

## Douglas gets ready to deal with impact of climate change

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Town Hall Highlights: Douglas

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Town Administrator

Douglas is participating in the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) grant program. This two-step process includes a planning component followed by active grant writing and capital projects designed to bring critical infrastructure in the Town up to grade to deal with the impact of climate change.

Proposed by the Baker Administration and supported by the legislature with substantial resources, the MVP program represents a significant investment in municipal infrastructure by the State. It is a worthwhile discussion regardless of one's individual views on climate change. Deteriorated or inadequate storm water management assets need to be replaced in anyway. The added complexity of managing water when a stubborn, legally protected group of inhabitants – the beaver population – has a significant impact on the effort, is a real issue already.

As part of the planning process, areas around Town that are most sensitive to very heavy rain and runoff flow have been identified for further review. Operating on the premise that future precipitation patterns may involve more infrequent, but more extreme, weather events, those vulnerable areas should be addressed as priorities before the costs of catastrophically failing infrastructure are incurred. Moving forward, the Town will work with the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission and the Commonwealth to identify and fund projects meeting the threshold of concern.

The Town has also identified changing conditions in its heavily forested areas as an area of interest. Once again, we are not responding only to the forecast for change, but existing circumstances following an unusually high rate of die-off affecting specific species of trees and ongoing development abutting forested areas. Most are aware of the extensive work that has been ongoing in various areas of Town just to remove branches and trees near power lines. One simply needs to imagine a multiplied quantity of material across the wilder forested areas of Town to recognize the need for monitoring and preparation that may deserve grant funding.

It is hard to overestimate the amount of financial loss, and in some cases, human suffering, that has arisen from the failure to plan for the worst scenario that circumstances suggest are not only possible but likely. Whether one believes the planet is flat or the sky orange or the climate is changing, or not, assessing the condition of the world around us reveals that any number of issues that some discuss in theory are in fact already here.

The planning process will soon involve events where public input is requested. If these topics interest you, please keep an eye out over the next couple of months as meetings will be posted and advertised, all with the goal of hearing from residents and taking your concerns into account as items are prioritized for possible funding.