



Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR
AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Councilmember David Cohen

SUBJECT: SEE BELOW

DATE: November 8, 2021

Approved

Date: 11/08/2021

SUBJECT: Climate Smart San José and Carbon Neutral Resolution

RECOMMENDATION

1. Adopt the *Carbon Neutral San José by 2030* resolution recommended by Staff's Memorandum.
2. Adopt all recommendations from the memo from Mayor Liccardo and Councilmembers Jimenez, Peralez, and Davis except 1d.
3. As part of the budget recommendations from 3a of the memo from Mayor Liccardo and Councilmembers Jimenez, Peralez, and Davis, ensure that the climate positions in ESD currently funded by the Bloomberg Philanthropies become full time equivalent positions as part of the 2022-23 budget, regardless of whether new grant funding for these positions is secured.
4. Direct staff to evaluate the following initiatives and return to the Transportation and Environment committee with recommendations for implementation as part of the acceleration of our carbon-neutral goals to 2030:
 - a. Establish a program that incentivizes and works towards converting gas fueled water heaters to electric across the City.
 - b. Develop design standards for all future development within the City to utilize roof space (i.e. solar panels, green roofs) to minimize carbon footprint.
 - c. Develop a plan to fund the retrofit of existing buildings for energy efficiency and accelerate the electrification of existing homes and buildings.
 - d. Develop a plan to accelerate the electric transition of the City vehicle fleet, for all departments.
5. Direct staff to work with Federal, State, non-profit advocates, and academic leadership to complete a full analysis of risks and required adaptations that considers sea level rise, saltwater intrusion, wildfires, prolonged drought, and extreme weather events as detailed in the IPCC report.
6. Reinforce the need for intradepartmental implementation of a more complete Climate Smart analysis on staff memos

BACKGROUND

Climate scientists are in lockstep when they tell us that “climate change is widespread, rapid, and intensifying and that increasing magnitudes of warming increases the likelihood of severe, pervasive, and irreversible impacts.”⁽¹⁾ There is nothing more important to the urgency of climate change than carbon neutrality, and I applaud the Environmental Services Department for taking this bold step to move our progress forward and committing to climate neutrality by 2030, as 2050 has been made clear by researchers to be too little too late.

There are already impacts that cannot be undone because of decades of failure to act to prevent climate change. However, we still have time, and we have an obligation to respond expediently to radically change the way our City has operated to protect our residents and our natural landscapes, and to ensure a safe and sustainable future for our children and the world we leave behind for future generations.

We cannot do this alone, as we need our regional, state, and federal leaders to be on the same page. We must ensure that staff in these respective agencies have the tools and resources they need to complete these goals effectively. Keeping the climate focused ESD positions funded post-Bloomberg Philanthropies is key to our ability to make these goals a reality as well as to improve recruitment and retention of high-quality staff in these roles by sending the message that these positions are permanent.

As is true of most environmental issues, climate change disproportionately impacts those who have historically been redlined into communities that have higher flooding risks, less natural protections from extreme heat and have suffered from long term neglect of infrastructure improvements. Cross reference studies have shown us time and time again that our most challenged communities have the least investment, and as a result that makes them more susceptible to exposure to climate change effects such as flooding and heat related illness.⁽²⁾ It’s imperative that we analyze our gaps in resilience through a lens of equity to prevent continued disproportionate impacts on our most vulnerable residents and make the conversion to carbon neutrality accessible for them.

There are a multitude of avenues that can be explored to reach this goal. To meet the moment, we must re-evaluate how we do business in development projects and transportation. Cities across the country have utilized programs such as implementing design standards requiring solar panels and/or green roofing to make the most of these spaces. The City of San José should seek out membership in NGO projects such as Climate Neutral Cities Alliance to leverage existing successful projects and policies. San José is poised to serve as a model for our regional partners to show that it’s not only feasible but worthwhile to invest in a climate forward approach. Ensuring that our residential development projects are dense and designed as transit-oriented first is key to ensuring that the residents of these developments can seamlessly live car-free. Commercial and industrial developments, specifically in North San José, should also be built under clear design standards that do not run counter to these goals. The City should consider ways to offer financial incentives to assist developers to achieve climate neutral objectives.

San José took a huge step in requiring future development to be electric only, but we should also work to find ways to accelerate the electrification of existing homes and buildings and improve their energy efficiency. Even though future new construction will be required to install electric water heaters, the current system makes it difficult to replace gas water heaters with electric ones. Typically, water heaters are replaced when there is an emergency situation, and it takes too long and costs too much to add electric circuits in this circumstance. We should build a system that communicates with people ahead of time that their water heaters are coming upon the end of their lifespan and provide financial incentives to make the switch.

Ithaca, NY has become the first city in the United States to begin 100% decarbonization.⁽³⁾ Helping businesses and residents improve their energy efficiency is a way to create jobs, help save money on electric bills, and move our city toward the 2030 goal. We know that all this work can be expensive, but the cost of not doing it will be even higher. There are many potential partners out there to help cities fund this vital work, including the private sector. Ithaca has committed to the conversion while working to prevent impacts on the city budget. Their entire city budget is just \$80 million, yet they have already been able to raise \$100 million for their efforts. We must be just as committed and creative. We must be willing to be bold in our decisions and actions.

(1) International Panel on Climate Change (IPPC) Statements

(2) https://mtc.ca.gov/sites/default/files/Horz_Futures_Report.web_.pdf (page 32)

(3) <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/11/04/ithaca-is-first-us-city-to-begin-100percent-decarbonization-of-buildings.html>