

Acton Environmental Sustainability Policy

Adopted January 27, 2025

Replaces 2018 Acton Environmental Sustainability Policy¹

WHEREAS: The Town of Acton (“Town”) and the Select Board recognize that natural resources and ecological systems are integral to the well-being and lives of its residents, as well as to communities across the world facing climate and environmental crises;

WHEREAS: Environmental sustainability means allowing the needs of the present population to be met in ways that do not prevent future populations from meeting their needs;

WHEREAS: Recognizing that present and future sustainability means

- (1) understanding Acton’s resources and natural systems,
- (2) eliminating or minimizing harms to them, and
- (3) regenerating compromised resources and systems for the long term;

WHEREAS: Given the Town’s location and the ecosystems within and bordering the Town, Acton’s primary environmental sustainability priorities are

- (1) climate mitigation and resilience,
- (2) protection or remediation of local and regional ecosystems, including the water system, and
- (3) public health;

WHEREAS: The Town and Select Board have a noteworthy history of environmental and climate action, as well as demonstrated leadership in sustainability in the Commonwealth, and recognize that continual tracking and routine updates to extant plans and policies are needed for consistent progress;

THEREFORE:

1. The Town, via the Select Board and Town Manager, will take into account environmental sustainability in policies, budgets, bylaws, projects, purchases, and contracts.
2. Annually, the Town Manager (or the Manager's designee) will present to the Select Board a progress report on the Town’s primary environmental

sustainability priorities. The report will include an updated list of initiatives and programs, with input from appropriate Town Departments and Divisions.

3. The Town will track progress toward, and advance the goal of, Town-wide net zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions with a target date of 2030, as articulated in the Climate Emergency Declaration of 2020 Town Meeting². In tracking progress, the Town will use categories from the Town's *Climate Action Plan*³ and *Climate Action Tracker*,⁴ and methods from the Town's periodic *Greenhouse Gas Inventory* reports.⁵ Consistent with Acton's Climate Action Plan, Hazard Mitigation Plan,⁶ and Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Plan,⁷ the Town will prioritize efforts on mitigation (emissions reduction) and resilience (preparation for coming climate impacts).
4. When staff, committees, and boards participate in land use planning and decisions, they will take into account the importance of protecting forests, meadows, wetlands, and ground and surface waters. Sometimes, protection is not enough, and remediation is needed. The Town will strive to improve ecosystem functioning that has been compromised by contaminants or other harmful human activity.
5. Because the Town operates within the limits of its financial and human resources, staff, boards, and committees should prioritize the actions that have the strongest sustainability impact. To expand the Town's capacity to address environmental sustainability, staff will continue to seek financial and technical assistance from state and federal governments and agencies.

This policy is deliberately broad because specific goals, plans, and technologies change from year to year. The Town is encouraged to continue to create specific policies for various sectors, such as the *Town of Acton Zero-Emission Vehicle First Policy*,⁸ and the *Policy Encouraging Building with Clean Energy*.⁹

This policy should be reviewed periodically by the Select Board, Town Manager, other Town staff, and community stakeholders.

- 1 The 2018 policy is entitled Acton Board of Selectmen Environmental Sustainability Policy and is available at <https://actonma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/6769/Acton-Board-of-Selectmen-Environmental-Sustainability-PolicyDecember-10-2018> (verified Sep 2024)
- 2 The Climate Emergency Declaration was passed at the Fall Town Meeting of 2020. The complete text is here: <https://www.acton-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/7304/Climate-Emergency-Resolution-As-Passed> and a presentation with more context is here: <https://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/Get/Document-73633/010%20-%20Town%20Presentations%20Acton%20Climate%20Emergency.pdf>
- 3 Acton's most recent Climate Action Plan is in a file called "CAP Final_7.28.22.pdf" The title page reads "ActOn Climate: The Road to a Resilient Net Zero Future" and it can be found at <https://www.acton-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/8096/Climate-Action-Plan-Final> (verified Sep 2024)
- 4 Acton's Climate Action Tracker is a web-based storymap available at <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/9dad1694db2f464387715460b3acbd07> (verified Sep 2024)
- 5 As of Sep 2024, the Town's DocuShare system has a folder called "Greenhouse Gas Inventory Reports" with folders for the 2017 inventory and the 2022 inventory at <https://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-17632>
- 6 The 2018 Hazard Mitigation Plan is available as a PDF at <https://www.actonma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/7486/Hazard-Mitigation-Plan-Adopted-2018>. A new version is under development as of Sept 2024. Links to drafts in process can be found at <https://www.actonma.gov/826/Hazard-Mitigation-Plan>
- 7 The 2018 Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Plan is available as a PDF at <https://www.acton-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/5022/2018-MVP-Report> (verified Sep 2024); A new plan is in process as of Sep 2024, and the details of the process can be found at this web page: <https://www.actonma.gov/807/Acton-Municipal-Vulnerability-Plan-Updat>
- 8 The Town of Acton Zero-Emission Vehicle First Policy is in a file called "ZEV First Policy Acton_Final_1.22.2024.pdf" and it can be found at <https://www.actonma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/9332/ZEV-First-Policy-Acton> (verified Sep 2024)
- 9 Policy Encouraging Building with Clean Energy is in a file called "2022-1-10 SB Policy encouraging building with clean energy.pdf" and it can be found at <https://www.actonma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/7431/2022-1-10-SB-Policy-encouraging-building-with-clean-energy> (verified Sep 2024)