

Summary Update of the City of Portland’s Climate Emergency Declaration Engagement Process and Public Comments

May 1, 2020

In response to community advocacy, the City of Portland began drafting its Climate Emergency Declaration in Summer 2019. The intent was for City Council to pass a resolution that reflected community priorities and that would serve as a bridge between the 2015 Climate Action Plan and the expected update at the end of 2020. The first draft of the Declaration identified priority actions and strategies for City bureaus to accelerate emission reduction efforts already underway and catalyze an emergency response to deliver even greater impacts.

After hearing concerns from stakeholders—especially youth climate activists and climate justice leaders—that the draft did not adequately address climate justice and incorporate community feedback, Mayor Wheeler extended the timeline for the development of the Declaration and directed the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS) to conduct additional community engagement. The Mayor directed BPS to reach out to interested stakeholders, including community organizations, residents, city bureaus, and partner agencies to solicit feedback on what should be included in the Declaration. Between October 2019 and February 2020, BPS and mayoral staff reached out to nearly 50 organizations and dozens of individuals, including:

350PDX	Pacific Climate Warriors
Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians	Pacific Power
Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon	Portland African American Leadership Forum
Audubon (PDX Chapter)	Portland Business Alliance
Center for Sustainable Economy	Portland Clean Energy Fund Coalition*
Coalition of Communities of Color*	Portland General Electric
Citizens’ Climate Lobby	Port of Portland
Climate Jobs PDX	Portland Public Schools
Climate Solutions	Portland State University Multicultural Retention Services Program
Ecotrust	Portland Youth Climate Council
Extinction Rebellion PDX	SE Uplift
Families for a Livable Climate	Sunrise Movement PDX
Forth	Unite Oregon
Home Builders Association of Metro Portland	University of Oregon Tribal Climate Change Network
Momentum Alliance	Urban Greenspaces Institute
Multnomah County	Verde
Native American Student Services at PSU	ZERO Coalition*
NW Natural	
Oregon Environmental Council	
Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility	

*Indicates that this is a coalition representing multiple organizations

Engagement took many forms, including phone calls, in-person meetings, emails, and presentations. Connections ranged from single touchpoints to multiple conversations over the four-month period. Staff approached this engagement without a pre-determined agenda and actively listened to concerns and recommendations for consideration in the next draft of the Climate Emergency Declaration. Some of the key priorities that the City of Portland was asked to incorporate include:

- Recognizing the underlying cause of climate change and the disparate impacts of climate change on frontline communities.
- Creating space for youth to actively participate in decision-making about climate action, including creating a youth climate summit.
- Creating a new paradigm for how climate action plans are drafted, implemented, and monitored for accountability.
- Updating the emissions reduction targets to be more aggressive and align with globally accepted goals.

After this information-gathering period, City staff drafted the next version of the Climate Emergency Declaration to reflect community priorities. The public comment period ran from February 12 to March 22, 2020. During this period, individuals and organizations submitted close to 300 comments online. BPS and mayoral staff also held an open house to gather public feedback in person at the Fix-It Fair held at Floyd Light Middle School on February 29, 2020. Comments received during the public comment period are categorized and summarized below.

Summary of Comments

This section provides a summary of public comments categorized into themes and is not meant to capture every individual comment. There were four broad categories of comments in relation to the draft Climate Emergency Declaration: A) comments supporting the draft Declaration; B) comments opposing the draft Declaration; C) comments suggesting revisions to the draft Declaration; and D) comments suggesting actions for implementation.

A. Comments Supporting the Draft Declaration

- Many commenters appreciated that the Declaration centered the leadership of frontline communities and youth.
- Many commenters appreciated the Declaration's focus on climate justice.
- Many commenters supported the Declaration's acknowledgement of the urgent need to act to restore a safe climate.
- Commenters supported the City's focus on reducing emissions from the buildings and transportation sectors.
- Commenters appreciated the City's leadership in addressing climate change.
- Most comments supported the City of Portland's adoption of a Climate Emergency Declaration, but suggested revisions to strengthen the draft. Those comments are summarized in section C.

