As 2022 began, Massachusetts’ climate world was gripped by fear and frustration over the presumed death of Build Back Better, the massively disappointing 2021 UN climate talks, and the failure of two key pieces of the state’s energy transition plan.
But now, as the year comes to a close, climate advocates are looking back on some key wins.

The federal and state government passed groundbreaking — if insufficient — clean-energy policies. Massachusetts elected a new governor with a history of climate advocacy. And environmental justice advocates notched big victories, like the probable defeat of a controversial wood-burning power plant.

It wasn’t all so rosy. New England endured devastating drought and heat. Battles over the siting of infrastructure persisted. And Massachusetts came nowhere close to meeting all of its climate goals. Still, compared with this time last year, things just might be looking up — depending on who you ask.

We asked five experts about the year that was, and what to look forward to in the year ahead.

Dwaign Tyndal is executive director of Roxbury-based environmental justice organization Alternatives for Community and Environment; Oliver Sellers-Garcia serves as Boston’s first Green New Deal director under Mayor Michelle Wu; Katie Rae is the founding CEO of The Engine, a venture capital firm launched by MIT that invests in climate innovation; Ben Hellerstein is the state director at the advocacy group Environment Massachusetts; Paul Kirshen is a professor of climate adaptation at the University of Massachusetts Boston and research director of the research group Stone Living Lab.

These interviews have been edited for length and clarity.

What was Massachusetts’ biggest accomplishment in the fight against climate change in 2022?

Tyndal: Since I focus on the local area: Boston’s building emissions ordinance, which can substantially cut emissions from large buildings. If we can do that in Boston, it can
be done across the state. Local political energy is going to define the state’s level of commitment.

**Sellers-Garcia:** The climate legislation from this summer. It’s going to do so much: the gas restriction pilot that we hope to be able to be a part of, rebates for electric vehicles, and so much to really push forward electrification through Mass Save programs, among many other things.

**Rae:** Look at our universities and the important research there that has translated into companies that could have a huge impact on climate — this is the year it got real. Commonwealth Fusion opened their manufacturing facility for the future of fusion energy. That is so freakin’ cool. We had Form Energy, with their long-term storage battery for wind and solar. Via Separations, that basically decarbonizes heavy industrial processes. Sublime is doing green cement. Boston Metal is doing green steel. They’re all in Massachusetts!

**Hellerstein:** One piece of the [climate bill that passed in August](https://www.globe.com/news/energy/2022/08/18/senate-passes-climate-bill-to-cut-emissions) that will be critical is a requirement for the owners of large buildings to disclose the energy that their buildings use each year.

**Kirshen:** I’d highlight two recent state reports that lay out a blueprint for the future. The [Clean Energy Plan for 2050](https://www.mass.gov/doc/clean-energy-plan-for-2050/) lays out how to get to net zero emission by 2050. I worked on the other one, the [new Massachusetts Climate Change Assessment](https://www.mass.gov/doc/new-massachusetts-climate-change-assessment), and it focuses on identifying coming impacts of climate change and gaps in our planning for adaptation, with an emphasis on marginalized and oppressed populations.

**What was the state’s biggest missed opportunity on climate this year?**

**Sellers-Garcia:** I’m worried about energy prices. Boston is in a great position because we have our Community Choice Electricity program, but there will still be uncertainty next year. It’s really hurting a lot of people. I wish that more communities had been able to get their aggregation plans approved and that we had all been in
alignment earlier to have the conversations about having efficiency and electrification be tied into the energy price crisis conversation.

**Kirshen:** Implementation. I see great conceptual plans for adaptation, particularly along the coast. But we need to start thinking about how to finance some of these solutions and how we get permits for them. And we need to build. The longer we wait, the more vulnerable we become.

**Tyndal:** Many people believe we can push the process of emissions reduction down the road. And also, we still focus on what we call “market-based” solutions that put the economy first. Many times, those just serve as a way to avoid the tough question, which is, how do we get off fossil fuels right now? There are no shortcuts.

**Hellerstein:** Ten states have committed to 100 percent clean electricity in legislation. Massachusetts is not one of them. Environment Massachusetts helped file a bill for the first time back in 2017 to make that commitment, but it has still not passed into law. I had originally hoped we’d be the first to make that commitment. Now, I hope that we’re not the last.

What should the incoming Healey administration’s top climate priority be?

**Rae:** Look at what Deval Patrick did 15 years ago in biotech, but with a mandate around climate and around making sure that these climate tech companies are here.

**Kirshen:** The most important thing is mitigating greenhouse gas emissions. But we can’t reverse climate change immediately, so we have to invest in adaptation, with equity concerns up front. [For instance,] when I talk to residents of East Boston, they say, it’s great you’re going to make the coast greener and more resilient, but you should also make sure you build more affordable housing to avoid gentrification.

**Tyndal:** Air quality. Follow the asthma. Until we put the necessary political capital in
to clean our air and to reduce emissions, it will be a silent deadly killer.

**Sellers-Garcia:** The MBTA. Taking the most possible out of the Inflation Reduction Act and creating programs that really work for cities and environmental justice communities. And workforce development.

**What’s one climate-related New Year’s resolution you’d recommend Massachusetts residents make this year?**

**Rae:** It’s a whole bunch of little things, right? Think about who you’re buying your energy from. Think about how you’re using your energy. Think about what you eat. More importantly, who do you buy from? How do they think about their climate pledges?

**Hellerstein:** Look at getting an induction stove or an electric resistance stove. Gas stoves and propane stoves cause greenhouse gas emissions, and we’re learning more about how these stoves are really harming our health. Federal funds from the Inflation Reduction Act and rebates through Mass Save can help bring these technologies into reach.

**Tyndal:** Hold your municipalities accountable. Do not forfeit the power of local governance to Beacon Street.

**Kirshen:** In making any decision, ask yourself, will it negatively impact the climate? And think about if the decision will still be a good one under a wetter, hotter, more stormy, and variable climate.

**Sellers-Garcia:** Take stock of all the great things that you have, and can have, in your life because of climate action. The Community Choice Electricity example is one of them. Think about how much greater it will be to ride a free bus, because you can get on and off more quickly. Recognize how much more comfortable your home could be if it had more weatherization.
Describe your feelings about climate change in one word.

**Kirshen:** Frustration. This is a problem we didn’t have to have. We know what to do, but we need the political will.

**Hellerstein:** Cautiously optimistic.

**Sellers-Garcia:** Excitement. 2023 is the year where we have local, state and federal governments aligned.

**Rae:** Determined. We are determined to back great entrepreneurs.

**Tyndal:** Militancy. We need militancy to push forward.

Dharna Noor can be reached at dharna.noor@globe.com. Follow her on Twitter @dharnanoor. Sabrina Shankman can be reached at sabrina.shankman@globe.com. Follow her on Twitter @shankman.