



Legislation Text

File #: RES. 2021-R049, **Version:** 1

To declare the existence of a climate and ecological emergency that threatens the city of Richmond, the surrounding region, the Commonwealth of Virginia, civilization, humanity, and the natural world.

WHEREAS, in Chapter 6 of the City's Master Plan entitled "Richmond 300: A Guide for Growth" (hereinafter referred to as the "Master Plan"), approved by Ordinance No. 2020-236, adopted December 14, 2020, Goals 15, 16 and 17 outline a vision for a sustainable and resilient city with healthy air, clean water, and a flourishing ecosystem; and

WHEREAS, upon information and belief of the Council, there is a consensus among scientists, as described in the recent United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, and further reflected in the City's RVAgreen 2050 plan goals, that the City must reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 45 percent from 2010 levels by no later than 2030, and reach net zero by 2050, in order to stabilize a 1.5° C (2.4° F) temperature increase to have a chance at avoiding profound and disastrous impacts on the city's local climate, ecosystem, and communities; and

WHEREAS, upon information and belief of the Council, climate stressors such as the urban heat island effect-whereby human-designed landscapes amplify local heat extremes by several degrees-have been shown by the Science Museum of Virginia to disproportionately impact historically redlined, majority Black neighborhoods in south and east Richmond and public housing communities, which lack the mature tree canopies that protect wealthier White neighborhoods in the northern and western parts of the city of Richmond; and

WHEREAS, upon information and belief of the Council, in addition to exacerbating the heat island effect, a lack of urban tree canopy worsens air pollution, harms wildlife, exacerbates erosion and stormwater issues, and threatens the economy and ecology of the city in a variety of interrelated ways; and

WHEREAS, upon information and belief of the Council, frontline communities in the city of Richmond and globally, including communities of people of color, immigrants, indigenous persons, low-income individuals, people with

disabilities and the unhoused are already disproportionately impacted by climate change, and will continue to bear an excess burden from increasing temperatures, sea level rise, the spread of disease and the economic consequences of inaction on the climate crisis; and

WHEREAS, Council is of the opinion that justice calls for climate resilience that addresses the specific experiences, vulnerabilities, and needs of frontline communities within the city of Richmond, which must be included and supported in actively engaging in climate resilience planning, policy and actions; and

WHEREAS, Council is of the opinion that environmental racism is a systemic structure that undermines the health of Black residents of the city of Richmond, and Resolution No. 2021-R039, which is pending before the Council, states that the Council is committed to dismantling those systemic structures that undermine the health of Black people; and

WHEREAS, upon information and belief of the Council, over 1,910 local governments representing over 798 million people have already declared a state of climate emergency, including New York City, New York, Austin, Texas, Boulder, Colorado, San Francisco, California, Alexandria, Virginia, and 58 other localities within the United States, as well as 15 national governments, including those of the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Ireland and Argentina; and

WHEREAS, upon information and belief of the Council, the costs of the City's inaction on climate change far outweighs the costs of immediate mitigation efforts; and

WHEREAS, the Council believes that it is in the best interests of the citizens of the City of Richmond that the Council declare the existence of a climate and ecological emergency that threatens the city of Richmond, the surrounding region, the Commonwealth of Virginia, civilization, humanity, and the natural world;

NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF RICHMOND:

That the Council hereby declares the existence of a climate and ecological emergency that threatens the city of Richmond, the surrounding region, the Commonwealth of Virginia, civilization, humanity, and the natural world, and

commits to pursuing all of the legislative goals outlined in this resolution and the City's RVA Green 2050 plan.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the Council hereby commits to a just and equitable transition for residents that includes the full participation, support, and leadership of community organizations, faith communities, youth, labor organizations, academic institutions, indigenous groups, and racial, gender, family, immigrant and disability justice and organizations and other allies as are integral to the climate change crisis response and mobilization efforts.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the Council hereby commits to using a community engagement process and the Climate Equity Index of the RVA Green 2050 plan to keep the concerns of frontline and marginalized communities central to all climate mobilization planning processes and to invite and encourage such communities to actively participate in the revision and implementation of the RVA Green 2050 plan and all climate mobilization efforts.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That Council hereby commits to working with City's Administration on legislative and funding opportunities, to the extent permitted by law, to address the climate and ecological emergency and its impacts through existing hazard mitigation programs and use of funds received pursuant to the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, H.R. 1319, 117th Cong., 1st Sess. (2021-2022), other funds appropriated for infrastructure improvements, and such funds as may be proposed by the Mayor and appropriated by the Council.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the Council, in collaboration with the City's Administration, hereby commits to fund and empower the City's sustainability programs by creating a new Office of Sustainability, the agency head of which shall report to the Chief Administrative Officer and, as the Chief Administrative Officer may direct, to such City official charged by the Chief Administrative Officer with the overall administration of the City's economic development projects and initiatives, to oversee a community-wide mobilization effort to be implemented by all departments and agencies of the City, and

