350PDX Summary of Comments on Climate Emergency Declaration

General Comments

The city’s declaration states a commitment to a community-centered process to develop climate actions; we have concerns about the level of community involvement in the creation of this draft policy. Policy development should be accessible and inclusive, and the declaration should be written in plain language (see plainlanguage.gov) so that it is accessible to readers from many different backgrounds.

We’d like to see stronger, more concrete language in this resolution with specific actions the city will take, and by when.

This declaration needs a comprehensive and community-generated definition of climate justice at the outset to properly frame what has created this crisis and to lay out a vision for creating justice-based solutions.

Recommendations

1. Accountability & Transparency:

We’d like to see timelines stated for more of the resolutions in this declaration. Instead of one progress update at the end of the year, short-term reports on progress made should be communicated to the public regularly (e.g. every 30 days) after the declaration is passed. Reports and progress towards goals should be made publicly accessible with transparency around deadlines and responsible persons.

2. Establishing new governance structure:

We are in support of a community-led oversight body as described in items 4, 5, and 6. However, this directive is similar to one in the City’s 2017 100% Renewable Resolution to “form a Climate Action sub-committee of the Planning and Sustainability Commission that will include but is not limited to Oregon tribes, communities of color, low-income residents, youth representatives....” It is unclear if that sub-committee was ever created. Please include who will be in charge of overseeing the creation of this new governance structure, how the members will be chosen, when will it be established, what funding/resources will be provided to participants, and how this information will be made available to the public.

3. Funding:

To address the climate emergency, the City of Portland must dedicate funding for implementation, including funds to adequately staff the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability and to support the climate justice work of frontline-led organizations.

The Declaration recognizes who will suffer most from the impacts of climate change but does not address who is most responsible: fossil fuel companies, big business, and the wealthy (the Climate Action Plan documented that Portland’s residents with higher incomes contribute the most to the climate crisis). These companies and individuals should therefore contribute the most funding for climate justice solutions and be held
accountable for polluting practices that contribute disproportionately to the climate crisis. Funding should not be used for carbon offsets or purchases of Renewable Energy Credits. Instead, this funding should be invested in climate solutions in the city of Portland that benefit low-income residents and people of color and frontline-led organizations leading climate justice-based solutions in Portland. Funding is needed specifically for two critical BPS staff positions that are currently lacking: one that is dedicated to policy implementation and one that is dedicated to community outreach and engagement. It is further recommended that hiring for these positions show strong preference (\textit{include in the qualifications, knowledge & experiences}) for candidates who have worked with community-based organizations, particularly those led by and serving BIPOC communities.

4. Emissions Targets:
A 2030 emissions target is too far off in the future. At a minimum, there should be targets every five years starting with 2025 (see for example Minneapolis’ Climate Emergency Declaration which sets 5-year goals). Recommend annual emissions reductions of 7.6\% annually to align with what the UN states is necessary to stay below 1.5 degrees of warming.

Lowering greenhouse gas emissions can also reduce other pollutants that impact the health and safety of Portland’s residents. Emissions reductions that improve health and safety of community members and workers (e.g. diesel emissions) should be prioritized. Measure changes in emissions looking forward, not backward. We should not continue measuring our progress against 1990 emissions levels, as this locks us into using less accurate data for utility sector emissions and skews our emissions data so that they appear lower than they are.

5. Electric Utilities:
Amend the 100\% Renewable Energy Resolution to reflect target date of 100\% of electricity from renewable energy sources by 2030. Clarify how utilities will prioritize “efforts to protect low-income customers.”

The investor-owned utilities are not on track to meet 100\% renewable energy goals; in fact, Pacific Power has said it’s unnecessary. In light of this, direct the City to produce a report studying alternative options for sourcing 100\% renewable energy outside of the investor-owned utilities.

6. Transportation:
Investments should be focused on greatly expanding public transportation, creating new jobs in this sector, and making transit fareless and accessible to all residents.

As a first step, work with Metro to pass YouthPass, to ensure all youth 18 and under receive access to free public transit, regardless of the community they live in.

