

Boston Green Ribbon Commission Five-Year Strategic Plan

2021-2025

The mission of the Green Ribbon Commission is to accelerate the implementation of the City's Climate Action Plan by convening, organizing, and enabling leaders from Boston's key sectors.

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1 Strategic Planning Background

The Green Ribbon Commission was launched in the fall of 2010. Our core “theory of change” was that by directly engaging the city’s key business and civic leaders in the design and implementation of the City’s climate adaptation and mitigation strategy, we could accelerate the pace of change and match the scale of transformation to the scope of the challenge. Over the last decade, we have made critical contributions to the development of the City of Boston’s climate strategy. *Climate Ready Boston*, which we initiated and championed, is now leading to direct investment in resilience projects and regulations to guide future development. And the Commission’s *Carbon Free Boston* report is helping to shape the city’s strategy to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, with a strong emphasis on ways to achieve equitable outcomes for socially vulnerable populations in Boston.

Along the way, we have built a robust civic leadership network that is informed, engaged and connected on climate action. Our sector working groups—Commercial Real Estate, Health Care, Higher Education and Cultural Institutions—have brought together sector leaders to share best practice, advance the cohort of “first movers” aligned with the City’s climate goals, and weigh in on important policy directions. We have been recognized as a “best in class” public-private partnership in the service of climate action, and our model informed the design of C40’s recently launched global City-Business Climate Alliance initiative.

The City of Boston is entering a critical new phase in its climate work—shifting from analysis and planning to implementation—from a focus on the “what” (What strategies do we need to implement for long-term resilience and carbon neutrality?) to a focus on the “how” (How do we implement these strategies so that they achieve scale within the necessary time frame, are



affordable, lead to equitable outcomes, and improve the quality of life in the city?) All stakeholders will need to pivot quickly to making change happen “on the ground” and start working out the very practical details of what resilience and carbon neutrality look like across multiple sectors and at multiple scales.

As the GRC enters its second decade, we engaged in the strategic planning process to determine where we go from here, and how the GRC network can add the most value in this next phase of city climate work. As the planning process unfolded, so did many powerful contextual events: the global pandemic, broad-scale outrage at ongoing racial injustice, and the continued, systematic weakening of important environmental policies at the federal level. All of these conditions inform climate action in Boston, and in turn the GRC’s plans and projects must address all of these conditions. Our work ahead will also include consideration of aspects of the GRC itself, including membership, operations, and ways of partnering. This strategic plan lays out our mission, vision, theory of change, values, key action areas and priority projects for the next five years.

2 GRC Strategy Framework

MISSION

The mission of the Green Ribbon Commission is to accelerate the implementation of the City's Climate Action Plan by convening, organizing, and enabling leaders from Boston's key sectors.

VISION

- Boston is a global leader in climate resilience and emissions reductions and helps demonstrate the "art of the possible" in ways that inspire others to aggressive action.
- A critical mass of large property owners in the city has their own climate action plans in place that are aligned with the City's goals and targets.
- GRC members use their influence to give policy makers the confidence to make the difficult decisions needed to achieve socially equitable resilience and carbon neutrality.

THEORY OF CHANGE

- Aligned business and civic leadership prepares the way for aggressive climate action.
- "First Movers" can demonstrate the feasibility of rapid transformation.
- Resilience and carbon neutrality success will require all organizational leaders to adopt goals aligned with the City's goals.
- Success will require strong policy mandates that cannot be successfully implemented without support from business and civic leadership.
- Generating broad support for difficult long-term climate choices requires member organizations to listen to and activate their multiple spheres of influence, including employees, customers, communities, and audiences.



2 GRC Strategy Framework

VALUES

- **Scientific Integrity.** Our strategic choices need to be driven by the best science and updated as new knowledge becomes available.
- **Responsible Leadership.** GRC members are committed to being leaders in their field and embracing innovation to accelerate climate action.
- **Climate Justice.** Social equity is a climate imperative and the only viable long-term solutions are those that address the needs of the full diversity of stakeholders, including vulnerable populations.
- **Urgency.** Climate change is a “time-based test,” and we have to act with a sense of immediate urgency if we want to avoid the most catastrophic consequences.
- **Collaboration.** Successful climate action requires structured collaboration across multiple sectors and stakeholder groups – no one can succeed on their own.

STRATEGIES

We pursue our mission and vision by pursuing the following strategies:



Advise. Provide ongoing advice to the City on the development and implementation of its Climate Action Plan.



Execute. Partner with the City to design, test, and scale actionable solutions that accelerate equitable implementation of City climate strategies.



Lead by Example. Support GRC Members and Working Group participants in developing organizational climate strategies that align with the City’s goals and targets.



