

Updating New Hampshire's Climate Action Plan

North Country Community Conversation in Berlin, NH

Summary Report by NH Listens, January 2024
Mikayla Townsend & Carrie Portrie

Purpose and Background

In August 2023, New Hampshire was granted federal funding to update New Hampshire's Climate Action Plan to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. The four-year program runs from 2023-2027. Objectives of the plan are to:

- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions while supporting the creation of good jobs and lowering energy costs for families.
- Empower community-driven solutions in neighborhoods overburdened from pollution and impacts of climate change by directly seeking input from those communities.
- Deliver cleaner air by reducing harmful air pollution in places where people live, work, play and go to school.

These plans are part of the Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. **They lead to additional implementation funding that will support community-engaged projects** with an effort to focus on Justice40 investments among the sectors of air pollution and greenhouse gas reductions ([see more on Justice40 here](#)).



Figure 1. Community Conversation in Berlin, NH, January 31, 2024



New Hampshire Listens is working on behalf of the NH Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) to design and facilitate community engagement—an essential component of NH's Priority Climate Action Plan (PCAP) and Comprehensive Climate Action Plans (CCAP).

Each climate action plan requires meaningful community engagement. The design and initial efforts to identify climate action priorities must actively involve the participation of people who live in communities that experience a disproportionate burden of environmental hazards that affect their quality of life [...] There is much to talk and engage about across New Hampshire!

(NH DES - <https://www.des.nh.gov/climate-and-sustainability/climate-change/climate-pollution-reduction-grants>)

Between December 2023 and early February 2024, NH Listens hosted a series of conversations and gatherings that offered time for people to learn, listen, and talk with each other to help develop a priority climate action plan for the state. From these conversations, NHDES will identify priority projects and linking measures based on community engagement along with a series of analyses by (March 1, 2024; [see more about the CPRG process and training/technical tools](#)). The PCAP allows the state to apply for implementation funding from the federal government (April 1, 2024) to move projects forward in New Hampshire ([see more about the implementation grants](#)).

The conversations focused on talking about local issues and potential solutions in many different areas of concern:

- Agriculture
- Commercial and Residential Buildings
- Electricity Generation and/or Use
- Industry
- Natural and Working Lands
- Transportation
- Wastewater
- Wastewater & Materials Management

Goals, Facilitation, and Participation

On January 31, 2024, NH Listens and NHDES held an in-person community conversation in Berlin, the gathering's purpose was to share information about the Climate Action Plan and discuss implementation grant goals and projects that can be implemented in North Country. This meeting continued ongoing conversations about key priorities for reducing air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions in New Hampshire. Additionally, NH Listens and NHDES were interested in identifying/building a list of local and statewide partnerships, so that projects locally and statewide include a robust mix of perspectives needed to move this work forward.

Participants engaged in a workshop that allowed them to review near-term, high priority, implement ready priorities, projects, programs, and policies that would reduce greenhouse



gas emissions ([see slides and transcriptions on the Carsey School of Public Policy Page](#)).

Projects prepared were derived from previous online meetings, including individual interviews with statewide providers, cross-sector stakeholder conversations, and community conversations. They were organized by sector. The sectors are as follows: Transportation, Electricity Generation and/or Use and Industry, Commercial and Residential Buildings, Natural & Working Lands and Agriculture, and Waste & Materials Management and Wastewater. Participants reviewed projects as they related to the said sectors and worked through the prompts provided.

The four overarching questions for the evening's workshop were:

- What is needed to effectively achieve this project? What would make success possible in NH?
- What successful examples have you seen?
- What prevents progress or acts as a barrier?
- Who needs to be involved? Identify partners on the ground.

During the workshops, NH Listens helped keep time, facilitated group discussion, and made sure everyone who attended had a chance to contribute. **Nineteen people attended the session. Collectively**, they identified key projects and priorities relevant to the North Country and surrounding localities.

