



City of Tacoma
Office of Sustainability

September 16, 2021

TO: Infrastructure, Planning, and Sustainability Committee

RE: Tacoma Climate Action Plan Letter of Support

Dear Chair McCarthy and Members of the Infrastructure, Planning, and Sustainability Committee,

As you know, the Sustainable Tacoma Commission was created by Tacoma City Council to advise council members and staff on sustainability initiatives, as well as bring community accountability, transparency, and vigilance to the long-term implementation of Tacoma's Environmental Action Plan, the City's second climate action plan, and other sustainability policies.

Recommendation: Adopt and Fully Fund, Staff, and Implement the Draft Tacoma Climate Action Plan

We write now to communicate our enthusiastic support for the draft Tacoma Climate Action Plan (CAP) developed through a robust year-long engagement and technical process involving staff, stakeholders, and community members. The Sustainable Tacoma Commission advises Tacoma City Council to adopt and fully fund, fully staff, and fully implement the Climate Action Plan. The CAP charts a course for the City of Tacoma and Tacoma Public Utilities to lead our community in equitable, transformative climate action. Much more than an emissions reduction plan, the CAP presents us with the opportunity to improve community resilience and advance social justice with investments in healthy and affordable housing, a reliable multimodal transportation system, and a green economy.

There is action the City can take immediately on its course to fully fund, staff, and implement the Climate Action Plan. As the City approaches its mid-biennial budget adjustment process, we recommend that the City fully fund (1) the Decarbonization Studies called for by the [Decarbonization Resolution](#) (RES 40776) and (2) food growing projects focused on the right-of-way. We also recommend that the City immediately prioritize federal recovery funding and City mid-biennial budget adjustment funding for implementation of high priority CAP actions that are effective immediate investments in our equitable, climate-safe future.

This Climate Action Plan Requires a New Pace and Scale for Tacoma Climate Action

The CAP builds on our Environmental Action Plan, which spanned 2016-2020, as well as our 2019 [Climate Emergency Declaration](#) and 2021 Decarbonization Resolution.^{1 2 3} The CAP commits our community to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050 and prepare for climate impacts we are experiencing now or anticipate soon. Now-annual wildfires and extreme heat waves remind us that, while we must plan for the long-term, climate change is burdening our community today – and we must modernize and change our municipal operations, services, and community at a transformative pace and scale or risk catastrophic climate change. Climate impacts and investments we need to make as a community tend to burden our most vulnerable community members most – particularly low-income households, our unhoused neighbors, outdoor workers, kids, seniors, pregnant people, low-income households, BIPOC community members, and people with breathing or heart issues. Their wellbeing is in our trust.

¹ https://cms.cityoftacoma.org/enviro/Sustain/Environmental_Action_Plan_2020_Progress_Report_FINAL.pdf

² https://www.cityoftacoma.org/in_the_news/city_council_approves_climate_emergency_resolution

³ https://cms.cityoftacoma.org/enviro/Sustain/Resolution-No-40776_Decarbonization.pdf#:~:text=harm%20to%20all%20people%2C%20including%20the%20residents%20of,operations%20carbon-neutral%20by%202050%2C%E2%80%9D%20and%20requested%20the%20City

Call for Visionary City Leadership and True Commitment on Climate Action

Implementation of this Plan will test the resolve of Tacoma City Council to meet the public need of this moment and generation. It will test the commitment of City of Tacoma staff to implementing democratic policy commitments for the wellbeing of our community. If we have reason to question what government can deliver today – what will they say tomorrow, or in ten years? We must not hesitate or fall short. The scientific, moral, and economic cases are clear. We insist only a transformative approach to climate action will demonstrate our commitment to good governance and making hard decisions because they are the right decisions.

In particular, we want to call your attention to the following elements of the Plan:

- Please review Appendix 7 of the Climate Action Plan to familiarize yourself with input the City received from frontline community members about their priorities
- Please review the “Stories from 2030” in the Climate Action Plan that depict a better Tacoma – transformed to be more equitable and low carbon by CAP investments

In addition, we wish to call for the City to:

- Please fully fund through the mid-biennial budget adjustment process (1) the Decarbonization Studies and (2) food growing projects focused on the right-of-way.
- Please immediately fund high priority CAP actions through federal recovery funding or the mid-biennial budget adjustment process

Basis for Our Recommendations & Who We Are

The Sustainable Tacoma Commission bases its recommendations to Council on its deep involvement in development of the Climate Action Plan. The Commission received monthly updates and made recommendations on plan development and engagement processes at regular Commission meetings. Commission subcommittees researched and analyzed several other municipal climate action plans and made recommendations incorporated into the CAP. Commissioners lent their expertise to CAP technical teams, volunteering insights to develop climate actions that reduce our community’s emissions, prepare us for climate impacts, and offer various co-benefits to public health, economic opportunities, or social equity. Commissioners have communicated Commission priorities to Council Members, including the need for our City and community to rapidly and equitably transition away from fossil fuel use; focus on decarbonizing our buildings and vehicles by electrifying them; and prioritize external funding (such as federal recovery funding) for green, equitable, shovel-ready jobs.

Beyond our participation in the Plan development process, we want to emphasize the professional and civic expertise that we volunteer to better advise the Council. Our members work, have training, or engage civically in energy systems management, waste/material management, ocean and marine sciences, climate science and policy, governance, sustainable business practices, public health, food policy and programming, environmental justice, and research and advocacy in climate planning and action. We work in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. We are Tacoma community members. We understand this issue. The time for transformative climate action is now. Again, the Sustainable Tacoma Commission advises Tacoma City Council to adopt and fully fund, fully staff, and fully implement the Climate Action Plan.

Red Alert on Climate: More Science, More Certainty, More Urgency

The latest United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (UN IPCC) [report](#) on climate change echoes the science, conclusions, and need for aggressive actions detailed in our own Tacoma Climate Action Plan: [2021 is a “make or break year” for climate action](#), this is “[code red for humanity](#)”. Tacoma is a small and significant part of the larger American and global community – we must do our part in taking climate action [before catastrophic climate change becomes irreversible](#). It is a matter of our privilege and to our advantage to act now. Because we did not invest adequately in our 2016 Environmental Action Plan, the resources required to fully implement this Climate Action Plan are substantially greater. Failure to fully implement this Climate Action Plan will make it so future actions and investments will need to be even more rapid and costly. The City of Tacoma and our wider community must invest boldly now to get on track for our 2030 climate goal, and then sustain momentum through 2050.

Sincerely,

Matthew Benedict

Matthew Benedict
Vice-Chair, Sustainable Tacoma Commission

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