provide for the powers and resources necessary to coordinate the City's climate and environmental programs, including the revision and implementation of the RVA Green 2050 plan and detailing the actions and strategies necessary to implement climate crisis response, climate mitigation, resilience, adaptation, engagement, education, advocacy, and research and development programs.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the Council hereby commits to working with the City's Administration to more effectively utilize the Urban Forestry Commission, with the participation of a new urban forester position, should one be provided for in the annual budget for the fiscal year commencing July 1, 2022, and ending June 30, 2023.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the Council hereby commits to working with the City's Administration to provide for the creation of an urban forest master plan, to be prepared by a new urban forester, should one be provided for in the annual budget for the fiscal year commencing July 1, 2022, and ending June 30, 2023, that incorporates the findings of the City's RVA Green 2050 plan, the objectives of the Master Plan, the Department of Public Utilities' RVA H2O program, and the priorities of the City's Equity Agenda, as set forth in Resolution No. 2021-R032, adopted June 14, 2021, to increase the city-wide tree canopy from 42 percent to at least 60 percent and achieve at least 30 percent tree canopy in all neighborhoods, prioritizing areas with a high heat vulnerability index rating and low tree canopy coverage, and using shade sails and cooling stations to support communities while tree canopies develop.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the Council hereby commits to working with the City's Administration to implement a tax on disposable plastic bags at retail outlets, as authorized by section 58.1-1745 of the Code of Virginia (1950), as amended

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the Council, prior to the imposition of a tax on disposable plastic bags, hereby commits to conducting a robust community engagement process to determine key equity challenges, and plan support for low-income city

residents and small businesses to support such residents in a transition to reusable bags.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the Council, as may be proposed by the Mayor in the annual budget and to the extent permitted by law, hereby commits to appropriating revenues generated from a disposable plastic bag tax to support an equitable implementation of the disposable plastic bag tax, and to fund city projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions in accordance with section 58.1-1745 of the Code of Virginia (1950), as amended, in connection with the City's sustainability programs.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the Council hereby commits to working with the City's Administration to identify lenders with which the City contracts that invest in fossil fuel companies, and then joining New Orleans, Louisiana, New York City, New York, Los Angeles, California, and other climate leaders in divesting from such lenders, and adopting a socially responsible banking policy.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the Council hereby commits to working with the City's Administration on an equitable plan to phase out reliance on gas and shift to accelerated investment in City-owned renewable energy and hereby recognizes that the continued operation of the City's gas utility is an obstacle to the City's goal of Net-Zero emissions in accordance Resolution No. 2020-R024, adopted June 8, 2020.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the Council hereby commits to working with the City's Administration to petition the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board for the creation of a soil and water conservation district within the city of Richmond to ensure that residents, businesses and nonprofits within the city of Richmond have access to technical and financial support for projects to prevent soil erosion, prevent floods, and conserve, develop, utilize and dispose of water in order to build resilience as the climate continues to increase annual rainfall in the region.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the Council hereby supports the pursuit of a memorandum of understanding with the neighboring Henricopolis Soil and Water Conservation District located in Henrico County, Virginia to be effective by no later than June 30, 2023.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the Council commits to working with the City's Administration, including the Department of Public Utilities with regard to its RVA H2O program, the Richmond delegation to the General Assembly of Virginia, and the United States Congress to procure funding to modernize the City's combined sewer overflow system, prioritizing green infrastructure that reduces stormwater runoff including green roofs, street trees, rain gardens, bioretention areas, and permeable paving as part of a comprehensive strategy to reach compliance with state and federal water quality standards.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the Council hereby commits to working with the City's Administration to explore amending City policies to ban or significantly limit the use of synthetic pesticides and herbicides on City-owned property.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the Council hereby commits to working with the City's Administration to implement a clean and green fleet management plan by September 30, 2021, including the allocation of full funding towards phased implementation of the plan, as the Mayor may propose in the annual budget for the fiscal year commencing July 1, 2022, and ending June 30, 2023, and in annual budgets thereafter as the Mayor may propose.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the Council hereby commits to working with the City's Administration on the appropriate implementation of the Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy Financing Program, as set forth in Chapter 11, Article VIII of the Code of the City of Richmond (2020), as amended, in order to promote the general health and welfare of the community.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the Council commits to working with the City's Administration to designate and, if necessary, provide funding for an existing or new position within the City carry out the duties of a green procurement officer by September 30, 2021, and to adopt, to the extent permitted by law, a green procurement policy.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the Council hereby commits to further endorse legislative proposals for submission to the Richmond delegation to the General Assembly of Virginia that reflect the policies set forth in this resolution, and to create a task force, the purpose of which shall be to ensure the timely and equitable deliberation and implementation of the policy goals set forth in this resolution by September 30, 2021.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That, in furtherance of the goals of this resolution, the Council hereby requests that the Chief Administrative Officer cause to be provided to the Council all relevant support and assistance as may be necessary to effectuate the objectives of this resolution cause the City's Administration to submit to the Council a report concerning the legislation that is necessary to implement the priorities set forth in this resolution by no later than January 1, 2022.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the City Clerk is directed to submit a certified copy of this resolution to the President of the United States, the United States Congress, and the Richmond delegation to the General Assembly of Virginia.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That, for the avoidance of doubt, no statement contained in this resolution shall be deemed to constitute the consent of the City Council pursuant to section 44-146.21(A) of the Code of Virginia (1950), as amended, to the declaration of any local emergency pursuant to, or otherwise to authorize the activation of any provision of, the Commonwealth of Virginia Emergency Services and Disaster Law of 2000, Va. Code Ann. §§ 44-146.13-44-146.29:3 (2013 & Supp. 2020).