B. Comments Opposing the Draft Declaration

- Several commenters expressed concern that the Declaration would result in new or increased taxes.
- Several commenters felt that the City should be spending resources on addressing other community priorities, such as homelessness.
- Some commenters opposed the Declaration on the basis that addressing climate change at the local level is ineffective and instead should happen at the national and/or global level.
- Some commenters opposed the Declaration because they questioned climate science.
- Some commenters expressed concern that the Declaration was prioritizing process over action. Commenters felt that rather than spending time drafting a Declaration to outline the process for updating the Climate Action Plan, the City should instead devote the time to updating the Climate Action Plan.
- Some commenters expressed concern that the Declaration outlined an ideologically-driven approach to climate action.
- Some commenters disagreed that youth and/or frontline communities should be prioritized in climate action planning and solutions.

C. Comments Suggesting Revisions to the Draft Declaration

Most comments supported the City of Portland’s adoption of a Climate Emergency Declaration, but suggested revisions to strengthen the draft. Suggested revisions are categorized here by theme.

Language and Definitions

- Many commenters wanted the Declaration to use stronger and more direct language overall.
- A number of commenters suggested the Declaration use plain language that is more accessible to readers, e.g., following guidelines from [plainlanguage.gov](https://www.plainlanguage.gov).
- Commenters said that the Declaration should include a clear and inclusive definition of climate justice. Some commenters advocated that the definition should be community-generated.
- A number of commenters wanted the Declaration to include a clear definition and vision for a just transition and acknowledge workers who may lose their jobs as a result of climate policies.
- A number of commenters wanted a clearer definition of frontline communities, e.g., one which explicitly includes labor; older adults; and communities living in proximity to fossil fuel infrastructure.

- Several commenters wanted the Declaration to define or clarify what is meant by “building resilience” and include specific actions the City will take to invest in resilience.
- Several commenters questioned what the appropriate terminology was to refer to Indigenous people and recommended the Declaration use the appropriate terminology consistently throughout.
- Many commenters wanted the Declaration to define “net zero carbon” more clearly.
- Commenters suggested using the term “greenhouse gas” or defining the term “carbon” to include all greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change, not only carbon dioxide.
- Several commenters provided recommendations for changes to language that appropriately attribute actions and responsibility, for example in BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED #12 using “fossil fuel production and use” or “infrastructure” rather than “consumption.”
- Some commenters wanted the Declaration to define “extractive economy” in terms specific to Portland.

Goals, Timeline, and Scope

- Commenters asked for more concrete, specific actions connected to the goals in the Declaration.
- Commenters wanted to see timelines specified for more of the actions.
- Commenters felt that emissions reduction goals should be more aggressive, for example net-zero carbon emissions by 2025, 2035, or 2040.
- Many commenters advocated for the Declaration to establish interim emissions reductions targets. A number of commenters wanted to see annual targets of at least a 7.6% decrease in emissions as called for by the UNEP’s 2019 Emissions Gap Report.
- Many commenters advocated for the Declaration to acknowledge the need to collaborate with other regional governments and public agencies (such as TriMet) to successfully address climate change.
- A number of commenters wanted the Declaration to include a statement of support from the City for carbon pricing at the state and/or federal level (in particular, the federal Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act).
- Commenters suggested the Declaration provide specific directives and accountability mechanisms when calling on businesses, non-profits, and other institutions to make and act on climate commitments of their own.
- Several commenters asked for more clarity on how the Declaration related to the Climate Action Plan, 100% Renewable Energy Resolution, and other climate commitments, including making clearer which actions in the Declaration substantively change or expand on prior commitments of the City.

Authority and Accountability

- Commenters wanted more specificity on how the City would hold itself accountable to the goals in the Declaration.
- Many commenters advocated for the Declaration to include requirements for, at minimum, regular annual reports to the public on the City's progress towards the goals in the declaration.
- Some commenters felt that the Declaration should have more authority by being a binding resolution, including specific changes to City Code, and/or invoking the Title 15 Emergency Code to authorize expanded powers for City Council to address the climate emergency.
- Several commenters advocated for the Declaration to identify explicitly those who are most responsible for climate change (e.g., white supremacy; fossil fuel companies; large businesses; and the wealthy), while also acknowledging the need to address income inequality through solutions in which the most responsible contribute the most funding for climate justice solutions.
- Some commenters wanted the City to acknowledge more explicitly its share of responsibility for historically racist land use policies, gentrification, and other discriminatory practices, and their ongoing impacts on communities of color today.

Resources

- Many commenters wanted details on the financial resources the City will commit to implementing the goals outlined in the Declaration.
- Commenters advocated that the City must commit to provide resources for frontline community members to participate fully in climate action planning.

