



Coalition of
Communities of
Color



Sunday, March 22nd, 2020

To: Ted Wheeler, Mayor of Portland
Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, City of Portland

From: Coalition of Communities of Color, Verde, Sunrise PDX, Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility, Climate Jobs PDX (a project of Portland Jobs with Justice), 350PDX, Columbia Riverkeeper, Willamette Riverkeeper, and Center for Sustainable Economy

Re: Comments on Draft Climate Emergency Resolution for the City of Portland

Dear Mayor Wheeler and Bureau of Planning and Sustainability,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the City of Portland’s draft Climate Emergency Declaration. We, the undersigned, urge you to make the following changes to this resolution to make it a powerful and effective tool for the City and demonstrate Portland’s leadership by setting a strong example for other communities. Fuller detail for each of these changes is elaborated upon below.

- Resourcing Community Climate Action Planning
 - Commit to resourcing frontline community members so that they can participate fully in climate action planning
 - Commit to building bridges to ensure successful outreach with and participation by key stakeholders, including a new staffer and/or expert consultant to focus on this work
 - Commit to finding and deploying resources to achieve climate justice goals
- Accountability and Transparency
 - Commit to a thorough and inclusive public recruitment process for the new governance structure for advising climate action planning
 - Indicate specific desired outcomes and process for the new governance structure
 - Commit to public reporting on creating the new governance structure and its progress
 - Commit to regularly coordinating with frontline organizations and leaders

- Demonstrate commitment to accountability, inclusivity, and transparency in the next steps of passing this Climate Emergency Declaration
- Specific Issues and Priorities
 - Noting what specific details are appropriate in the resolution thus far, and
 - Highlighting specific issues that should be named in the resolution

Introduction

Our organizations and our collective memberships agree with the City that we are in the midst of a climate emergency. Our City has a pressing and urgent need for climate justice and thus we appreciate that the City of Portland is committed to calling it what it is. The City must not only declare a climate emergency, but commit to action that is appropriate for addressing the crisis at hand. That action must be transparent, rooted in justice, and accountable to the communities on the front lines of climate change. For the reasons discussed below, we believe the City's Climate Emergency Declaration must go further in order to rise to meet this emergency at the scale and urgency that it demands.

In particular, this means rapid curtailing of Portland's contribution to greenhouse gas emissions and increasing resiliency measures. We must support those who have contributed the least to the causes of global climate change but who are most exposed to its health impacts, such as our communities' young people, and those who live on the front lines of the climate crisis. These frontline communities include but are not limited to black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), low-income households and people experiencing poverty, and unhoused persons and people experiencing housing instability. Workers, especially those in high-carbon industries, are also at risk as we enact a swift transition to a renewable energy economy. We must ensure a just transition for all of these communities that respects people's dignity and leaves no one behind.

The rapidly spreading COVID-19 pandemic highlights a wide range of areas where our social safety net is failing to provide for communities who need it most and demonstrating unacceptable weaknesses in our systems. Universal health care, housing stability, living wage jobs with benefits and protections for workers, and food sovereignty are all examples of critical infrastructure needed by all in order to weather public health crises. Health professionals worldwide have correctly pointed out that climate change is one of the largest and most complex public health crises the world has ever faced. We need swift action prioritizing the most vulnerable among us both to tackle the acute health crisis of COVID-19 and the ongoing health crisis of climate change.

With these points in mind, we urge you to adopt the following changes to the City of Portland's Climate Emergency Declaration.

Resourcing Community Climate Action Planning

In the time that has passed since early efforts to pass a Climate Emergency Declaration (“Declaration”), there have been some efforts made by the City of Portland to engage with frontline communities in refining the draft resolution. We appreciate that the process was slowed and that effort was taken to receive more input before moving forward this Spring. However, many of our calls for investments in frontline communities to participate in shaping this resolution have not resulted in action from the City to provide resources to community members for full participation in this process.

The draft Declaration is right to acknowledge:

- WHEREAS - B: that frontline communities “must be the ones that benefit first from the transition to a renewable energy economy and be able to lead the planning and implementation efforts to address climate change” and
- WHEREAS - D: the value of “the sovereign voice of Native Nations and the importance of working in partnership with tribal leaders to uphold treaty-reserved lifeways, traditional values, and cultural resources that are jeopardized by the increasing threat of the climate emergency.”

In order to act accordingly, the Declaration must include a prompt commitment to provide resources for frontline communities to participate in the “new, ongoing governance structure” outlined in BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED 4-6. These resources should include, at a minimum, commitments to:

- Stipends for frontline community members’ time spent,
- Free childcare and translation/interpretation services, and
- Travel compensation.

These are necessary commitments to allow frontline communities to “be able to lead the planning and implementation efforts to address climate change.”

New bridges and relationships should be built by the City with frontline communities to ensure success in climate action planning. In executing the Declaration, the City should consider hiring a new staffer or, at the least, an expert consultant to assist with outreach and recruitment efforts to build relationships with frontline communities and to help facilitate the co-creation of this new governance structure with frontline communities. This is essential because to date, the City’s efforts have not yielded significant headway in this area. A new hire should, ideally, be a member of a frontline community.

