

Topsfield Sustainability Advisory Committee Strategic Plan 2024

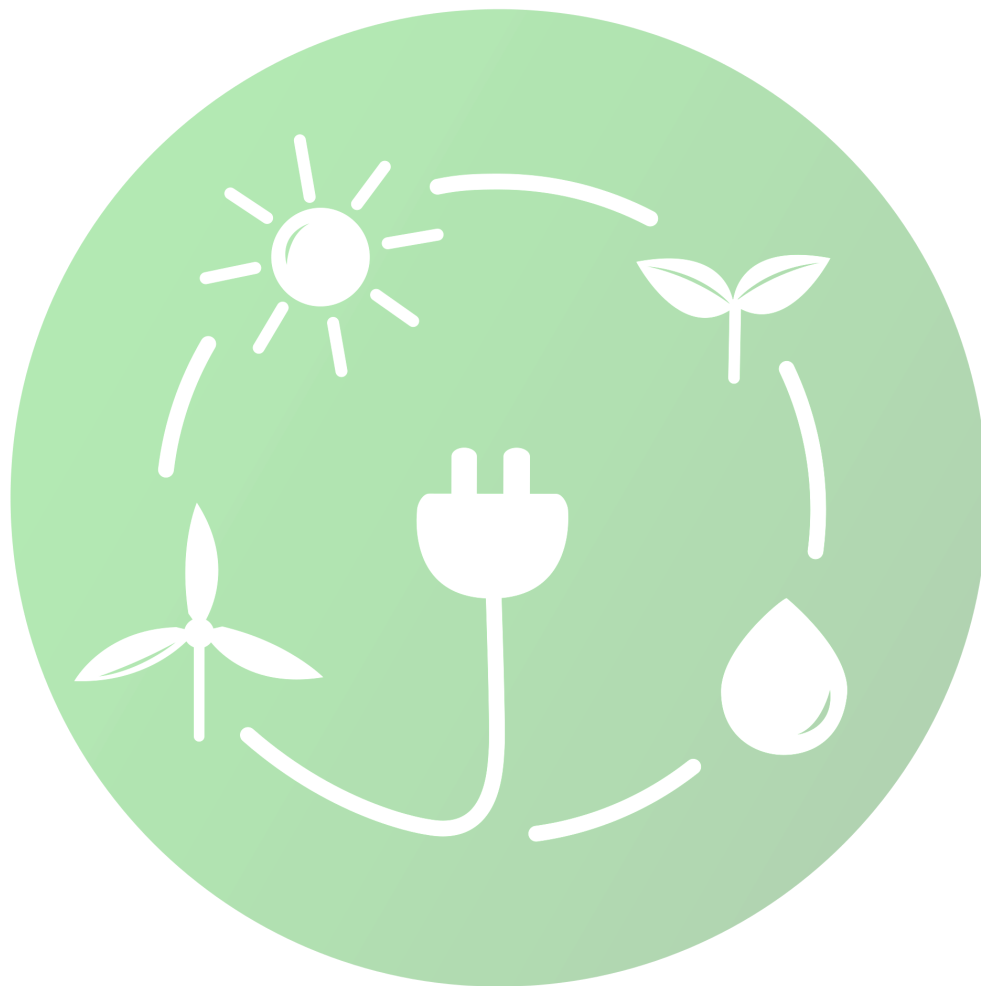


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December 2023

Dear Topsfield Select Board,

The following strategic plan outlines the various sustainability goals and initiatives the Topsfield Sustainability Advisory Committee (SAC) intends to pursue in 2024. These are organized according to the focuses outlined in the SAC Charter and are as follows:

- Reduce carbon footprint
- Promote waste reduction
- Promote renewable energy
- Preserve and protect ecosystems
- Education and outreach

It is important to note that change is often slow and incremental. However, it is our ardent hope that with the support of the Select Board, the Town and its community members, Topsfield will become a regional leader in sustainability.

Thank you for supporting Topsfield's efforts to secure a greener future!

