Mass Green Network

Community Resources for Greening Massachusetts
Our Mission

The Mass Green Network seeks to protect the earth, its resources, and its inhabitants by connecting community groups, fostering grassroots civic capacity, catalyzing volunteer activism, and bridging demographic divides.
Four Problems
Problem #1

We face a new regime that is hostile or indifferent to ecological issues.

For the next four years at least, the locus of environmental remediation will be at the local or state level.
Problem #2

There are many local environmental groups.

But they tend to work independently.

As a result, folks are continuously reinventing the wheel.

Local groups are both *atomized* (there over 30 groups in Wellesley, MA) and *isolated* (folks working on pesticides regulation in Wellesley do not communicate with people working on pesticides in Provincetown).
Learning curves are steep.

To pass a local law, you need to master the basic science, draft appropriate legislation, prepare educational materials, map out the political process, address questions of implementation, assemble a coalition, attract media attention, and get out the vote. That’s a lot to master on your own.
The environmental movement’s diversity problem is not merely ethical. Underrepresentation also impacts the distribution of human and financial resources. And it contributes to an affective divide. Activist apartheid has led many conservationists to think that people of color are just not interested in environmental issues, and many minorities to consider environmentalism a diversion from the more pressing economic and social problems that confront struggling communities.
The Solution:
The Mass Green Network
The Mass Green Network

- Founded October, 2015
- A peer-to-peer collective linking grassroots activists and local groups across Massachusetts
- 380 active members to date, with over 1200 affiliates, from every corner of the state
- Extraordinary record of achievement
Pollution and other issues with local impact bridge traditional divides, bringing conservationists, environmental justice advocates, and students to the same table.
A Record of Success

In Our First Year We focused on passing Local Laws to reduce Plastic Bags and Polystyrene (including Styrofoam), and...
We Passed almost 40 Pieces of Legislation!

In October, 2015, there were 23 laws on bags and polystyrene in Massachusetts. By December 2016, there were 62. Today there are 68.

In 2016 members built tremendous momentum:

Mar 7: Westfield (polystyrene)
April 2: Westford (polystyrene)
April 4: Concord (polystyrene)
April 12: Wellesley (plastic bags)
April 12: Tisbury (plastic bags)
April 12: West Tisbury (plastic bags)
April 12: Edgartown (plastic bags)
April 25: Chilmark (plastic bags)
May 10: Aquinnah (plastic bags)
May 10: Ipswich (polystyrene & plastic bags)
May 12: Framingham (plastic bags)
May 12: Lee (polystyrene & plastic bags)
May 16: Shrewsbury (plastic bags)
May 25: Amherst (plastic bags)
June 7: Watertown (plastic bags)
June 9: Lenox (polystyrene & plastic bags)
June 10: Ipswich (polystyrene & plastic bags)
June 20: Adams (plastic bags)
July 26: Winthrop (polystyrene)
Oct 15: Plymouth (plastic bags)
Oct 18: Bourne (plastic bags)
Oct 18: Mashpee (plastic bags)
Oct 19: Dennis (polystyrene & plastic bags)
Nov 15: Brookline (plastic bags -- revised)
Nov 17: Salem (plastic bags)
Nov 28: Sandwich (plastic bags)

In the works: Boston, Springfield, Gloucester, Yarmouth, and others
NATIONAL RECOGNITION

A nationwide recycling journal wrote on our progress in June, 2016, after we had raised the number of bag laws in Massachusetts from 15 to 35 in six months.

By November, there were 42 bag laws on the books.
What We Do

• An online hub
• A Lively Listserv
• Issue summits
• Partnerships
MassGreen.Org compiles essential resources for local action, including fact sheets, legislative templates, and powerpoints.
A Lively Listserv

Members share best practices, solicit advice, and develop strategies through a highly active statewide listserv.
Members receive **issue briefings** and **tactical training** at statewide gatherings.
Membership organizations support the Mass Green Network by endorsing local bylaws and helping to get out the vote.

Other groups offer expertise and sponsorship.

A partnership with the Grassroots Fund streamlines the process for Mass Green Network members to apply for small grants for local campaigns.
Why We Succeed

- Civic Participation, not Clicktivism
- Winning Formulas for Local Victory
- Community, Not Combat
- A Network of Equals
- Cooperative innovation
Civic Participation, not Clicktivism

Over the past 30 or 40 years, the environmental movement has shifted from direct democracy to political surrogation as the nonprofit sphere has become increasingly professionalized.

The proliferation of local groups demonstrates that many people want to be directly involved. For them, signing a petition and writing a check is not enough.

Our focus on developing capacity distinguishes the Mass Green Network from environmental groups focused on advocacy and education.
It’s hard to gauge success if your target is global warming. So we focus on smaller scale problems, like plastic bags. Here, success is visible, tangible, invigorating, and infectious. Once we establish a toolkit for passing local legislation on an issue, we repeat it from town to town, scaling the impact of local victories.

Although our focus is nominally local, the ultimate effect is much larger. By passing similar legislation in many municipalities, we build the critical mass that drives legislators to pass statewide laws.
Our focus is on positive vectors of change. There are other environmental organizations focused on fighting toxic facilities. Our approach is centered not on protest and dissent but on the local adoption of standards for environmentally and economically sustainable living.

Passing a bylaw to reduce plastic bags represents not an attack on a corporate enemy, but an embrace of a vision for a more verdant future.
A Network of Equals

There are a handful of other groups that are focused on fostering local capacity. But they generally are centered around a cadre of nonprofit professionals who offer training and expert assistance, and then move on.

In contrast, the Mass Green Network is conceived as a peer-to-peer service. The listserv allows veterans of local campaigns to help new recruits in different parts of the state. People in the Berkshires help their counterparts in Cape Cod, who go on to advise their neighbors on the South Shore. The Network cultivates an ethos of sharing and mutual aid.

The result is a growing, enthusiastic population of grassroots activists excited not only to better their own communities but also to help others do the same.
Cooperative innovation

Finally, the Mass Green Network allows for the **efficient emergence and distribution of innovative ideas.**

Rather than repeating from a canon of proprietary practices, Mass Green Network members continuously build on each other’s success. They come up with better legislative language or develop new materials.

**Examples:** In May, activists in Framingham solicited data from the Network to design a compelling Powerpoint presentation that has used as a template for almost every bag campaign since. In November the citizens of Brookline, whose 2012 bag law inspired so many other communities, revised their bylaw to match the higher standards set by their successors. This **collective feedback and collaborative innovation** is what the Mass Green Network is all about.
Contact

Brad Verter
Brad@MassGreen.Org
(413) 281-0522