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SPP 609 WORKSHOP
NEW BEDFORD CASE PROFILE
APRIL 2026

City of New Bedford Networked Geothermal

An early-stage HEET Kickstart feasibility study exploring two potential sites in New Bedford's historic central neighborhood, where strong community interest has not yet translated into project momentum.

LOCATION	PROJECT TYPE	CURRENT STATUS
New Bedford, Bristol County, Massachusetts	**Community (HEET Kickstart)**	**Feasibility (no identifiable movement since study)**

LEAD ORGANIZATION	SYSTEM SCALE	ESTIMATED COST
City of New Bedford	**Not yet determined**	**Not publicly available**

KEY OBSTACLE

Pre-1950 housing stock and brownfield contamination at proposed sites

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This project is in the exploratory phase, with two sites under consideration for a potential networked geothermal system. The first is a city-owned, decontaminated vacant lot that formerly housed Morse Cutting Tool, a brownfield site located in an environmental justice area where indoor air quality was affected by prior industrial use.[1,2] The second is the historic Arnold Mansion, home to the Wamsutta Club, a local private club that expressed interest in geothermal options.[1] Both sites are in the central, historic part of New Bedford in mixed-use neighborhoods.

No site has been selected and no system design has been proposed. Much of New Bedford's housing stock was built before 1950, making major system upgrades necessary to support geothermal conversion. The city's industrial history has produced several brownfield and Superfund sites that, while potentially suitable for repurposing, may limit the use of closed-loop networking.[1]

TIMELINE

Feb 2024: Kickstart program announced; New Bedford selected

2024: Feasibility study conducted

2026: No identifiable movement since study completion

POLICY ANCHOR

No explicit policy anchor found. New Bedford has a municipal resilience dashboard and sustainability programs but no climate action plan or policy mandate specifically directing

KEY ACTORS AND GOVERNANCE

HEET administered the Kickstart grant that funded the feasibility study.[2] The City of New Bedford is listed as the lead organization, and collaboration with Neighborhoods United, a collective of neighborhood organizations, facilitated outreach and information distribution.[2] Beyond these, the available sources do not identify specific municipal officials, consultants, or technical partners driving the project forward.

FUNDING AND COSTS

The identified funding source is the Kickstart Massachusetts program, which distributed $450,000 across 12 communities. If distributed equally, New Bedford would have received approximately $37,500 for its feasibility study.[3] No system cost estimates, net cost projections, or construction funding sources are available in the public record. The project has not progressed to a stage where detailed cost analysis has been conducted.

PERMITTING AND APPROVALS

Because no site has been selected and no system has been designed, there are no permitting materials at this time. Brownfield remediation requirements and any environmental restrictions associated with the Morse Cutting Tool site would likely add complexity to any future permitting process, though the specific requirements have not been assessed.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND EQUITY

Community engagement is well documented despite the project's early stage. Methods included surveys and feedback forms, online and social media outreach, and public information sessions, coordinated in collaboration with Neighborhoods United.[1,2] Survey results showed majority positive reactions: nearly 70% of respondents indicated interest in being considered for pilot programs, and 85% of respondents were single-family homeowners currently heating with natural gas.[1]

The first proposed site, the Morse Cutting Tool lot, is in a state-designated environmental justice area.[2] New Bedford has broader sustainability infrastructure, including an active resilience dashboard tracking initiatives beyond energy.[4] A separate geothermal project is already under construction as part of a new elementary school, which could cost up to $119 million.[5] The networked geothermal sites may have been deprioritized in light of that larger commitment.

WHY THIS CASE MATTERS

networked geothermal exploration.

NEXT STEP

A thorough assessment of the Morse Cutting Tool lot (brownfield) and Arnold Mansion sites, including site-specific technical and regulatory evaluation.

> New Bedford illustrates a case where strong community interest and municipal sustainability capacity have not translated into project momentum. The city has an active resilience program, a separate geothermal school construction project, and survey data showing broad resident support for networked geothermal. Yet the two proposed sites appear to have stalled, possibly deprioritized in favor of the elementary school project. The case raises a question relevant across the Kickstart portfolio: whether feasibility-stage community engagement can sustain itself when institutional follow-through is slow, or whether public interest dissipates without visible progress toward construction.

Sources

1. Town of New Bedford, "Project Report," n.d. PJ9_HEET_Feasibility_Study_01
2. HEET, "Tier 1: Pre-feasibility of Geothermal Networks," n.d. PJ9_HEET_Kickstart_Report_02
3. HEET, "Kickstart Massachusetts," n.d. PJ9_KickstartMassachusetts_03.pdf — https://www.heet.org/Kickstart-Massachusetts
4. City of New Bedford, "NB Resilient Dashboard," n.d. — https://nbresilient.com/dashboard
5. *South Coast Today*, "The Congdon-DeValles school will be a New Bedford first," n.d. — Link

Sources still needed: Town meeting minutes from relevant committees or boards that might explain why the proposed sites have not moved forward; any site-specific environmental or technical assessment for the Morse Cutting Tool lot or Arnold Mansion; documentation of coordination (if any) between the networked geothermal exploration and the Congdon-DeValles elementary school geothermal project.