Participants attended from:

- Bartlett
- Berlin (x9)
- Bow
- Glen
- Gorham (x3)
- Milan (x2)
- Randolph
- Sugar Hill

They identified with the following organizations/affiliations when asked:

- Appalachian Mountain Club
- Berlin NH Planning Board
- Casella Waste systems
- City of Berlin/Community Development Department
- City of Berlin Planning Board
- Community College System of NH
- Cross New Hampshire Adventure Trail
- Northern Forest Center
- No affiliation shared (x11)



Figure 2. Community Conversation in Berlin, NH

Themes and Key Points

During the workshop, community members worked together to identify priorities, barriers, and potential partnerships. Participants provided input across three rounds of small group conversation, switching sectors with each round, which provided multiple perspectives for each of the five sectors.

Transportation

- Expanding the capacity of the electrical grid to support electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure, including EV charging for vehicles.
- Building out off-road bike paths and rail trails separate from car traffic.
- Partnering with local organizations that can advocate for and encourage employees to seek alternate modes of commuting.

Commercial and Residential Buildings

- Installing EV charging stations at high-traffic areas including schools, businesses, and banks.
- Installing solar farms, with attention to where it is installed, including superfund sites and landfills.
- Partnering with local community colleges to establish new and/or support existing programs to provide postsecondary education, develop workforce, and implement energy efficient services.



Electricity Generation and/or Use and Industry

- Utilizing buildings to support energy efficiency measures (i.e., solar on roofs) and installing EV charging for vehicles, e-bikes, etc.
- Partnering with utility companies and property owners and developing implementation groups.

Natural & Working Lands and Agriculture

- Investing in green spaces: including planting trees in central locations and maintaining forests.
- Supporting local farmers and the services they can provide to the community.
- Partnering with state and local partners that can oversee agricultural and conservation efforts like state parks, local farmers, and community-based organizations.

Opportunities for Engagement Moving Forward

Berlin is one of the eight communities where NH Listens and NHDES is hosting in-person meetings during the first phase of engagement under the Climate Pollution Reduction Planning Grant. Participants spent time reflecting on current projects and discussing potential implications for the North Country. When debriefing the activity, NH Listens asked participants to identify supplementary priorities for greenhouse gas and air pollution reduction in the North Country.

Additional priorities for the North Country include:

- Curating “15-minute” towns that are suitable for walking, biking, and other forms of non-car transportation, including bike infrastructure and protected lanes, wider sidewalks, and rail trails.
- Connecting with utility companies to understand how distribution automation will be implemented.
- Filling in the capacity gap of providers that can provide energy efficient services.

Additional Resources

The 15-Minute City Project. <https://www.15minutecity.com/about>

New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services. Climate Pollution Reduction Grants. <https://www.des.nh.gov/climate-and-sustainability/climate-change/climate-pollution-reduction-grants>.

New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (2023). NHDES using EPA grant to update state's Climate Action Plan. <https://www.des.nh.gov/news-and-media/blog/nhdes-using-epa-grant-update-states-climate-action-plan>.



Executive Office of the President of the United States (2022). Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool: Frequently asked questions: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/CEQ-CEJST-QandA.pdf>.

The White House (n.d.). Justice 40: A whole-of-government initiative. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/environmentaljustice/justice40/>.

United States Environmental Protection Agency (2023). Climate Pollution Reduction Grant Program: Planning grant question and answer document. <https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2023-11/climate-pollution-reduction-grants-frequently-asked-questions.pdf>.

NH Listens & NH Department of Environmental Services Contacts

NH Listens

- Carrie Portrie, PhD., Research Assistant Professor & Program Manager, Carrie.Portrie@unh.edu
- Mikayla Townsend, Program Coordinator, Mikayla.Townsend@unh.edu

NH Department of Environmental Services

- Kurt Yuengling, Community Engagement Specialist, Environmental Health Program, Air Resources Division, kurt.r.yuengling@des.nh.gov