Protect Geprags Park continues their work, now focusing on the lingering safety issues of the entire pipeline from Colchester to Middlebury. Protect Geprags Park leveraged their community organizing power at the local and state level. They are an inspiration!

Vermod Houses

After Tropical Storm Irene, it was evident to state assessors that mobile home owners experienced a greater proportion of the storm's damage. The need for affordable, durable and efficient housing was clear, and motivated the collaboration of the High Meadows Fund, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and Efficiency Vermont in forming the Modular Housing Innovation Project, led by contractor Steve Davis. This project led to the creation of the Vermod, a non-toxic, durable, efficient, and affordable modular home. "Traditional manufactured homes are a depreciating asset like a car or an RV. Conversely, zero-energy modular homes appreciate like a house. I want to replace every home in my mobile home parks with these units." - Jim, affordable housing partner, Hardwick.



Photo courtesy of Abby Mnookin

VBike

In 2014, Dave Cohen founded VBike. The mission of the organization is to demonstrate that bike riding can be a reliable form of transportation in Vermont. VBike is "dedicated to shifting the bike and bike culture in Vermont towards a far more inclusive, fun, and transportation-oriented future." With cargo bikes and electric-assist technology, most anyone can get around on their bicycles.

(Re)Solution Version 1

The undersigned voters of the Town of _____ request that the Selectboard warn the following resolution for our 2018 Town Meeting:

WHEREAS extreme and erratic temperatures, increasingly severe storms, a rise in tick-borne diseases, and threats to farmers and maple sugar makers clearly demonstrate that climate change is one of the most urgent problems facing our state, nation, and the world, and

WHEREAS the State of Vermont has a goal in the Comprehensive Energy Plan to achieve 90% of its energy from renewable sources by 2050, yet is making insufficient progress towards achieving that goal;

Now, therefore, be it resolved:

That the Town urges the State of Vermont to:

- a. Halt any new or expanded fossil fuel infrastructure, including but not limited to energy pipelines;
- b. Firmly commit to at least 90% renewable energy for all people in Vermont, with firm interim deadlines; and,
- c. Ensure that the transition to renewable energy is fair and equitable for all residents, with no harm to marginalized groups or rural communities.

Name (Print) Signature Address where registered to vote Phone/email (optional)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

Purpose of a Town Meeting Day Resolution*

We need solutions on the local level. This (Re)Solution campaign is part of a broader Re(Generate) New Solutions Campaign: Building momentum for alternatives to fossil fuels. The purpose of the (Re)Solutions campaign is to demonstrate the demand for local solutions and be a first step in a multi-year campaign. We are taking our demands from the streets to our town halls. Dozens of towns are pursuing resolutions this year, and we expect dozens more next year to continue and broaden our demands.

Despite the State of Vermont's goal to power Vermont by 90% renewables by 2050, we are far from meeting this goal. Similarly, a recently released report from the United Nations shows that the worldwide effort to stem greenhouse gases has fallen short of the goal set by the Paris Climate agreement. We need to do more at every level of government to decarbonize the atmosphere and build momentum towards alternatives to fossil fuels. That's what 350VT's Town Meeting Day (Re)Solutions are all about!

Why have two versions?

Version 1 is a simple list of broad demands. This is a great place to start, especially if your town has not started building local solutions to the climate crisis. Version 2 includes language for specific demands for your town. Is your town under threat of fossil fuel infrastructure? Is your town already implementing renewable energy that the resolution could celebrate and support? Are there other specific initiatives or plans for weatherization to support and expedite with this resolution?



Mad River Community Solar Farm
Photo: <https://www.aegis-re.com/mrcsf-1>

* This resolution is advisory, not mandatory. Mandatory resolutions require the approval of the Vermont State Legislature.

According to Fourth National Climate Assessment, by the U.S. Global Change Research Program, Vermont is already seeing a 25% increase in severe precipitation events. Vermont is warming faster in winter than any other area in the US.

