Why Tacoma Needs a Climate Action Plan

Our climate has reached a point of crisis. Here we are living through unprecedented heat, extreme downpours, wildfire smoke, and other impacts, with their severity increasing year-by-year. In 2019, Indigenous and youth climate strikes demanded more City climate action. In response to community concerns, the Tacoma City Council declared a climate emergency. This Plan sets climate strategies and actions that get us on track to address the climate emergency by 2030. The science is clear - we need to act urgently.

Climate change is not the only crisis our community is facing. Therefore, City Council asked staff for climate solutions that advance other community priorities – like public health, economic opportunities, social justice, and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. On top of these needs, our community is growing – we need to accommodate more people and offer more services. This is the context we are living in, and so it is the context we are planning in.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY NET ZERO EMISSIONS?

Net zero emissions are achieved by eliminating GHG (greenhouse gas) emissions from activities carried out within the city. The goal is to first get as close to zero emissions as possible, and then to offset any emissions that are left with an equivalent amount of carbon removals. Carbon can be removed from the atmosphere through direct capture and storage technologies, or from reclaiming and restoring natural lands.

In Tacoma, net zero emissions will be achieved by improving the systems and technologies for moving people around, building and operating buildings, producing and manufacturing goods, and disposing of waste.

Working toward a better Tacoma in 2030 and net-zero emissions in 2050, we plan to do our part to solve the climate crisis with strong investments in the immediate and long-term future while improving community health, safety, job opportunities, and equity. That’s news we’re happy to share: climate action can have many different benefits.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY EQUITY?

Equity is when everyone has access to the opportunities necessary to satisfy their essential needs, advance their well-being, and achieve their full potential. (Racial Equity Alliance)

Letter from the City Manager & Tacoma Public Utilities Director

My fellow Tacomans,

We – City of Tacoma and Tacoma Public Utilities staff – recognize the climate emergency and other crises that confront us. We hear clearly Tacoma City Council’s call to action. And, we hear our community’s voices echo throughout this Plan.

As Tacoma’s public servants, you can measure our integrity and effectiveness by our keeping with Tacoma’s democratic policy commitments. We are committed to Tacoma’s climate goals and policies, including our 2050 net zero greenhouse gas emissions goal (Climate Action Plan, 2021), the 2021 Decarbonization Resolutions (Res. 40776, U-11193), 2019 Climate Emergency Resolution (Res. 40509), as well as the 2020 Anti-Racist Systems Transformation Resolution (Res. 40622), which governs everything we do. These policies embody much of our vision for our shared future. With this Plan, you can track our work as we build a Better Tacoma.

As two of Tacoma’s principal public organizations, it is our purpose to plan and act in the long-term vision of this community. The welfare of our community, across generations, is our main concern. As directors of the City and Tacoma Public Utilities, we are committed to ensuring department directors and managers embed climate and equity in every service, policy, program, project, and contract. We will continue to work with Tacoma City Council and the Public Utility Board to direct and authorize our work, including through regular funding requests that empower us to be successful. While adoption is the first step, only implementation of this Plan brings us the progress we need. Indeed, our Earth and everything that calls our planet home depend on the leadership of Tacoma and cities like ours.

Elizabeth Pauli
City Manager

Jackie Flowers
Tacoma Public Utilities Director