

04-07-2021 Town Council Meeting Responses to Council Questions

ITEM #11: Consider Adopting the Revised Climate Action and Response Plan, Requesting Funding Options, and Joining Other North Carolina Municipalities in Declaring a Climate Emergency

Council Question:

What kind of feedback has been received from Sunrise Chapelboro? What additional improvements were made as a result?

Staff Response:

We met with Sunrise Chapelboro following the Council's first review of the draft plan back in January. In that meeting and in follow-up communications, the Sunrise Chapelboro team members indicated that their priorities are:

- *"Justice and equity concerns are at the center of any environmental action taken by the town.*
- *Climate Resilience funding prioritized where possible over other town budgetary concerns.*
- *Position of Climate Emergency Mobilization Manager be created to oversee the implementation of the Climate Action Plan and overall community mobilization towards this cause.*
- *Annual climate goal evaluations for both the Climate Action Plan and other ongoing projects.*
- *Continued (and if possible obligatory) commitment to advocate however possible for Duke Energy to increase the speed they are transitioning away from fossil fuels. The Town should take the strongest stance possible by using any possible leverage to demand Duke Energy transition away from fossil fuels in a manner that provides affordable energy to all North Carolinians.*
- *Accountability measures implemented on every climate and/or justice related project/policy enacted."*

The draft plan was revised in ways that we believe better address the Sunrise Chapelboro priorities listed above.

- *Justice and Equity: Focus within Message from Leadership (PDF page 5), defined as a core theme of the plan (PDF page 12), named within the list of opportunities (PDF page 15) and wider community benefits (PDF page 26), and a focus of Implementation and Next Steps (PDF page 72). The history of the Rogers-Eubanks neighborhood is referenced*

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as part of the “Produce Zero Waste” section (PDF page 56). We are also actively working to identify places in town where communities of color may be disproportionately impacted by the impacts of climate change (e.g., flooding, extreme heat). This work will inform the implementation process, including strategies that would begin in FY21-22.

- *Climate Resilience funding prioritized: Climate resiliency was elevated to one of the top 5 High-Impact Actions (PDF page 9) and targets include a new Green Infrastructure Ordinance by 2022, the completion of the top 3 subwatershed study stormwater projects by 2025, and continuing to plant an average of at least 200+ trees per year. Funding priorities could be discussed as part of the FY21-22 budget cycle, as described in the first resolution (R-10).*
- *Position of Climate Emergency Mobilization Manager: We are prepared to share a staffing proposal for plan implementation as part of the annual budget process.*
- *Annual climate goal evaluations: We are proposing annual program evaluations of our climate action efforts. This is noted within Implementation and Next Steps (PDF page 72). The second resolution (R-11) would declare a climate emergency, which is something named in the draft plan and an item of interest from Sunrise Chapelboro. The declaration is based somewhat on the City of Asheville’s declaration, a version shared with us by Sunrise Chapelboro.*
- *Advocacy for Duke Energy to quickly move away from fossil fuels: This is highlighted within action category #1 (PDF page 9) and there are three new strategies (PDF page 42) that help to advance this interest:*
 - *Advocate on all levels for a fast, affordable and just transition to clean and renewable energy that supports the Town's goals*
 - *Explore options like Green Source Advantage and Community Solar, and work with utility companies to develop more utility-scale renewable projects in our area*
 - *Support and advocate for the state and utilities to reach their goals for carbon neutrality by actively participating in public processes like Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) reviews and petitions like the one to have North Carolina join the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI)*
- *Accountability measures: There are a series of metrics listed within actions described within the back half of the document (PDF pages 32-60). We are proposing annual program evaluations of our climate action efforts and also interested to move the plan, once adopted, to the web, with layered information and performance tracking similar to other Town programs (e.g., affordable housing).*

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Council Question:

How does the climate action plan connect/overlap with the COVID recovery plan? Is there emphasis on our trails network/connecting our trail system, making Franklin St. more pedestrian and cycle friendly and helping businesses through the modifications made to lanes? How are we thinking about green space as we continue to grow and densify? This is an overlap with the FLUM and LUMO rewrite too... so really, how are we connecting our climate action plan to all of our other plans and how are we showing those connections and really emphasizing the pieces of the plans that appear in multiple places/across plans?

Staff Response:

We are seeing systems thinking and connected action as being central to the success of the Climate Action and Response Plan. For that reason, the Plan attempts to build upon the positive impacts of several existing Town efforts, while also enhancing others and adding new actions and strategies to fill in the gaps.

Examples of existing Town efforts highlighted within the Plan include the:

- *Mobility Plan, including trails and greenways*
- *North-South Bus Rapid Transit project*
- *LUMO Rewrite*
- *Council's Energy Policy*
- *Affordable Housing Plan*
- *Subwatershed studies*
- *Community Tree Program*

We are planning to share a draft of the Long-Term Recovery and Transformation Plan with the Council later this spring, perhaps as early as the beginning of May. Similar to the Climate Action and Response Plan, the draft Recovery Plan attempts to build on existing efforts to address the impacts from COVID-19, while also creating new or enhanced initiatives where there are gaps. Overlapping strategies between the two plans include things like:

- *Promote climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts.*
- *Incentivize the development of affordable and accessible housing.*
- *Rehabilitate, improve safety, and preserve the affordability of existing housing.*
- *Prevent the deterioration of natural resources.*
- *Support sustainable local agriculture systems.*

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The plan will include a series of detailed initiatives for each of the strategies listed above.

Our local economic recovery plan (ReVive) also has a number related and reinforcing goals and strategies within the framework, including:

- *Prioritizing investments in livability and accessibility.*
- *Empowering people to advance their knowledge, prosperity and social impact.*
- *Developing the plans and partnerships to build a more accessible and affordable Chapel Hill.*
- *Supporting community partners as they provide social services to address the needs of disadvantaged communities.*
- *Strengthen the ecosystem for innovative startup companies and university spinoffs to thrive locally (particularly those that advance a green economy).*

The connections between land use and transportation are certainly key to climate action. For instance, the Climate Action Plan calls for more walkable, bikeable, transit-served neighborhoods (FLUM + LUMO rewrite), build-out of the Mobility Plan, completion of the North-South Bus Rapid Transit project, exploration of an East-West BRT and expanded Transportation Demand Management (TDM) programming. A strategy within the Resiliency section emphasizes the need to look for “ways to keep the positives” from our response to COVID, including on-road walking and biking paths like what’s being piloted on Franklin Street and in some neighborhoods.

Green space and green infrastructure are critical, especially along our major corridors where growth is directed to as part of the recently adopted FLUM. The plan calls for a new green infrastructure ordinance by 2022, the completion of the top 3 subwatershed study stormwater projects by 2025 and the continuation of annual tree planting (an average of 200+ per year). In addition to and in conjunction with the items listed above, we also see connections with the LUMO Rewrite.