

How Towns Can Fight Climate Change

We who are in this battle agree that our highest priority is getting to 100% clean energy as quickly as possible. New Jerseyans have recently been focusing on making the state's 2019 Energy Master Plan (EMP) as strong as possible. But more locally, Pat and Steve Miller are working toward this goal in Middletown and Monmouth County at large. At the urging of its citizens, Middletown has recently taken steps in this direction.

The Sierra Club Ready for 100 campaign is guiding cities and towns across the nation toward doing their part to save the earth for future generations of our children and grandchildren. This is how several hundred citizens of Middletown stated our mission in letters we sent to the town government demanding a path to 100% clean energy. Middletown has responded by creating and staffing a Sustainability Office and committing to work with our citizens' group to develop an Energy Plan. These are the steps we are endorsing for Middletown and other Monmouth County towns through Sustainable Jersey's Monmouth Hub.

Commit to 100% Clean Energy. And we really mean 100% clean: no fossil fuels and no nuclear by 2050, with intermediate milestones. Some towns are reluctant to make the commitment in writing. If so, we can get around this by simply laying out the steps to make it happen in the Energy Plan.

Adopt Clean Aggregated Electricity. There is one step so cost-effective for a town to take that will reduce its emissions by as much as 20%, that it should actually precede making a plan. That is to adopt aggregated electricity with as high a percent clean energy as possible, graduated to 100% by 2030 or 2035. New Jersey's program provides for towns or groups of towns to contract with third party electrical supplier with bids and contract handled by a consultant at no cost to the town. The cost of electricity to the residents, businesses and municipality will be **less** than they are paying their utility now because of volume savings as well as the lower price of renewable electricity. (You can buy 100% clean energy for your household immediately by switching online to a third party supplier. Directions for switching to a low cost supplier are at electric.smiller.org.)

Develop an Energy Plan. A town's Energy Plan takes the provisions of the state EMP and applies them to the local level. Sustainable Jersey provides guidelines for actions towns can take to lower emissions. It also publishes all NJ towns' Certification Reports, listing the actions taken in pursuit of certification. The one town that has achieved Gold Star in Energy, Woodbridge, provides an excellent example.

Like the EMP, categories of towns' Energy Plan actions would include the following:

- Transportation: Conservation (eg, public transportation, ride sharing); transition to electric vehicles (EV) of municipal fleet; charging stations in businesses and multi-family housing.
- Renewable and Distributed Energy: Rooftop solar and community solar; onshore wind where possible.
- Efficiency and Conservation: Building efficiency and landscaping. Existing state efficiency programs must be adopted, publicized, perhaps incentivized, and finally regulated. Tree ordinances are important for carbon sequestration, and other landscaping measures reduce heat, conserve clean water, or provide local food.
- Buildings: Net-zero carbon buildings; rooftop solar; transition from fossil fueled to electric; EV-ready construction.

Codify and Enforce the Plan. The Energy Plan will not get us to 100% Clean unless the provisions of the plan are codified into ordinances or regulations and enforced. A transition will take place over time in many areas. Building regulations will affect new buildings at first, then major renovations, then requirements at the time of sale, and so on. Energy efficiency measures and the switch to all-electric appliances and heating can be incentivized at first, then included in regulations as above. Later market forces will drive transition, such as when gasoline-fueled vehicles are no longer made. At every step a priority must be to help low-income and climate justice communities with the transition, as well as to encourage local business and jobs.

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