Advocate and Amplify. Advocate for the equitable implementation of policy changes needed to make long-term resilience and carbon neutrality a reality, and work with our network partners to align their constituencies in supporting those priorities.



3 Priority Projects to Support Our Strategies

The GRC will pursue priority projects, using its four strategies, to advance important targeted outcomes related to the Boston Climate Action Plan. Targeted outcomes will also be addressed through GRC core operations. These projects were identified through dialogue with the City of Boston, interviews with GRC members and experts in the GRC network, and stakeholder input gathered during the strategic planning process. The priority projects are organized by targeted outcome, with indications of which strategy they most directly support. Projects will be reviewed and revised on a yearly basis to reflect completed initiatives and new opportunities.

Targeted Outcomes 2020/2021	Priority Projects	Strategies
Climate Justice Ensure equitable distribution of energy and environmental benefits and burdens.	1. Climate Justice Planning. Design a fully developed GRC climate justice initiative, in collaboration with the City, GRC Members, and key community stakeholders.	 ADVISE
	2. Climate Justice Action. Implement targeted initiatives that use the resources of the GRC to advance climate justice.	  LEAD BY EXAMPLE EXECUTE
Climate Resilience Ensure a safe and climate-resilient Boston.	1. Resilience Financing and Governance. Partner with the City to design alternative structures to prioritize, design, implement and finance resilience investments.	 EXECUTE
	2. Resilience Policy Advocacy. Advocate for the adoption of key resilience polices, including new development requirements; changes to the state building code and new governance and finance authorities.	 ADVOCATE & AMPLIFY
Carbon Mitigation Decarbonize the City by 2050.	1. District Energy Decarbonization. Work with Boston’s largest district energy system managers to identify options for decarbonizing those systems by 2050.	 EXECUTE
	2. Building Emissions Performance Standard Implementation. Support the City in developing technical and stakeholder engagement resources for the implementation and on-going improvement of the proposed Building Emissions Performance Standard for large buildings.	 EXECUTE
	3. Mitigation Policy Advocacy. Partner with the City to secure adoption of a Zero Net Carbon standard for new construction and a Carbon Emissions Performance Standard for existing large buildings.	 ADVOCATE & AMPLIFY
Community Capacity Building Empower diverse stakeholders to engage in climate action by providing information, technical tools, and organizational structure.	1. Communications Campaign. Develop an aggressive media and communications campaign to build public support for the implementation of the City’s Climate Action Plan.	 ADVOCATE & AMPLIFY
	2. Climate Progress Report. Partner with the Boston Foundation to develop a process for an annual third-party climate progress report.	 ADVISE
	3. Organizational Climate Action. Support GRC members in developing Climate Action Plans aligned to the City goals, including developing guidance tools and launching collaborative Climate Action Plan development processes.	 LEAD BY EXAMPLE

4 Strengthening the GRC Organization

The GRC is organized as a voluntary social impact network. It is not a traditional NGO-style non-profit organization. It is currently not incorporated—the Innovation Network for Communities (INC), a national non-profit that works with cities on their climate strategies, serves as the fiscal agent for the GRC. The informal nature of the GRC organizational design has allowed us to remain nimble and flexible and to operate with a low level of overhead. The work of the GRC has significantly increased in complexity over the last five years, however, and the GRC will adopt an even more aggressive implementation strategy in the next five years. There are four important strategies to strengthen the GRC capacity to effectively implement our strategic plan:



1. GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES.

Document our current organizational governance structures, including the roles of the GRC Executive Committee and Working Groups, and member and stakeholder expectations for participation, leadership, staffing, and financial support.



2. DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE.

Form a Development Committee to create a long-term funding strategy for the GRC. The goal of the Development Committee will be to secure a stable five-year funding for the GRC of \$2 million per year—\$1 million for operating expenses and \$1 million for priority projects.



3. POLICY COMMITTEE.

Form a new Policy Committee to guide the GRC's policy advocacy agenda. A copy of the current GRC policy priorities is attached.



4. LEGAL STRUCTURE.

Explore pathways to an independent legal structure or other more permanent organizational basis, including continuing as an informal network, incorporating as a 501(c)(3), or merging with a larger Boston-based non-profit organization that is aligned with the GRC mission.

ATTACHMENT 1

Boston Green Ribbon Commission Policy Priorities

PURPOSE

This document describes the key policy outcomes the Green Ribbon Commission (GRC) believes are necessary to achieve the City of Boston's long-term climate resilience and greenhouse gas reduction goals, according to the Climate Ready Boston and Carbon Free Boston research findings. The document focuses on the broad policy outcomes that are needed and does not advocate for or against any specific piece of legislation.

