

Information on Climate Change Warrant Article
Harvard Special Town Meeting
October 16, 2021

Q: What is the purpose of this article?

A: Once it is adopted, the citizens of Harvard will be on record as supporting the activities necessary to address climate change, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions, adapting to climate change, and mitigating the impact of extreme weather events. Future climate-related proposals can assume that the town agrees climate change is a serious issue, and our debate can focus on the best ways to address it, rather than whether or not climate change is happening.

Q: Why does Town Meeting need to vote on this issue?

A: Town Meeting is the ultimate local governing body for Harvard. Only Town Meeting can align all town activities around a common goal.

Q: What changes might we see as a result of approving the article?

A: As noted in the resolution, we can expect that adapting to climate change and mitigating its effects will impact many aspects of local governance, including, but not limited to, purchasing decisions, physical infrastructure, building codes, health and safety regulations, protection of natural resources, conversion away from fossil fuels, and so on.

Q: Who is sponsoring this article?

A: The article was written by the Harvard Energy Advisory Committee (HEAC) and the Community Resilience Working Group (CRWG), and it was endorsed by the Select Board.

Q: Given that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has enacted multiple climate-related bills, is it really necessary for Harvard to adopt this resolution?

A: As noted above, it puts the town on record as supporting greenhouse gas reduction and climate adaptation and mitigation activities, and it charges our Select Board with establishing a means by which our climate-related goals can be accomplished. By adopting this resolution, we will hold all town boards accountable for their activities that relate to climate change.

Q: What impact will adopting this resolution have on my local taxes?

A: By itself, this resolution does not call for any new spending. We can expect that some climate-related activities will save money, both in the near term and over coming months and years. We are at the mercy of Mother Nature in nearly every aspect of our lives, and as climate-related weather events continue to grow in frequency and severity, we can expect that new initiatives will be required to offset those changes. Whether these new initiatives will lead to cost savings or cost increases is impossible to predict at this time.

Q: How can we commit to endorse unspecified future modifications of the state climate goals without knowing what they are?

A: Harvard is subject to state law and regulation, so while it may not be necessary to endorse future changes now, by doing so we avoid having to approve such changes in the future.

Q: How will the proposed environmental assessment process affect planning for future capital projects?

A: The environmental assessment process is designed to help decision-making bodies understand all the costs and impacts of each proposal so that we can address climate change as we accomplish other goals and objectives. Harvard already has a voluntary environmental assessment process in place; we can expect that this process will evolve over time as we gain experience using it.