Improved environmental and public health

Cleaner energy better protects the climate, soil and water: There will be less air pollution without combustion engines and coal powered energy plants, fewer oil spills and gas leaks, and cleaner water.

Cutting pollution levels and the presence of fossil fuels in our environment will lead to less asthma and other respiratory diseases, and lower cancer rates, while reducing the financial burdens put on states by these public health risks.

Climate Justice

Poorer nations contribute less to CO₂ emissions, yet many are feeling the impact of climate change at a greater rate. We need to do our part!

Impacts of climate change are already forcing relocations and migration. Agriculture and food production will be greatly impacted by climate change. Small-scale, family or subsistence farmers produce 75% of food production around the world and are the ones being most impacted by climate change. Some have been forced to abandon their farms, leading to increased economic and political instability around the world.

Sources: Ready for 100% Clean Energy Factsheet, Vermont 2017 Clean Energy Industry Report, Renewables 100 Policy Institute, 350Vermont, Climate Central

How To Talk About the (Re)Solution

Job growth and economic benefits

Clean energy saves money: Stanford scientists say the transition to 100% clean energy will save the average family over \$200 dollars per year in energy costs and another \$1,500 per year in healthcare costs.

Clean energy creates good-paying jobs: The solar industry employs over 200,000 people, nearly twice as many people as the coal-mining industry. Vermont saw jobs in the clean energy segment grow 29% since 2013, an additional 19,000 jobs in VT.

The renewable energy industry has created hundreds of thousands of new jobs and has grown into a multibillion-dollar industry, creating revenue for cities and states. With only about 15% of U.S. energy supplied by renewables, there is the opportunity for infrastructure expansion and enormous economic growth potential.

Power of the people

Numerous experts agree that the biggest hurdle to going 100% renewable is not technical or financial but political. Technologies to get us to 100% renewable energy exist and are becoming more affordable. Building the political will in the face of entrenched interests is the largest challenge, and this is up to us!

Vermont is full of examples of small-scale innovation (see success stories below). Let's promote more experimentation and sharing of successes.

A decentralized, diversified, renewably-powered grid will provide more reliable and resilient energy to communities. We will be more resilient to extreme weather when our power is generated and stored locally.

Effects of climate change in VT

Ticks that carry Lyme disease were unheard of in Vermont 15 years ago. As temperatures warm, ticks have moved north infecting people with Lyme and other tick-borne diseases.

(Re)Solution Version 2*

The undersigned voters of the Town of _____ request that the Selectboard warn the following resolution for our 2018 Town Meeting:

WHEREAS extreme and erratic temperatures, increasingly severe storms, a rise in tick-borne diseases, and threats to farmers and maple sugar makers clearly demonstrate that climate change is one of the most urgent problems facing our state, nation, and the world, and

WHEREAS the State of Vermont has a goal in the Comprehensive Energy Plan to achieve 90% of its energy from renewable sources by 2050, yet is making insufficient progress towards achieving that goal;

Now, therefore, be it resolved:

1. That the Town urges the State of Vermont to:
 - a. Halt any new or expanded fossil fuel infrastructure, including but not limited to energy pipelines;
 - b. Firmly commit to at least 90% renewable energy for all people in Vermont, with firm interim deadlines; and,
 - c. Ensure that the transition to renewable energy is fair and equitable for all residents, with no harm to marginalized groups or rural communities.
2. That the Town will do our part to meet these demands by committing to efforts such as:
 - a. Protecting town lands from fossil fuel infrastructure, denying easements or agreements for any pipelines crossing town lands;
 - b. Weatherizing town buildings and schools;
 - c. Enlisting state support to install roof-top solar on town and school buildings;
 - d. Other initiatives to improve residents' quality of life while helping us reduce overall energy use.

Name (Print) Signature Address where registered to vote Phone/email (optional)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

* The list of town-specific demands is provided as an example. Each town should modify the language in this list to be specific to the initiatives, plans, and needs of each unique community.

Want to modify the resolution to better suit your town?