Governance Structure and Community Engagement

- Many commenters wanted more details about the governance structure process, such as how will it be established and by whom, how members will be chosen, a timeline for establishment, and how participants will be resourced.
- Commenters recommended that the City hire a community member who is a member of a frontline community to assist with outreach to frontline communities and facilitate the co-creation of the governance structure.
- Commenters wanted more details about the governance structure role, including what authority it will have on City decision-making, how decisions will be made by the governance structure, and clear outcomes for the governance structure.
- Commenters wanted the Declaration to be more specific about accountability for the governance structures, such as requiring regular reporting to the public on the

governance structure establishment process and requiring that the governance structure regularly report out to frontline community organizations and leaders.

- Some commenters pointed to the Portland Clean Energy Community Benefits Fund Grant Committee as a model for an inclusive engagement process with an equitable and transparent structure and decision-making process.
- Commenters expressed that the City has not historically done a good job in centering community in City decision-making, and therefore the Declaration should be more explicit about how frontline communities will be engaged and should ensure that outreach and recruitment for participation in the governance structure is broad and inclusive.
- Many commenters wanted to ensure that the governance structure centered the leadership of frontline communities. Others advocated that the governance structure should include a broad coalition, including businesses, energy utilities, other environmental organizations, labor, neighborhood associations, and other community groups, in addition to frontline communities and youth.
- Commenters wanted more specifics about what outcomes the City hopes to see achieved through a youth-led summit on climate.
- Several groups felt they were excluded from the engagement process.
- Groups asked the City to release a summary of its engagement process for the draft Climate Emergency Declaration, and allow community groups to review the next draft to ensure feedback is incorporated

Climate Test

- A number of commenters advocated that a climate test should be more extensive than an internal price on carbon or a carbon fee and should apply to permitting processes.
- Commenters noted that the term “climate-friendly decisions” was vague; some suggested this be changed to “decisions based on the best available climate science”.
- Commenters wanted specifics on how youth will be engaged on the development of a climate test.
- Some commenters requested that the Declaration specify that the climate test is internal, applying only to City operations rather than directly on Portlanders or businesses.

Natural Systems and Agriculture

- Many commenters wanted to see more in the Declaration about the role of natural resources and natural systems in climate action.
- Commenters suggested the Declaration include language about the need to protect, restore, and expand green infrastructure and natural systems like wetlands, forests,

riparian areas, and parks that provide ecosystem and health benefits, sequester carbon, and contribute to climate resilience.

- A number of commenters wanted the declaration to include commitments to increasing Portland’s tree canopy, with a focus on expanding tree canopy for underserved communities including communities of color and lower-income neighborhoods, and improving the Tree Code and enforcement.
- Some commenters wanted the Declaration to acknowledge the role of farms and food supply in the climate emergency, such as by recognizing the impact of climate change on farms and food supply; including farmers as partners in addressing the climate emergency; and including local, community-based food production as a climate solution.

Adaptation

- A few commenters expressed concern that the Declaration focused more on climate mitigation than adaptation.
- Commenters wanted the Declaration to acknowledge environmental threats that frontline communities face from air pollution, extreme heat, and other climate impacts.
- Commenters recommended that the Declaration include actions to increase safety and security of frontline communities in the face of climate-induced extreme weather.

Transportation

- Many commenters thought that the Declaration should underscore the importance of expanding public transportation options, with a particular focus on making transit more accessible, safe, and sustainable.
- Commenters wanted to see transit investments prioritized in areas that are currently underserved by the transit system, and investments in affordable housing prioritized in the same areas.
- A number of commenters wanted the City to commit to working with TriMet to secure decriminalized and fareless transit for all.
- Commenters wanted the Declaration to include specific goals for transit electrification and/or the adoption of electric vehicles.
- Many commenters called for a halt to the I-5 Rose Quarter highway expansion and wanted the Declaration to oppose the expansion.

Buildings & Energy

- Some commenters requested that the Declaration clearly define what is meant by the “net zero carbon” goal for the building sector. Commenters suggested the term should be defined in relation to third-party standards.