Respectfully submitted,

The Topsfield Sustainability Advisory Committee

Jennifer Forster, Chair
Julie Shannon, Vice Chair
Phil Kennedy, Clerk
Brad Bissell, Member
Rafael McDonald, Select Board & SAC Member
Andrew Prazar, Member
Tom Warren, Member
Kevin Harutunian, Non-voting Member

INTRODUCTION

Topsfield is committed to protecting and preserving its natural resources and promoting environmental sustainability. To date, we have invested in solar street lights on S. Main St, converted Town buildings to LED lights, installed a solar-powered bench on the Rail Trail, purchased an electric police cruiser, and introduced composting programs in our schools. Topsfield also maintains its Green Community designation through the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources since July 2011.

While this is a great start, we know there is more work to be done. The Sustainability Advisory Committee was formed in 2021 to identify and promote environmental sustainability initiatives in Topsfield by supporting planning and investments to reduce the Town’s carbon footprint, promote waste diversion and renewable energy, preserve and protect our ecosystems, and perform education and outreach to raise awareness for a greener Topsfield.

The following Strategic Plan outlines the Committee’s initiatives designed to support the goals in our charter and to ultimately position Topsfield as a regional leader in sustainability. It’s worth noting that many of the actions supporting the stated initiatives overlap. A high level matrix of initiatives and supportive actions is included below:

SAC Initiative →	Reduce Carbon Footprint	Promote Waste Diversion	Promote Renewable Energy	Preserve and Protect Ecosystems	Community Education and Outreach
Action ↓					
Rain Barrel Program				✓	✓
School Energy Efficiency Audit	✓		✓		
Invasive Species Control				✓	✓
Waste Reduction Education	✓	✓		✓	✓
Community Composting	✓	✓		✓	✓
Community Trash Audit		✓		✓	✓
Advocacy (research and data collection; cost benefit analyses; grant research/submission)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Where appropriate, we’ve noted alignment with Topsfield’s [draft Master Plan strategy short list](#), prepared in December 2023.

2024 STRATEGIC PLAN

INITIATIVE 1. REDUCE CARBON FOOTPRINT

Action 1. Support the Town with various tasks and projects to reduce our carbon footprint.

- Town Hall energy audit
- Streetlight conversion to LEDs
- Support evaluation and purchase of electric vehicles and equipment
- Assist in transition to automated waste conversion (See initiative 2)
- Assist in determining the Town's carbon footprint and greenhouse gas inventory to provide priorities for carbon reduction.
- Education focus: Provide information and updates regarding the Town's efforts to reduce its carbon footprint.

Draft Master Plan Alignment (as of December 2023):

Goal 5A: Integrate initiatives within municipal and school properties and public infrastructure to reduce greenhouse gases, increase energy efficiency, and become climate prepared.

- Strategy 5.A4: Prioritize electric or energy-efficient municipal vehicles whenever possible as new vehicles are purchased.
- Strategy 5.A5: Build on recent efforts, such as solar-powered streetlamps, to increase solar and other alternative energy sources at Town facilities and in Topsfield's public spaces.
- Strategy 5.A6: Develop a greenhouse gas inventory to help understand Topsfield's baseline of significant sources of emissions, establish a greenhouse gas emission reduction goal, and document current measures taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Additionally, develop an Action Plan to address gaps focusing on municipal energy reduction with high return on investment.

Action 2. Coordinate and support school efforts for energy efficiency and alternative energy sources to reduce their carbon footprint.

- Energy Efficiency - School Analysis:
Year 1 activities:
 1. Explore Mass Save audit
 2. Request for Quote for engineering firm to do a more detailed study and construction cost estimates (of an electric heat pump system). -Coordinated by elementary schools (could require a Town Meeting vote if funding is needed)
 3. Recommendation including cost/benefit analysisYear 2 activities:
 4. Town Meeting vote

5. Construction

- Education focus: Encourage, advocate and provide assistance to the schools regarding energy efficiency and alternative energy sources.

INITIATIVE 2. PROMOTE RENEWABLE ENERGY

Action 1. Support Green Communities and other Climate programs led by the Commonwealth.

- Support ongoing work to maintain Green Communities designation.
- Consider advocating for Topsfield to become certified as a [Climate Leader Community](#) by Massachusetts DOER (Department of Energy Resources).
- Explore modifications to the residential and commercial building construction codes which facilitate transition to electrification and alternative energy (i.e., following examples of other communities that had adopted the "Specialized stretch codes").

