



## Wellfleet signs on to global covenant on climate

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WELLFLEET — This town has joined thousands of other towns and cities around the world in committing to ambitious climate initiatives through the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy. The action came by unanimous vote of the select board at its June 12 meeting.

As research continues to paint a dire picture of humanity's future under "business-as-usual" greenhouse gas emission scenarios, cities and towns of all sizes are taking action, not waiting for change at the federal level.

A recent study titled "The Future We Don't Want," produced by the nonprofit C40 Cities, predicts that by 2050, 1.6 billion people will be regularly exposed to extreme high temperatures, over 800 million people will be vulnerable to sea level rise and coastal flooding, 650 million people will be at risk of water shortages, and 2.5 billion people will be living in cities where the food supply is threatened by climate change.

Wellfleet is the tenth municipality in Massachusetts to commit to the global covenant and one of 60 communities worldwide to sign on since the start of 2018.

The covenant, formed in 2016, is the broadest climate alliance in the world, representing the commitment of 9,000 cities and local governments from six continents — more than 10 percent of the total global population.

Wellfleet's commitment was prompted by energy committee member Robert Shapiro, who says he first learned about the covenant while looking for a tool to do a greenhouse gas inventory for the town.

"Whereas in respect to energy the town's possessions are carefully monitored, there's really nothing that does that for the whole community and residents," Shapiro told the selectmen. "If we are concerned about the environment and energy and greenhouse gases, not including all the residents of the town and all their houses and so forth is ignoring the most significant part of the story. So I spent some time this past year investigating ways of doing this and some tools that were available."

Shapiro found a tool for doing a community-wide greenhouse gas inventory through the nonprofit ICLIE, which helps local governments tackle challenges of sustainability. The tool is free to any community that signs on to the global covenant.

The first phase of the commitment is to carry out the inventory. Next steps include an assessment of climate hazards and vulnerabilities; setting ambitious, measureable, time-bound targets to reduce or limit greenhouse gas emissions; creating plans to address climate change mitigation, low emission development, just access to sustainable energy, climate resilience and adaptation, and regular progress reports. The town has pledged to develop, formally adopt and report on these measures within three years.

“The entire board is supportive of minimizing environmental impact,” said select board Chair Janet Reinhart in response to an email query. “It is exciting to be connected to a global organization.”

Wellfleet Energy Committee member David Mead-Fox said that in order to meet this commitment the town will need both extensive volunteer efforts and paid positions, an opinion echoed by Sally Brotman based on her two years on the Truro Energy and Recycling Committee.

“The Truro Select Board adopted the U.S. Mayors’ Cities Climate Protection Agreement,” said Brotman. “The commitment was explicitly based on the opinion that it wouldn’t cost the town anything and no funds or personnel were contemplated. In order to be effective, it seems to me that this sort of effort would have been more productive if the town had hired or appointed an energy and environmental planning specialist.”

Funding for regional sustainability coordinators has been included by state Sen. Julian Cyr in the Governor’s Environmental Bond bill, currently before the state House and Senate. Mead-Fox noted there are also “significant financial resources” available to address climate change issues through state grants.

“The reason why cities and towns are so important is that’s where these changes are going to take place,” said Shapiro. “I view this as a path that we can spread beyond Wellfleet to get other towns involved.”

Part-time Wellfleet resident and former Cambridge Mayor Henrietta Davis agreed.

“This is great news,” said Davis. “I’m so proud of this town.”

Cambridge has also signed the covenant and has taken significant steps toward reducing emissions. “Local leadership in the U.S. can make all the difference in meeting the commitment of the Paris Climate Agreement, even without the federal government,”

Davis added. “Most carbon emissions are directly related to activity in cities and towns. For a town like Wellfleet to take responsibility for its emissions and to join up with other local governments around the world — that’s powerful.”