Great! We welcome it. A successful resolution is one that can engage a majority of residents in your town and be relevant to the local community's needs and desires. The resolution is modifiable and many towns may have variations on the resolution's wording. Please send us your resolution language so we can share it with the whole network. We request that any version of the resolution maintain the three main topics (see directly below): **stopping fossil fuel infrastructure, building to at least 90% renewables, and making the transition fair and equitable.**

Here are some other ideas for modifications:

Your group may or may not want to name Vermont's Comprehensive Energy Plan in your resolution. It is not a perfect plan, especially because the targets include natural gas—*fracked* natural gas; however, it is an important statewide target, and one that Vermont is not on track to meet.

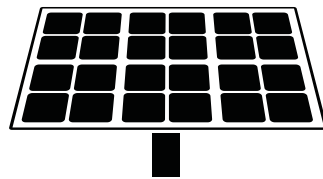
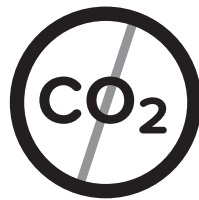
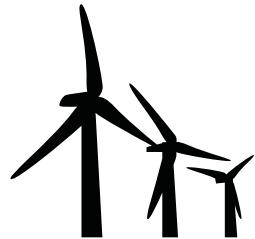
Does your group have specific dates to include to reach targets or implement projects? For example, do you want to see electric school buses purchased in 2019? Perhaps your town has committed to a community solar project, but needs a deadline. Can you make your goals specific?

Focus on conservation. Are there specific and measurable ways that your town can reduce its power and fuel consumption? List these in section 2!

Have conservation or transition efforts in your town been hampered by local or state regulations? Consider including language to challenge the status quo.

Highlight resilience measures! What could your community do now to better prepare for climate crises like storms, floods, disease, displaced peoples, etc.

Go local. What localization efforts are happening in your town that the resolution could amplify and support? Local foods, local housing, community-level self sufficiency, etc.



Our Demands

1. Stop Fossil Fuel Infrastructure

All across the country from Portland, Oregon, to Portland, Maine, resolutions and policies are being passed that restrict or prevent the expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure. The communities that have passed these resolutions recognize that it is time to put a hard stop to any projects that promote the use of fossil fuels. The best way to Keep It In The Ground is to stop building the pipes to transport it and the refineries to process it. It is time for cities, towns, and states to take the bold step of not permitting any new fossil fuel infrastructure projects.

2. Go Renewable

We are serious about the commitment to power our communities solely with renewables. Vermont's Comprehensive Energy Plan calls for 90% renewable energy by 2050, but we are Ready for 100%. We need firm interim targets and policies to greatly reduce consumption of fuel and power, while also switching to renewable sources. With this resolution, we urge the legislature and Governor of the State of Vermont to pursue the policies to reach these target goals. Simultaneously, we commit at the town level to pursue and implement local initiatives such as deep energy conservation, renewable power, electrified transportation, and renewable heat sources.

3. The transition is fair and equitable

What do we mean by a fair and equitable transition? Let's consult some experts:

Bill McKibben, in conversation with Jacqueline Patterson, director of the NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program, asked, "People talk a lot about 'just transition,' but what does that mean?" She replied, "I will say what I've heard from various front-line groups, defining what it looks like in their communities...just transition is about energy access and affordability, it's about livelihood for oneself and one's family, and it's about being sensitive about tax revenues and how we're shifting them."¹

Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN) describes a justice-based transition with regenerative systems change that adheres to natural law and indigenous knowledge. Check out IEN's full list of Indigenous Principles of Just Transition, which includes this one²:

A Just Transition is a vision-led, unifying and place-based set of principles, processes and practices that build cultural, social, economic and political power to shift from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy. The transition itself must be just and equitable; redressing past harms and creating new relationships of power for the future through reparations.

¹ <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/just-transition/climate-justice-is-racial-justice-is-gender-justice-20170818>

² <http://www.ienearth.org/justtransition/>