

# Frequently Asked Questions about the Green Communities Program

Prepared by Green Needham

## What is the Green Communities program?

In 2008 the Massachusetts Legislature passed two landmark laws to combat climate change, reduce energy use, and lower carbon emissions: The Global Warming Solutions Act and the Green Communities Act. The Green Communities Act established a program to provide municipalities with an opportunity to obtain grant funding for energy efficiency and renewable energy projects, as well as publicly demonstrate their commitment to clean energy efforts at the local level.

The first 35 communities were designated as Green Communities in 2010, with 240 achieving the designation as of December 2018.

The Green Community designation is given to municipalities meeting the following five criteria:

- Create a plan to cut municipal energy use by a goal of 20 percent over 5 years;
- Pass zoning in designated locations for the as-of-right siting of renewable or alternative energy generating facilities, research and development facilities, or manufacturing facilities;
- As a second criteria relating to renewable energy development, adopt an expedited application and permitting of one year at most, under which facilities interested in locating their facility in a designated renewable zone may be sited within the municipality;
- Purchase fuel-efficient vehicles for municipal use, whenever such vehicles are commercially available and practicable;
- Reduce life cycle costs of new construction (Adopt the Stretch Energy Code)

In Needham, all of the above criteria have been met.

## What are the benefits of being a Green Community?

Programmatic benefits include:

- Receipt of an approximately \$149,000 designation grant.
- Eligibility for annual \$250,000 competitive grants.
- Annual energy savings that free up town resources to help fulfill other core missions.
- A more flexible, comprehensive approach to facilities & infrastructure management.
- Immediate savings to new home buyers in Needham through lower utility bills.'
- Lower greenhouse gas emissions.

Other benefits: Inspires cities and towns to undertake additional energy-related initiatives, improve coordination between municipal staff and departments, and increase messaging with the public at large about energy-related issues and actions. Needham would be joining other municipalities in a regional effort to address climate change.

## In 2012, Needham had taken steps to become a Green Community, but Town Meeting failed to pass the Stretch Energy Code. What was the impact to the Town?

In 2012 Town Meeting did not pass the Stretch Code, voting to refer it back to the (then) Board of Selectmen. Without the Stretch Code in place, Needham was not able to join the Green Communities program. As a result, Needham could not apply for Green Community

Grants to support municipal and school energy efficiency and reduction projects. Based on the experience of comparable communities that became Green Communities at that time, Needham has potentially forgone \$1 million in grants since 2012.

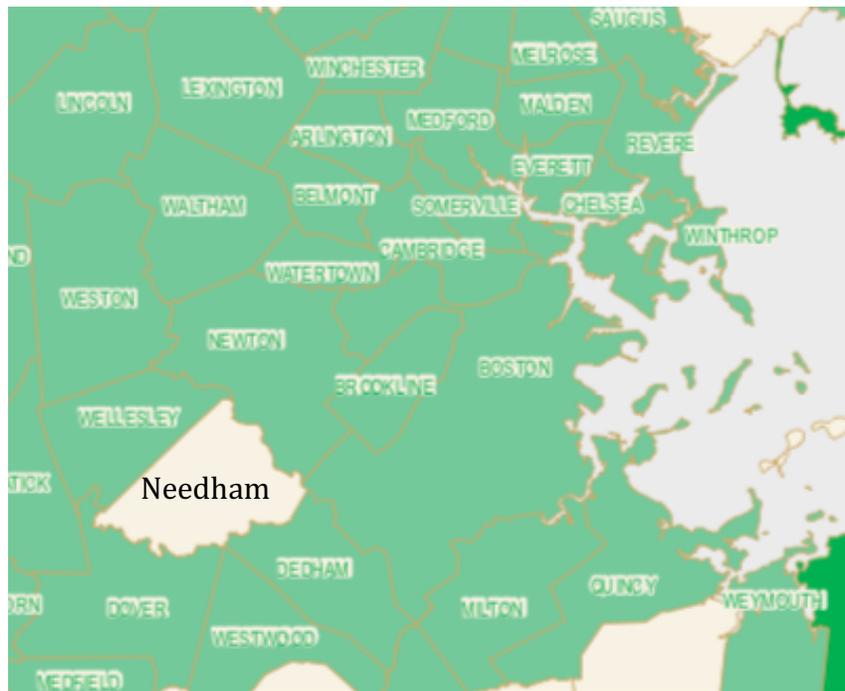
**Does Town Meeting Need to Vote on Becoming a Green Community?**

No, Town Meeting only needs to adopt the Stretch Code, one of the five criteria. Town Meeting adopted the Stretch Energy Code in May 2019. Other criteria are also already in place. The Select Board will make the final decision to apply for Green Community status. Applications for Green Community status are accepted in October of each year.

**What cities and towns are Green Communities?**

As of December 2018, 240 of the 351 Massachusetts cities and towns are Green Communities, representing two-thirds of the population. Newton, Wellesley, Dedham and Dover are all Green Communities.

**Green Communities in Eastern Massachusetts**



Source: [https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2019/01/08/map-summary-green-communities-240\\_0.pdf](https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2019/01/08/map-summary-green-communities-240_0.pdf)

List of 20 towns Needham routinely uses for comparisons and whether Green Communities.

Belmont	Yes	Holliston	Yes	<b>NEEDHAM</b>	<b>No</b>	Wayland	Yes
Brookline	Yes	Hopkinton	Yes	Newton	Yes	Wellesley	Yes
Concord	Yes	Lexington	Yes	Norwood	No	Weston	Yes
Dedham	Yes	Medfield	Yes	Sherborn	Yes	Westwood	Yes
Dover	Yes	Natick	Yes	Walpole	No	Winchester	Yes
Framingham	Yes						