- Many commenters wanted the Declaration to address specifically the future of natural gas in Portland’s energy system. Commenters wanted the Declaration to include a timeline and specific actions for phasing out fracked natural gas, such as prohibiting natural gas hook-ups in new construction.
- Many commenters urged that NW Natural should be specifically included among the investor-owned utilities in BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED #19 (public comment draft).
- Some commenters wanted the Declaration to align the definition of renewable energy and electricity in BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED #18 with the 100% Renewable Energy Resolution to include hydropower, whereas other commenters wanted the Declaration to specifically exclude hydropower from the definition of renewable energy.
- Commenters asked for more specificity on how utilities will ensure energy affordability for communities of color and low-income customers, and how the City will partner with frontline communities, utilities and businesses to ensure both economic prosperity and energy affordability.
- Some commenters wanted stronger and/or more specific language in BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED #19 on how the City will facilitate the transition to 100% renewable energy, such as “requiring” rather than “calling on” utilities.

Fossil Fuels

- Commenters wanted additional clarification on what is included in “fossil fuel infrastructure” in BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED #12, and more specificity on what policies or actions might be taken.
- A number of commenters asked for the inclusion of details on how the city would address specific issue or projects of concern such as the Zenith Energy facility, Critical Energy Hub, and oil trains.
- Commenters suggested that the City should commit in the Declaration to conducting a community process to plan a managed decline of fossil fuel infrastructure, and should work with labor unions to develop a just transition strategy for workers in fossil fuel-related industries to transition to jobs in the green economy.
- Commenters wanted the Declaration to acknowledge risks posed by fossil fuels throughout their entire life cycle.
- A number of commenters expressed concern about harmful emissions from non-fossil fuels. Commenters wanted the Declaration to clarify what is meant by “renewable transportation fuels” in BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED #18 and acknowledge the impact of emissions from renewable natural gas and biogas (such as methane) and biodiesel as a concern.
- Commenters wanted the Declaration to acknowledge the need for progress on reducing diesel emissions and the associated black carbon, and prioritize emissions reductions that improve the health and safety of community members.

D. Suggested Actions to Incorporate into the Draft Declaration

In addition to what is captured above, a number of commenters provided suggested actions, policies, and programs the City should implement to tackle the climate emergency. Some of the suggestions and recommendations included that the City should:

- Amend the 100% Renewable Energy Resolution to align with goals in the Climate Emergency Declaration.
- Ban all single-use plastic.
- Strengthen building codes to require new buildings to use more renewable energy and/or install solar or wind turbines on buildings, and apply similar standards to government buildings.
- Adopt policies to limit emissions from construction, such as requiring the use of low-carbon concrete.
- Address embodied carbon of buildings and infrastructure, including concrete, and create ways to test and incentivize new building approaches (e.g., architecture competitions) including ground-source heat pumps and district energy.
- Use incentives rather than regulations to reduce emissions in the building sector to avoid driving up the price of housing.
- Research and implement policies to improve the ability of the urban environment to adapt to the impacts of climate change (heat, flooding, etc.), such as requiring developers to show buildings are resilient (e.g., create a “climate impacts compliance” standard).
- Many suggested actions focused on transportation and urged the City to invest more in biking, walking, and transit infrastructure. Commenters wanted the City to expand transit routes and frequency, especially for areas that are currently underserved; create car-free zones (especially downtown), and re-allocate the right of way and parking for low-carbon transportation modes; create more bus-only lanes (Rose Lanes) and make streetcar-dedicated lanes; adopt no-idling policies; high-speed rail between Salem and Seattle; carpooling sites and infrastructure for suburbs; more heavily regulate companies like Uber and Lyft; install more flashing crosswalks; make parking more expensive; increase electric vehicles, including cars, buses, bikes and scooters, and build more charging infrastructure; and implement the Off-road Cycling Master Plan.
- Implement new taxes or fees to make activities that create carbon emissions more expensive (e.g., fees for larger sized vehicles) and use those funds to do climate work and incentivize low-carbon behaviors (e.g., bike commuting and transit) and to offset cost impacts on low-income people.
- Create more agricultural and food-growing spaces inside the City limits; provide education and/or implement policies to reduce the consumption of high-carbon foods like red meat.

- Limit continued population growth, building, and development in Portland.
- Ban gas-powered mowers, leaf blowers, and other portable equipment.
- Engage janitors and other workers that can be trained to help improve the sustainability of buildings (green cleaning, energy and water conservation, waste diversion, health and safety).
- Divest from companies that promote or benefit from fossil-fuel extraction and use.
- Encourage schools to teach and practice sustainability. Encourage schools to stop serving packaged and processed foods.
- Create community-oriented collective action programs and efforts so all Portlanders can work together to take action; create education programs and get decision-making tools (like online carbon footprint calculators; carbon data on utility bills) into the hands of residents.