Recognize that methane from both fracked gas and non-fossil fuel sources is not a clean, renewable transportation fuel and not a climate solution. Biomethane causes the same climate polluting emissions as fossil fuel derived methane when burned and enables continued reliance on fracked gas. Amend the City’s 100\% Renewable Energy
Resolution to remove biogas as a renewable energy source.

7. Trees
Tree are not addressed in the Declaration. Portland should prioritize and advance policies and investments to increase the urban tree canopy and achieve tree equity throughout the city, recognizing the power of trees to sequester carbon and cool urban heat islands that disproportionately endanger frontline communities and communities of color, and provide other health benefits. This includes funding for jobs to plant and care for trees.

   Limit tree cutting on industrial and commercial properties through improvements to the tree code.

8. Farms
Farms and food supply are not addressed in the Declaration. Local farmers as well as farmers from other regions that supply food to the city will be impacted by the effects of climate change. Include farmers as critical partners in addressing the climate emergency, and support state and federal level farm conservation programs that help farmers adopt regenerative farming practices.

19. Climate Test
In addition to evaluating procurement decisions, permits and other city- and county-related projects should be assessed on whether they would exacerbate or accelerate the climate crisis. Procurement decisions, permits, and projects that don’t pass the climate test should not be granted.

   We look forward to seeing the language around this that is created with youth and frontline communities. Currently, the terms “climate test” and “climate-friendly” are vague. For example, it is unclear if this would include assessment of impacts on ecosystems, community health, and equitable outcomes.

11. Housing
Acknowledge impacts of ongoing gentrification in item J.
Those most impacted should be involved in the development of the Anti-Displacement plan. Will the city dedicate staffing and financial resources to implement this plan? Efforts to increase housing supply needs to focus on housing that is affordable for the lowest income residents. Rather than focusing on increasing housing in areas where transportation investments have already been made, investments should be prioritized in areas that do not have adequate access to transit and where unsafe conditions exist for pedestrians and bicyclists.

12. Phasing out Fossil Fuel Infrastructure and Leading the way for a Just Transition
Plans and new policies need to be developed for the managed decline of existing fossil
fuel infrastructure in addition to stopping new infrastructure. Further, the city should coordinate such planning with labor organizations before worker dislocation occurs. A plan for phasing out fossil fuels in NW Portland’s Critical Energy Hub should be a priority. The hub holds 90% of Oregon’s transportation fuel and 100% of the state’s jet fuel, is situated at the Cascadia Subduction Zone, and is overdue for a major earthquake. When this occurs, this fuel would spill into the Willamette River, and would cause the largest oil spill in the world. As part of this Emergency Declaration, we strongly recommend that the City develop a detailed mitigation and spill response plan for this scenario.

Communities most adversely affected from the climate crisis must be among the first to benefit into a 100% renewable energy economy. Define actions that Portland will take beyond a generalized commitment to a just transition. For example, job training programs and union internships for workers to transition into “green” jobs, especially for youth, unemployed, BIPOC, and elders. This should also include actions to restore and repurpose impacted sites as determined by affected communities.

In collaboration with unions and other worker support organizations, the city shall establish and implement a just transition strategy for workers employed in the fossil fuel and related industries who may lose their jobs due to city climate policy, assisting them and unions in transitioning to jobs in the green economy that provide family wages, benefits and will enforce the right to organize.

13. Climate Resilience
Define or clarify what is meant by "building resilience." For example, does this mean more availability of mental health services, rental assistance, tax credits for "green projects", more funding of community support programs such as after school programs and arts program for youth? Investigating housing discrimination and hate crimes? Does it include the loss of homes that is predicted, and how to address this and assist displaced persons?

Include the type of actions the city will take to invest in climate resilience. As part of this, recognize the health and safety measures needed for workers and residents on the frontlines of climate change.

14. Terms
The term “Native Nations” on page 3 is unfamiliar to us. Have Native Americans been consulted in the language of items C and D?