

December 10, 2020

Sent via Email

House Members of the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy

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Re: Recommendations for a Green Recovery for the Commonwealth

Dear Chair Golden and House Members of the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy,

As Executive Director of the Charles River Watershed Association as well as a Newton City Councilor, and a member of the Mass Municipal Association Energy and Environmental Policy Committee, I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today as part of your information gathering for the MA Green Recovery Task Force. I wanted to follow up to share my remarks in writing as well as flesh out some of my comments.

It was terrific to hear Chair Golden say back in June that we need to “identify pathways to a cleaner, more resilient Commonwealth.” That captures our challenge and opportunity at this time. As federal recovery dollars start to flow, as hopefully they will, it seems to me we want to be sure that the Commonwealth is best positioned to benefit financially and also make sure that investments are targeted where they are most needed and can do the most good.

I know that the legislature is already wrestling with how to help individuals, families, businesses, and communities hardest hit by COVID when it comes to housing, health care, and jobs. But for purposes of clean energy and climate resilience investments that will benefit those hardest hit communities as well as all municipalities across the Commonwealth, I recommend the following:

- **Energy efficiency.** The cheapest and best form of energy. Investments in energy efficiency not only reduce energy bills, they create jobs for carpenters, insulators, air sealing experts, heat pump installers, energy modelers, building envelope and green building consultants, high performance building operators, rain garden/green roof installers, blower door testers, energy performance trackers for real estate portfolios, architects, HVAC engineers, and more. In addition to delivering

much needed savings to municipal, residential, and commercial customers, energy efficiency investments provide health benefits, including improved indoor air quality, avoided health impacts, and even contributions to health care cost containment.

- **Transportation Electrification.** This includes electric buses, garbage trucks, pickup trucks, emergency vehicles, and sedans. Local governments want to invest in electrification of their vehicle fleets and in promoting electric vehicle usage among their residents, and we can make it cheaper and easier for them to do so. This should include vehicle to grid interconnection standards and enabling utility rates. Total lifecycle cost is already lower for electric vehicles, but municipalities will need innovative financing models to allow them to begin making the transition today. We know that the communities hit hardest by COVID also have the poorest air quality and highest rates of asthma and respiratory diseases, so electrification will have added benefits in those communities by reducing air pollution particulate matter from dirty diesel vehicles.
- **Electrify Homes.** We should make it easier for communities to require clean energy in new construction. Brookline tried to do this and was told it was not allowed under current state law. Several communities including my own are now moving ahead with home rule petitions, but that is difficult and time consuming. The law could be changed to allow local communities to require building electrification if they so desire. Then as new housing is built, including new affordable housing, we won't be increasing our reliance on fossil fuels, but rather speeding our transition to a clean energy economy. We will not meet Governor Baker's goal of net zero by 2050 unless we ensure that the anticipated 500,000 new buildings built by 2050 are net zero.
- **Water Infrastructure.** Our water infrastructure is in dire straits. A report issued by State Auditor Suzanne Bump in 2017 found a \$20.4B backlog in water infrastructure needs, and it's only grown since then. Investing in water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure will ensure reliable water supplies, keep our communities safer from flooding, and reduce pollution in our rivers, lakes, and streams. It will also create construction and engineering jobs. Municipalities across the state are under a federal mandate to significantly reduce stormwater pollution and many need more resources to be able to meet those requirements. Investments in green infrastructure in particular will allow communities to not only meet their required stormwater pollution reductions, but also protect their local water supplies and build climate resilience at the same time.
- **Shovel-Ready Projects: MVP Program.** 89% of Massachusetts cities and towns, or 312 municipalities, have participated in the Baker Administration's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Program. This means they have gone through a stakeholder process to identify their vulnerabilities to climate change, and also which populations within their communities are most vulnerable. Once a community has gone through this step, they are eligible for "action grants" to invest in everything from upgrading culverts to "nature-based solutions" such as restoring wetlands, building bioswales, planting trees, daylighting streams, and more. At this time, the program has many more eligible applicants and projects than available funding. **These applications describe projects that would be ready to go if funding were to be made available.** Nature-based solutions offer additional benefits of protecting against the weather extremes of climate change such as flooding or storms or heat; capturing carbon from the

atmosphere; and providing more access to nature, especially in our more urban environments that need it most.

- **Trees.** Urban areas generally lack enough tree cover, and are losing tree canopy due to infestations, gas leaks, storms, drought, preferences of private property owners to have fewer trees, and a lower lifespan in areas with a lot of pavement. Yet trees are lifesavers! They clean the air, cool the air (incredibly important with our hotter summers), prevent flooding, and capture carbon dioxide, which is a greenhouse gas. In addition, access to trees and nature boosts mental health, which is important at all times but especially during this pandemic.
- **Green New Deal: Jobs for All.** My last recommendation has to do with **who gets the new jobs that are created** as we invest more in protecting our environment. We want to make sure that we create pathways for all to benefit, especially those who have historically been excluded from such opportunities. For example, within the water and wastewater world, a generation of older white men are retiring, but not enough young people are entering the field to replace them. These are great jobs, with good pay and benefits, and a relatively low barrier to entry. One can get started with just a wastewater certificate, a high school diploma isn't even required. Mark Young, the Executive Director of the Lowell Regional Wastewater Utility, started out with an entry level job and kept getting more certificates, and now he runs the place! But young people of color or from disadvantaged backgrounds are not entering these fields because they don't have an easy pathway. Heather Donovan at the **MassHire Lowell Career Center** helps kids from low income families get work experience in a range of industries, including wastewater. She told me earlier this week what she could be doing with a little more money, and more discretion on how their grant money is spent. For example, they're not allowed to help kids get their learner's permit and license, even though that can be a huge barrier to job access. Another great program is **X-Cel Education**, located in Boston, which helps young people who have not been successful in traditional college or who are transitioning from the criminal justice system get into water and wastewater fields. The program has a terrific track record of success, but could do so much more with even a little more funding. Lastly, an exciting model is **IBM's P-Tech program**, which provides intensive mentoring and apprenticeships for high school students interested in STEM careers. After six years in the program, students have an associate's degree and a guaranteed job with IBM or one of the other dozens of corporate partners. This program is not in any Massachusetts high schools at this time, but **P-Tech is interested in expanding to Massachusetts.**

Thank you again for your leadership on these issues. We have an incredible opportunity to "build back better" as our President-Elect says, and in such a way that those who have traditionally been left behind are prioritized for money and attention.

Sincerely,

Emily Norton

Resources:

- [Renewing the Water Workforce](#) by Metro Policy at Brookings
- [Water and Wastewater Workforce](#) by U.S. Gov't Accountability Office
- [2017 Infrastructure Report Card](#) by American Society of Civil Engineers
- [Costs, Regulation, and Financing of MA Water Infrastructure by MA State Auditor](#)

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