THE GRC ROLE IN POLICY CHANGE

The GRC was launched in the fall of 2010. Our mission is to convene leaders from Boston's key sectors—business, education, health care, civic society, finance, real estate, professional services, the arts, tourism and others—to support the outcomes of the City's Climate Action Plan.

Over the last decade, we have made critical contributions to the development of the City of Boston's climate strategy. *Climate Ready Boston*, which we initiated and championed, is now leading to substantive actions to regulate future development and invest in resilience projects that will protect the city from sea level rise, extreme heat and extreme storms. The Commission's *Carbon Free Boston* report is helping to shape the city's strategy to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, which will require dramatic changes in city energy systems, including large improvements in building energy efficiency, decarbonization of the electricity grid, and the electrification of transportation and building heating and cooling.

The initiatives we have championed clearly signal the need for significant policy changes. As a credible convener focused on cross-sector collaboration towards common climate goals, GRC support can lend important weight to debate on critical policy objectives.

This GRC Policy Brief is designed to be used in two ways:

- As a tool for the GRC to communicate the urgency of taking action on climate adaptation and mitigation policy priorities.
- As a tool to support policy advocacy by individual GRC Members and Working Groups as they interact with policy influencers and decision-makers.

As a general practice, we do not envision the GRC becoming involved in advocating for or against specific pieces of legislation or administrative policy. We are not structured or staffed to do this effectively, and there are many other partners engaged in that work. Therefore, this Policy Brief is focused on the broad policy outcomes that are needed as opposed to advocating for specific pieces of legislation or administrative policy.

ATTACHMENT 1

Boston Green Ribbon Commission Policy Priorities

CLIMATE RESILIENCE POLICY PRIORITIES

<i>Climate Projections</i>	Institutionalize the Greater Boston Panel on Climate Change to provide updated projections in five-year intervals beginning in 2025 (2020 update already underway).
<i>Future Flood Zoning Overlay District</i>	Adopt a flood zoning overlay district that incorporates the planned flood elevation of at least 40 inches and requires resilient and equitable design for new developments and major renovations of existing development.
<i>Resilient Infrastructure</i>	Establish resilient design standards and funding mechanisms for needed investments in municipal and regional transportation, energy, water, sewerage, communications and other classes of infrastructure.
<i>City and State Governance and Finance Structures</i>	Prioritize implementation of the district scale implementation plans for Charlestown, East Boston, South Boston, Downtown and Dorchester for action by 2030, 2050, and 2070. Establish local and state governance and financing structures that are capable of delivering the funding and implementation capacity needed to execute these priorities, while ensuring equitable outcomes.
<i>State Building Code</i>	Update the state building code to require buildings to be resilient to the climate impacts projected over their expected life span.
<i>Waterfront Regulation</i>	Update the Public Waterfront Act (Ch. 91) and/or its regulations to address projected future climate risks and encourage the use of nature-based coastal protection measures, while enhancing public access.

CARBON NEUTRALITY POLICY PRIORITIES

<i>100% Clean Electricity</i>	Take steps to ensure that 100% of the electricity used in the city is generated from carbon-free sources, including the large district energy systems within the city boundary that are not regulated by the Public Utility Commission. Ensure fair outcomes for all electricity consumers. Update the state Clean Energy Standard to require a 100% clean electricity grid by 2050 or earlier.
<i>Carbon Free New Buildings</i>	Require that all new construction meets Zero Net Carbon performance standards, without placing undue burden on socially vulnerable populations.
<i>State Building Code</i>	Update state building code to require all new construction be built to Zero Net Carbon standards, without placing undue burden on socially vulnerable populations.
<i>Existing Building Performance Requirements</i>	Require existing buildings to achieve Zero Net Carbon performance by 2050 through a combination of energy efficiency retrofits, thermal electrification, and renewable energy purchasing. Ensure equity through financial incentives/funding mechanisms.
<i>Transportation Mode Shift</i>	Prioritize transit, walking and biking over private vehicle use through a combination of infrastructure investments, incentives and subsidies, and penalties (e.g. congestion charges, parking restrictions and vehicle bans), while taking affordability and access into account.
<i>Transportation Fuel Switching</i>	Over time, require that all vehicles operating in the city are powered by clean fuels and assure that there is a robust and equitably designed infrastructure of EV charging stations in homes, commercial buildings and parking garages.
<i>Transportation & Climate Initiative</i>	Adopt the regional Transportation & Climate Initiative (TCI) to implement a regional “cap and invest” policy to establish a cap on global warming pollution from transportation fuels and invest the proceeds to achieve additional benefits through reduced emissions, cleaner transportation, healthier communities, and more resilient infrastructure.
<i>Zero Waste</i>	Mandate recycling of plastics, paper and organics and implement diversion initiatives.