



WHAT IS THE GREEN NEW DEAL AND WHY SHOULD I CARE?

A BRIEF SUMMARY WITHIN RHODE ISLAND'S CONTEXT

RHODE ISLAND GREEN NEW DEAL RESEARCH COUNCIL

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The **Green New Deal** as an idea has recently stirred some robust dialogue across the country. Regardless of preconceptions, the **Green New Deal** is an attempt to address three pressing issues with one integrated solution. Its central question is: ***Under increasing threats from environmental change, economic uncertainty, and soaring inequality, how can we secure a strong future for American society?***

The recent devastating wildfires, hurricanes, and floods are the kinds of impacts that will only get worse if we don't address climate change. The costs of living are rising, economic inequality is soaring, and automation is questioning the future of work.

The **Green New Deal** is a response to address these challenges. Its components are not novel ideas. They are solutions which have been developed over several decades.

The **Green New Deal** integrates these solutions into a systemic way of thinking. The major challenges ahead are inextricably linked. In other words, one problem is intensified by the other. Instead of siloing policies that address economic or environmental dilemmas through piecemeal approaches, the **Green New Deal** is built on the narrative that these challenges can only be solved together. What the **Green New Deal** does is present a means to address climate change, the economy, and social equity issues as interconnected and interdependent. What the **Green New Deal** doesn't do is deliver another dose of Reaganomics, but neither do the economic policies of the current presidential administration.

“Under increasing threats from environmental change and economic uncertainty, how can we secure a strong future for American society?”

Quite recently, these kinds of solutions have been given vibrant expression by Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Edward J. Markey, with vigorous support from young people in the Sunrise Movement. The three basic pillars of the **Green New Deal** derive from existing sustainability theory and discussion: **Environment**; **economy**; and **equity**. The idea is not new: the phrase “green new deal” was used by Thomas Friedman in *New York Times* [opinion pieces](#) in 2007. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the major stimulus legislation of the Obama Administration, included “green new deal” provisions – for example, housing weatherization and renewable energy development, which were successfully used in Rhode Island to stimulate our economy at a time of recession and led to the state [being ranked](#) one of the top states in the country in energy efficiency. The Green Party has had a **Green New Deal** [platform](#) for several years.

The national **Green New Deal** [resolution](#) in Congress - as summarized in February 2019 by [New Consensus](#), a new think tank using the resolution to develop specific policy recommendations - has five main goals:

- 1) Achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions through a fair and just transition for all communities and workers.

- 2) Create millions of good, high wage jobs; and ensure prosperity and economic security for all people of the United States;
- 3) Invest in the infrastructure and industry of the United states to sustainably meet the challenges of the 21st century.
- 4) Secure clean air and water, climate and community resilience, healthy food, access to nature, and a sustainable environment for all.
- 5) Promote justice and equity by stopping current, preventing future, and repairing historic oppression of frontline and vulnerable communities.

Examples of this integrated approach already exist around New England, across the country, and in Rhode Island. These approaches have been implemented in the form of strategies to mitigate climate change and adapt to its impacts while restoring prosperity to communities. The central principle within each of these examples is *community-based resilience* - solutions that tackle the full scope of environmental, economic, and social challenges and are based on the experiences and needs of the impacted communities.

The national **Green New Deal** resolution gives important context to the need for solutions to safeguard America's future. It should not be accepted as a prescription for the kinds of solutions needed locally. However, Rhode Island should consider the principles behind integrating economy, environment, and equity in a systemic approach. This approach, if done the right way, would work to address the state's three most significant vulnerabilities:

- 1) Rhode Island is particularly susceptible to climate change impacts.
- 2) The state is exposed to economic uncertainty. Rhode Island is among the first states to fall into a recession and the last to recover.
- 3) Rhode Island has the highest poverty rate in New England. Growing economic inequality and rising costs of living threaten the well-being of Rhode Islanders.

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For a **Rhode Island Green New Deal** to succeed in its intention, it must be well-informed by the needs and conditions of all Rhode Islanders and local communities. This means anyone who brings an experience, expertise, and a shared concern should come to the table and join the conversation. With a scope broadly defined by the principles within, disagreements will be an inherent part of the process; but consensus is not a prerequisite heading in. By confronting Rhode Island's challenges together, we can build a framework for a **Rhode Island Green New Deal** that appropriately meets the experiences of Rhode Island's people and communities.