Action 2. As appropriate, encourage and assist schools and Town departments in considering and evaluation of alternative energy sources. (Ongoing)

Draft Master Plan Alignment (as of December 2023):

Goal 5A: Integrate initiatives within municipal and school properties and public infrastructure to reduce greenhouse gases, increase energy efficiency, and become climate prepared.

- Strategy 5.A5: Build on recent efforts, such as solar-powered streetlamps, to increase solar and other alternative energy sources at Town facilities and in Topsfield's public spaces.

Also aligned with the [Masconomet Sustainability Policy](#) (Policy ECF)

INITIATIVE 3. PROMOTE WASTE REDUCTION

Action 1. Provide trash contract support

- Assist Select Board, Town Administration and Town Departments by reviewing and providing comments on trash contract elements as pertain to sustainability objectives (2024-2026)
- Education and outreach focus: As determined by Town Administrator

Action 2. Assist Town for eventual transition to automated collection.

- Assist in data collection and analysis for the Town's eventual transition to automated collection (2023-2024)
- Provide liaison with Trash hauler sustainability staff regarding automated collection issues (2023-2026)

- Education and outreach focus: Educate and provide FAQs regarding automated collection. Create community program

Action 3. Promote removal of organics from the wastestream.

- Investigate and advocate for curbside composting (2024)
- Provide liaison with Trash hauler sustainability staff regarding automated collection issues. (2023-2026)
- Education focus: Encourage proper recycling and strengthen curbside composting program

Draft Master Plan Alignment (as of December 2023):

Goal 1C: Mitigate climate change on a local level through energy efficiency, waste disposal, and water conservation practices.

- Strategy 1.C3: Establish a Solid Waste Advisory Committee to explore new services, expand existing services, and educate residents about programs that improve recycling rates, encourage composting, and reduce the costs of waste being landfilled. Examples might be to expand bi-weekly recycling to weekly pickup and set up a “swap shed” where residents can exchange unwanted, still-usable items.

INITIATIVE 4. PRESERVE AND PROTECT ECOSYSTEMS

Action 1. Reduce water use and protect water quality.

- Create and implement a community-wide rain barrel program (2024-2025)
- Advocate for water conservation and assist in establishing a water use reduction goal
- Support protection of water quality – drinking water, groundwater, and surface water
- PFAS standards compliance (2023-2024)
 - Assist in reducing the Town’s impact on water quality by addressing nonpoint source pollution (e.g. fertilizer and pesticide use) and by limiting the impervious surface space. Assist in the Town’s stormwater management programs.
- Education Focus: Reduce water use and protect water quality

Draft Master Plan Alignment (as of December 2023):

Goal 1A: Protect Topsfield’s vulnerable open spaces and water resources from development pressures.

- Strategy 1.A3: Increase involvement with regional collaborations (e.g., Ipswich River Water Association) to help meet common water quality, groundwater protection, and stormwater management goals and objectives.

Goal 1C: Mitigate climate change on a local level through energy efficiency, waste disposal, and water conservation practices.

- Strategy 1.C1: Seek grants to incentivize private water storage and groundwater recharge through a no/low-cost rain barrel program.
- Strategy 1.C2: Educate the public on sustainability and resiliency topics, such as water conservation in tandem with their water bills, renewable energy options, and solid waste disposal.

Action 2. Support responsible vegetation management.

- Curb Biodiversity Loss
 - Encourage obtaining materials used by the Town with biodiversity preservation in mind, and reduce the purchase and disposal of non-recyclable materials overall to lessen the Town’s negative impact on biodiversity. Advocate reduce, reuse, and recycle.
 - Promote sustainable use of resources
 - Encourage programs for increasing native vegetation
 - Safeguard ecosystems and species including control of invasive species
- Promote Tree Protection
 - Prepare SAC position statement for Topsfield Tree Warden
 - Consider advocating Local Tree Bylaw per DCR [“Guide to Local Tree Bylaws for Communities in Massachusetts”](#)
- Safeguard ecosystems and species including control of invasive species; Explore feasibility of alternative species for lawns that would reduce or eliminate the use of fertilizers and pesticides, enhance soil health, and reduce the frequency of mowing.
- Education Focus: Vegetation and Ecosystem Protection; Alternative lawns; Native landscaping education to increase biodiversity.

