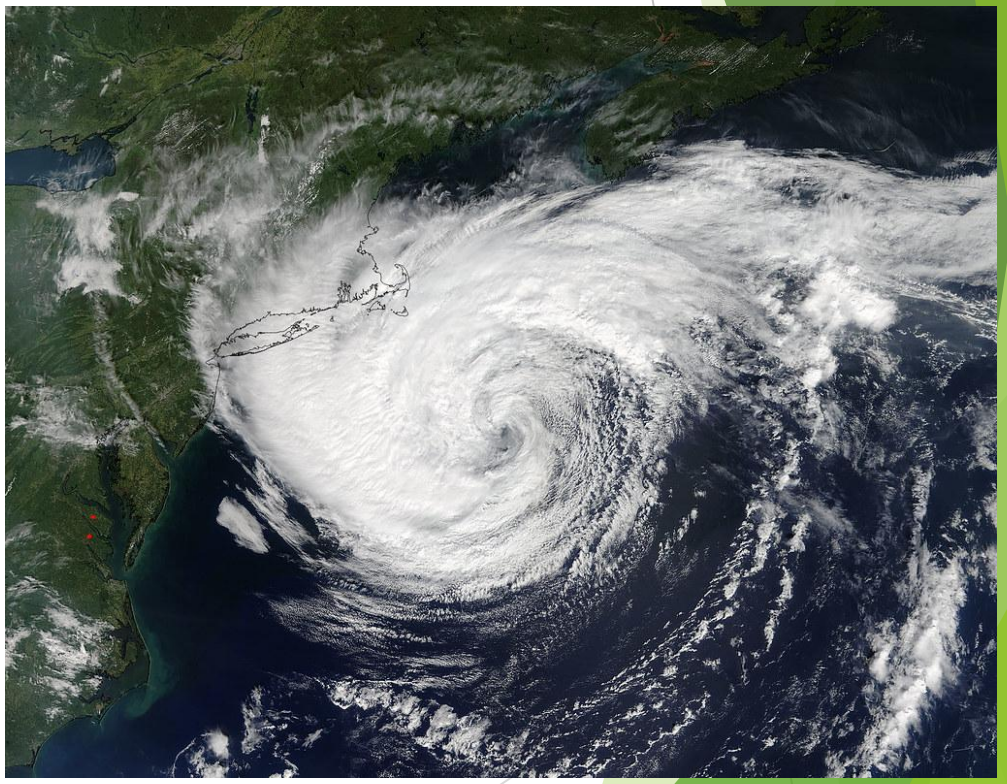
Why We Need a LOCAL SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE

Here's why cannot ignore climate change!

- Increased incidence of extreme weather events locally and nationally; local consequences include smoke from wildfires, flooding, drought, extreme cold, and heat waves
- Increased economic risks—disaster relief costs, infrastructure damage, agricultural disruptions and losses, public health issues, supply chain issues, higher food prices
- Disruptions will hit lower-income folks hardest
- Risk of increased social unrest



How we can address climate change locally

- Support local efforts toward the transition to renewable energy

- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions—compost food waste, weatherize homes and city buildings, provide grants for all residents, including low-income, to weatherize

- Improve infrastructure resilience
- Improve agricultural resilience

The plastics problem

- Plastic production in the U.S. is increasing every year—from 51.5 million tons in 2010 to 65 million tons in 2023 (<26%)
- 35-46 million tons end up in the waste stream yearly, <40% being single-use plastics and packaging
- Only 5-9% of plastics are recycled, mostly PET & HDPE
- Virgin plastic is often cheaper to produce than recycled because of abundant supply of petrochemicals, low fossil fuel prices, and the costs of collecting, sorting, cleaning and reprocessing
- *All* plastics break down into microplastics! Microplastics are found everywhere on Earth—in oceans, polar ice caps, soils, and within the bodies of all living organisms; we don't yet understand the environmental and health consequences of this

Some ways we can address the plastic problem

- Change our behavior—use fewer plastics, especially single-use plastics (reduce! reuse!)
- Support extended producer responsibility legislation (EPR) to shift responsibility for plastic waste from municipalities to producers
- Pass a single-use bag ban in North Adams

