

Environment and Climate Change

Context

The climate crisis is a national and global emergency that threatens critical ecosystems and communities. A 2018 United Nations report warns that we have *less than ten years* to stabilize global temperatures and mitigate catastrophic natural disasters. In 2012, New Haven responded to the destruction of Superstorm Sandy. In the aftermath of Hurricane Maria in 2017, New Haven became a climate refuge city for families displaced from Puerto Rico.

Last year, the Board of Alders declared a climate emergency and passed a Climate Emergency Resolution, which establishes a Climate Emergency Mobilization Task Force and “calls on the Mayor to direct all city departments to report to the Task Force.” It also calls for widespread climate emergency education and partnerships with local organizations to include “job creation, environmental justice, and public health in project development and to prioritize equitable outcomes, particularly for poor and marginalized communities.” The Task Force will address reductions in greenhouse emissions by the end of 2021, placing the highest priority on “equitable and just transition in all sectors.” The administration is enjoined to operate via a Just Transition framework, which aims to shift the base of economic and political power from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy, and commit to social equity. By emphasizing the intersectionality of climate change, we can collaborate to achieve a significant reduction in local greenhouse emissions.



First 100 Days

Recommendation 1: Publicly declare a climate emergency and action plan.

Establish that New Haven will respond with urgency to the climate emergency by charting a path to a 55% reduction of 1999 greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and carbon neutrality by 2050. As our environment deteriorates, frontline low-income and marginalized communities of color will continue to bear a disproportionate burden and become the most vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change. The City should advance a commitment to equity by planning with these frontline communities most impacted by environmental injustice and energy insecurity. Other actions to take: Affirm commitment to a federal Green New Deal Resolution to set priorities for a statewide policy agenda centered on investments in green jobs, infrastructure, building retrofits, and transit reforms, among others. Endorse the US Mayors' Climate

Protection Agreement (2005) and strengthen New Haven's advocacy for climate change action within the United States Conference of Mayors.

Recommendation 2: Establish the Climate Emergency Mobilization Task Force.

Involve all stakeholder groups, from department heads to those most at risk during the climate crisis, including elderly residents, female-headed low-income households, and communities of color.

Two Years

Recommendation 1: Convene department heads to address the intersectional impacts of climate change and plan for potential disaster.

Establish, coordinate, and address departmental goals in accordance with New Haven's 2018 Climate and Sustainability Framework. Strengthen climate emergency and environment communications on the City's website, which should include information on issues and actions related to the environment and climate change, disaster and emergency preparedness, and related content from environmental groups, task forces, management teams, and City initiatives. Ensure strong and supported partnerships with nongovernmental organizations that serve marginalized communities of color. Develop a New Haven Disaster Readiness Plan that prepares the City for future climate-induced migration, immigration, and other impacts.

Recommendation 2: Conduct public outreach and education to promote climate awareness and readiness strategies.

Establish Climate Emergency Town Halls to promote awareness and engage the public in co-creating climate readiness strategies. Ensure that

the New Haven Public Schools science curriculum includes grade-appropriate climate modules, and consider an annual citywide Climate Justice Symposium to showcase student work. Prioritize after-school programs centered on environmental sustainability and transportation alternatives, such as training in how to fix and maintain bicycles. Center outreach on communities of color, low-income neighborhoods, and youth, perhaps offering student internships to support outreach.

Recommendation 3: Support and expand policy initiatives and collaborations in food systems.

New Haven's Food Systems Policy Division works at the intersection of health, socioeconomic justice, and environment. Actions to take: Encourage the Community Food Systems Hub, a proposed "multipurpose facility for food systems-related organizations in New Haven" to strengthen food entrepreneurship opportunities, with particular attention to low-income and underemployed residents and entrepreneurs of color. Support the Green Ordinances Working Group, a collaboration between the Departments of City Plan, Engineering, and Food System Policy Division to guide zoning reform toward more equitable land-use policies for food- and farming-related work. Implement the Good Food Purchasing Program, a national framework to improve transparency and accountability in public food procurement, and school meals in particular, focused on the values of support for local economies, environmental sustainability, valued workforce, nutritional health, and animal welfare.

Recommendation 4: Improve citywide environmental practices.

Establish policies that eliminate unnecessary idling of City vehicles to reduce pollution and fuel consumption. Ban all carcinogenic pesticides and

herbicides, particularly near water sources and recreational areas. Prioritize wildlife habitats. Create a coordinated plan for tree maintenance, including swift and efficient removal when needed and collaboration with United Illuminating to eliminate injurious tree trimming by their crews.

Longer Term

Recommendation 1: Promote energy independence and equity.

New Haven's housing stock is generally old and lacks adequate air sealing and insulation. Seventy percent of New Haven residents are renters, with lower-income renters residing in older housing units and having to pay higher electricity bills than those in newer housing. Approximately 2,000 individuals in New Haven routinely experience utility disconnection. Many others are forced to scale back on basic needs and go into debt to avoid disconnection; many also experience housing instability, including eviction. Actions to take: Explore Community Choice Aggregation (see Economic Development recommendations) to allow for collective purchasing power and potentially reduce electricity prices by 15% to 20%, with a 100% renewable energy option. Work closely with United Illuminating to ensure that low-income households have energy audits, and explore the Livable City Initiative's capacity to address residential energy efficiency, including holding absentee landlords accountable for inadequate energy efficiency. Convene stakeholders around energy justice in order to prioritize the voices of residents experiencing energy insecurity, research low-income utility assistance programs, and address inequalities.

Recommendation 2: Invest in energy efficiency and green transportation.

Consider a citywide Green New Deal like that of Ithaca, New York, to convert all government operations to renewable energy. Invest in electric-powered City vehicles and become a member of an electric vehicle car-sharing program. Reduce the number of private cars allowed to park on public streets to allow for safer and more equitable transportation. Via goNewHavenGo and Complete Streets, establish safe routes for youth to walk to school, and enforce a citywide speed limit of twenty miles per hour.

Recommendation 3: Divest from fossil fuels.

In addition to divesting City pension funds from fossil fuels, collaborate with Fossil Free Yale and Endowment Coalition programs to urge Yale University, other institutions, and neighboring towns to divest from corporations that are destroying the environment and driving the climate crisis. Switch to greener, more sustainable energy. Reinvest funds in green initiatives in New Haven.



Photo: Sarah Miller