Draft Master Plan Alignment (as of December 2023):

Goal 1A: Protect Topsfield’s vulnerable open spaces and water resources from development pressures.

- Strategy 1.A2: Provide guidelines for and education on installing and maintaining sustainable landscapes on public and private lands, such as native landscaping, irrigation systems, removing invasives, mowing regulations, pesticide/herbicide use, etc.

Action 3. Support responsible outdoor lighting.

- Advocate consideration of light pollution (artificial brightening of the night sky) in operations, new building construction, and renovations conducted by the Town
- LED streetlight conversion (2023-2024)
- Review zoning and subdivision for lighting performance standards
- Education Focus: Responsible outdoor lighting

INITIATIVE 5. EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Action 1. Prepare a comprehensive community education and outreach plan specifically for waste reduction education.

- Includes social media posts, flyers and posters, roadshow presentations, events, and newsletter copy (January 2024)

Action 2. Include each of the “education focus” areas identified above in an ongoing comprehensive community education and outreach program.

- Outreach activities/events for recycling, automated collection, composting, rain barrels and invasive species control. (Ongoing)

IMPLEMENTATION AND GOVERNANCE

The Sustainability Advisory Committee will continue to meet roughly every other month in 2024, with more frequent, informal weekly workgroup check-ins to achieve the lofty goals set forth in this plan. The Committee is composed of eight volunteers, including the Town Administrator as a non-voting member, and seven Select Board-approved Town residents, including one Select Board member. For more details, please see the [Charter](#) included in the Appendix.

CONCLUSION

While this is a roadmap for progress towards reaching sustainability goals, it is flexible and subject to change, dependent on resources, changing priorities and opportunities for forward progress in other areas. Our Committee is made up of volunteers with limited time and resources, therefore the support of community members is welcomed and necessary to achieve these goals. We encourage anyone who is interested in participating in any of the initiatives outlined above to reach out to the team.

We are excited to continue the work we have begun and to move Topsfield closer to being a regional leader in sustainability!

Topsfield Sustainability Advisory Committee Charter

The mission of the Topsfield Sustainability Advisory Committee (the “Committee” or “SAC”) is to identify and promote environmental sustainability initiatives in Topsfield by supporting planning and investments to reduce the Town’s carbon footprint, promote waste diversion and renewable energy, preserve and protect our ecosystems, and perform education and outreach to raise awareness for a greener Topsfield.

Structure:

The SAC shall be created by a majority vote of the Select Board, and shall serve until the current or future Select Board may choose to disband or restructure the SAC. Members shall be appointed by the Select Board for one-year terms; members may serve any number of consecutive terms if so appointed. Resignations shall be in writing to the Select Board, and appointments to the SAC may be made at any time during the course of the year.

Authority and Responsibilities:

The Committee shall advise and support the Town Administrator and the Select Board in the creation and implementation of sustainability initiatives and may include working with and coordinating with other Committees, local businesses, nonprofit organizations, residents, as well as Town offices, schools and departments as an agency of the Select Board when appropriate.

As an adjunct committee of the Select Board, the SAC shall meet in Open Session at Town Hall or other public facility in Topsfield according to a schedule they may self-determine, but not less than once every two months. Minutes will be kept in accordance with Massachusetts General Law and reflect general discussion topics and key points. Minutes will be submitted electronically to the Select Board Administrative Assistant for filing and future reference.

The SAC will report to the Select Board in public session on projects, progress and opportunities, if needed or requested.

Composition:

The SAC shall consist of up to eight (8) members, including:

- Six (6) members of Topsfield appointed by the Select Board. Selections will be made from those who may indicate an interest and those who offer specific skills or experience that will enhance the SAC’s ability to perform its mission.
- One (1) member of the Select Board, selected by the Board.
- One (1) Town Administrator, or a designee, serving ex officio.