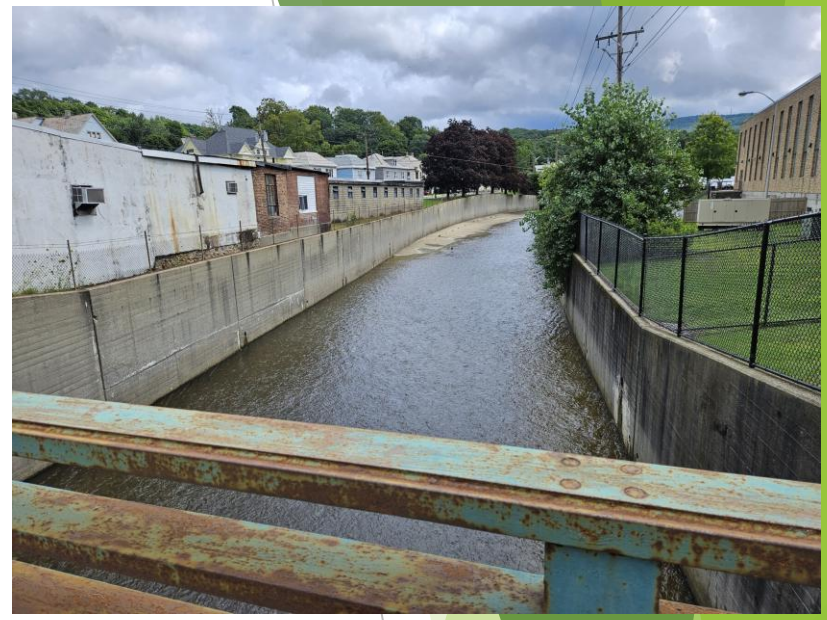
Our waste disposal systems are broken

- Lack of landfill space in Massachusetts raises questions about future options for waste disposal and increasing costs
- Food waste represents 21.5% of waste in Massachusetts; breakdown of food waste by anaerobic bacteria releases greenhouse gases
- Limited opportunities in North Adams to dispose of items that require special collection
- The public is uninformed

How we can address waste disposal issues

- Educate the public on the need to REDUCE and REUSE
- Expand recycling opportunities, including special collections; improve efficiency of recycling systems
- Expand food waste composting and provide more collection options, including collection at the North Adams Transfer Station

Water quality & watershed challenges



- Local waterways have high levels of bacterial pollution and lack of aquatic life
- Main sources of pollution to waterways are city runoff, plastic trash, farm/lawn fertilizer and residual heavy metals
- Microplastics pose a significant threat to aquatic life and water quality
- Reservoir levels fall to dangerously low levels in summer
- Drinking water quality, water-use efficiency and conservation improvements are needed

Other issues & ways to address—

- Pollinator decline affects wild pollinators and commercial bees; 50-70% of honey bee colonies did not survive last year
  - Reduce use of pesticides and herbicides
  - Reduce frequency of mowing where possible
  - Encourage residents to plant native flowering plants

- Limited production of locally grown food
  - Preserve land appropriate for future agricultural use
  - Support local food production

Other issues, continued

- The need for a green transportation transition
  - Boost use of electric cars and infrastructure (charging stations)
  - Establish electric city fleets, electric buses
- The need for carbon sequestration
  - Incentivize tree planting
  - Commitment by City of North Adams to plant trees

Why we need to address these issues locally

- North Adams residents are already bearing the costs of these problems
- We *can* make a measurable difference in some areas, and the taskforce believes we have an obligation to do so where we can
- Because educating the public about the need for change is part of the solution, *any* efforts that serve this purpose are worthwhile

Tie-ins with North Adams Vision 2030

- Ensure access to local healthy foods
- Maintain high quality recreation options
- Leverage presence of open space and wild lands
- Support healthy, active lifestyles
- Reduce dependence on energy from non-renewable sources
- Build climate resilience into the planning and maintenance of municipal facilities and spaces
- Build a resilient city by proactively working to set and advance climate change adaptation and mitigation best practices

What a city sustainability initiative might look like

- Create a sustainability commission that would
  - help set sustainability goals
  - coordinate with the city and other organizations already working toward these goals
  - provide public tracking for progress being made on these issues

- Pass a single-use bag ban in North Adams
  - We are the only larger community in Berkshire County without one
  - Would reduce plastic waste (litter and in landfill)
  - Would help to raise awareness of the need for more sustainable practices

Some resources

- Gelles, David. “Plastic, Plastic, Everywhere.” *New York Times*, 24 Feb. 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/24/climate/plastic-plastic-everywhere.html.
- “Total Plastics Production in the United States from 2010 to 2023.” *Statista*, https://www.statista.com/statistics/203398/total-us-resin-production/.
- *The Real Truth About the US Plastic Recycling Rate*. Beyond Plastics, May, 2021, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5eda91260bbb7e7a4bf528d8/t/62b2238152acae761414d698/1655841666913/The-Real-Truth-about-the-US-Plastic-Recycling-Rate-2021-Facts-and-Figures-_5-4-22.pdf.
- “Solid Waste Mater Plan.” *Massachusetts Dept. of Environmental Protection*, 2030, https://www.mass.gov/guides/solid-waste-master-plan.
- “UNH Study Shows Decline in Wild Bees That Pollinate Major New England Fruit Crops.” *New Hampshire Public Radio*, 15 Apr. 2019, https://www.nhpr.org/environment/2019-04-15/unh-study-shows-decline-in-wild-bees-that-pollinate-major-new-england-fruit-crops.
- Giacobino, Agostina and others. “Preliminary Results from the 2024-2025 US Beekeeping Survey: Honey Been Colony Loss and Management.” *Apiary Inspectors of America*, https://apiaryinspectors.org/US-beekeeping-survey-24-25.