In addition to resourcing essential collaboration with frontline communities, the City should commit to finding and deploying the resources needed to implement the goals and targets outlined in the Climate Emergency Resolution. One avenue by which this could be carried out is to expand the City’s emergency powers relating to the goals in this measure. Those powers could be used to allocate financial resources as well as make it easier for the City to make regulations needed to make progress on the goals of the Declaration.

Accountability and Transparency

Outreach, recruitment, and reporting

Opportunities to actively engage with the “new, ongoing governance structure” must be made widely available to frontline communities. The City should commit in the Declaration to a broad effort to invite resourced participation in this governance structure. The outreach efforts to solicit applications to serve on the Portland Clean Energy Community Benefits Fund Grant Committee in 2019, which were conducted in partnership with the Portland Clean Energy Fund community coalition steering committee, provide a strong template for a broad and inclusive recruitment effort. Two reports, one on interim progress and a final report, should be made by the city to detail how these recruitment efforts are carried out. These reports should be made widely available to the public. Additional reports should be made to assess the progress made on goals outlined in the Declaration, ideally quarterly and no less than annually.

Process & Outcomes from the New Governance Structure

Clear outcomes for the Declaration’s governance structure should be established in the Declaration, as well as a mechanism for transparency in decisions made by this governance structure. Again, the Portland Clean Energy Community Benefits Fund Grant Committee provides helpful models on equitable commission structure and transparency. Side boards need to be established so that the governance structure is set up for success and city leaders take its recommendations to heart in future climate policymaking.

Coordinate with the Broader Community

The Declaration should include a commitment to regular check-ins with frontline organizations and leaders in Portland in a clear, coordinated fashion. The purposes of these check-ins will be to ensure that the execution of the Declaration is being completed in a timely manner and being done in a way that is inclusive, transparent, and true to the stated goals in the “Whereas” section of the Declaration. This gives the City the opportunity to share back how community input is represented in process.

Process with the Climate Emergency Declaration Itself

In order to demonstrate its commitment to inclusive, accountable, and transparent climate action planning, we strongly urge the City to:

- Release a summary of its engagement process for the current draft of the Climate Emergency Declaration

- Allow community groups to review the next draft before it is voted on to ensure feedback is incorporated
- Ensure remote-access public testimony on the Declaration prioritizing frontline community members

Amplifying Specific Issues and Priorities

The Declaration rightly acknowledges some specific areas of focus for climate action planning in Portland, and we appreciate the Declarations mentioning of the following key issues:

In the **Whereas section**:

- Defining frontline communities
- Acknowledging the disproportionate burden borne by frontline communities, youth, and frontline youth.
- The public health and safety impacts of fossil fuel infrastructure (from extraction to transportation to storage)
- Housing justice, energy burden, air quality, and displacement as critical climate issues, and these issues' connection to racist land use policies and discriminatory urban planning and real estate rules
- Historical and current emissions levels and regional warming
- Our natural resources' role in climate action

In the **Be It Resolved section**:

- A cross-sectional approach calling on all sectors of the city to take ownership over climate action
- Commitment to supporting a youth-led summit on climate in 2020
- Managed decline of fossil fuels in a manner that is equitable for workers and frontline communities
- Building and transportation emissions reductions mindful of renter protections and advocacy for YouthPass
- Clear goals and a timeline for carbon reduction in the utility sector and a transition to 100% clean and renewable energy from Portland General Electric and PacifiCorp to all Portland residents and businesses
- An update on progress by the end of 2020

We urge you to **go further and acknowledge the need for progress on**:

- Specific infrastructure issues such as the Zenith Energy facility and the oil trains that move through Portland neighborhoods to supply the facility
- Advocacy from the City of Portland for fully fareless and decriminalized transit at TriMet and improved transit service, especially in outer neighborhoods

- A clear commitment that the City's statewide and regulatory advocacy to achieve 100% clean, renewable energy from Portland General Electric and PacifiCorp are focused on energy that benefits communities, such as community-generated renewable projects and frontline workforce development
- Specific annual emissions reductions goals, on either an annual or 5-year basis
- Diesel emissions, especially from old engines and construction
- Methane emissions from so-called "natural" gas as well as "renewable natural" gas
- The Portland Harbor Superfund Site and Critical Energy Infrastructure hub as major sources of environmental injustice in Portland
- Worker safety and empowerment, including protections for whistleblowers and acknowledging the huge environmental threats to workers posed by increasing air pollution, smoky air, hot weather, and more
- A climate test should be given the precedent that it should apply to permitting processes
- An acknowledgement for the need to collaborate with other governments to achieve success and maximize the positive impact of our actions

Conclusion

We appreciate that the City of Portland is taking the climate crisis seriously and making space and time for community engagement on this important declaration. The current moment we are living in shows us how important it will be to care for all residents of our city as the climate crisis worsens, like the public health issue that it is. We believe in the resilience and strength of our communities and our ability to respond well and take timely action for climate justice. We hope that many fruitful partnerships are built between the city and communities so that we are successful in our collaborative efforts for a just transition to a clean, renewable energy economy and a brighter future for all Portlanders.

Sincerely,

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Coalition of Communities of Color

Tony DeFalco, Executive Director
Verde

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