

Towns of Harvard, Ayer, and Shirley Awarded State Grant to Build Locally Owned Energy and Resilience

Founding municipalities, together with NextGen Energy, launch Keep Lights On MA,[™] a public-private partnership aiming to cleanly power critical infrastructure

HARVARD, MA, UNITED STATES, August 13, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The towns of Ayer,

“

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Kimberly Johnston: Founder and CEO, NextGen Energy

Harvard, and Shirley have been [awarded a Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness \(MVP\) Action Grant](#) by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs' (EEA's) new Environment & Climate (ECO) One Stop program.

The three towns, in partnership with NextGen Energy, will use the award to launch Keep Lights On[™] Massachusetts, an initiative to bring locally owned clean energy and storage to power the facilities their communities rely on most, with a replicable model designed to expand statewide.

“Keep Lights On MA started with a simple idea: the places that keep us safe -- hospitals, emergency shelters, fire and police stations -- should never lose power, and communities shouldn't have to choose between resilience and balancing their budgets,” said Kimberly Johnston, founder and CEO of NextGen Energy. “Our Hubs for Energy Resilient Operations or HERO[™] pair on-site clean generation and battery storage with an intelligent management system that lets a town generate, store, and orchestrate its own electricity, stay powered through emergencies, and even earn new revenue. Ayer, Harvard, and Shirley are showing what is possible, and we built this model so any Massachusetts community can follow them.”

Massachusetts has some of the highest energy costs in the nation, and more frequent extreme weather events are placing increased strain on an aging grid. “What drew Shirley to Keep Lights On is the potential to significantly reduce our municipal energy costs without compromising reliability,” said Brian Hildebrant Chair of the Shirley Select Board. “Energy affordability is a top concern for our residents, and that makes it a priority for town leadership.”

The grant will allow towns to take a critical first step in bringing HERO to life: conducting a comprehensive study that will determine ideal site locations for clean energy generation and battery storage, assess environmental factors, and calculate specific sizing requirements for powering the critical infrastructure sites in each town. "Harvard was first designated a Green Community back in 2010 and has since been certified as a Climate Leader due to our town-wide focus on implementing clean energy projects and initiatives. Our objectives of lowering energy costs while building a more resilient community are right in line with the Keep the Lights On initiative. We are thrilled to be part of this exciting venture and so appreciative of the grant award," said SusanMary Redinger, Chair of the Harvard Select Board.

"Residents want to feel part of this, and this grant gives us a way to bring them in," said Jannice Livingston, Vice-Chair of the Ayer Select Board. "It reflects exactly what the state's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness program set out to do: help communities turn climate risk into local action. We hope our work becomes a catalyst for the whole Commonwealth, proving that resilient, affordable, community-owned energy is within reach for any Massachusetts town."

About Keep Lights On Massachusetts

The Keep Lights On Massachusetts (KLO) initiative is a public-private partnership that helps cities, towns, and institutions bring HERO™ Hub energy systems to their critical facilities. KLO gives communities a pathway to own their own clean energy infrastructure, deliver energy resilience, lower energy costs, and generate new municipal revenue. Municipalities, universities, ports, and other institutions across the Commonwealth that want to strengthen their resilience and take control of their energy future are invited to learn more at keeplightsonma.org.

About NextGen Energy

NextGen Energy (NGE) originated Community Energy Infrastructure (CEI), a new category of locally owned clean energy that pairs dispatchable, carbon-free generation with energy storage and an intelligent, software-driven management platform. That platform, the core of NGE's proprietary HERO™ Hub system, uses AI and geospatial analysis to size, prioritize, and continuously optimize energy resources across a network of sites, so a town or a cluster of towns can operate its own virtual power plant (VPP). NGE partners with municipalities and critical-facility owners across the country to bring resilient, revenue-generating energy infrastructure to the communities that need it most. As the initiative's lead business partner, NGE provides the technology, financing structure, and expertise to make town-owned energy and resilience achievable. Learn more at nextgenenergy.com.

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