



The Coalition for a just
and sustainable community

June 14, 2023

The Honorable Mayor Cavalier Johnson
Office of the Mayor
City Hall, 200 E. Wells Street, Room 201
Milwaukee. WI 53202

Honorable Members of the Common Council
c/o Jim Owczarski, City Clerk
Milwaukee City Hall, Room 205
200 E Wells Street
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Dear Mr. Mayor and Members of the Common Council:

We, the undersigned public service organizations, environmental groups, and faith leaders, urge you and members of the Milwaukee Common Council to formally adopt Milwaukee's [Climate and Equity Plan](#), as approved by the City-County Task Force on Climate and Economic Equity on March 21, 2023.

We further request that Milwaukee's Climate and Equity Plan be adopted as part of the city's comprehensive plan, so that it may inform present and future city planning.

Although we represent a diverse range of interests, we are united in our concern for addressing the existential threats of climate change and economic inequity. We recognize that failure to do so will further exacerbate the social, economic, and environmental challenges that our city faces today.

Milwaukee is, like other large cities, a contributor to climate change, spewing out vast amounts of fossil fuel generated emissions. While it may be easier to recognize the effects of climate change in other parts of the country, Milwaukee is not exempt. Changing weather patterns, including extreme weather events followed by heat waves and drought, are already producing floods, generating heat islands, impairing air quality, and impacting food production – all of which affect the health and well-being of our communities – especially those with the fewest resources to cope with these disasters.

Milwaukee also suffers the ignominious reputation as being one of the most segregated large cities in the country, ranking at the bottom of the largest U.S. metropolitan areas on measures of well-being for African Americans.¹ With some of the worst Black poverty rates among fifty metro areas (33.4 percent), Black residents and other people of color are at greatest threat from heat islands, high energy burdens, exposure to flooding, and other risks associated with climate change.

The proposed Climate and Equity Plan addresses the interconnected issues of climate and economic equity. As directed by the City of Milwaukee Common Council and Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors, the City-County Task Force has developed a Climate and Equity Plan to “address the ongoing climate crisis, ensuring Milwaukee meets the obligations set by scientists for necessary greenhouse gas reduction, and mitigating racial and economic inequity through ‘green’ jobs” (Common Council File [190445](#) and County Board File [19582](#)).

The Climate and Equity Plan provides a roadmap for achieving two goals:

- Reduce Milwaukee’s community-wide net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 45% by the year 2030 and achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 or sooner.
- Reduce racial and income inequality in Milwaukee by assuring that greenhouse gas reduction investments and policies create the maximum number of permanent living wage green jobs for people who live in the most impoverished neighborhoods with limited economic opportunity.

The Plan is organized around Ten Big Ideas (or sectors) each of which include an equity component. These recommendations are good for Milwaukee from an economic and service perspective as they will:

- Tap into new and current industries ripe for growth
- Reduce our reliance on fossil fuels, which are costly and add to air pollution that increases health costs
- Generate family supporting jobs to advance our workforce
- Position the city to take advantage of new federal funding sources

Milwaukee’s Climate and Equity Plan is both forward-looking and cost-effective. It is important to note that addressing climate and equity leverages multiple benefits. It is a “both/and” proposition that enables us to solve multiple problems at once, thereby making the most effective use of available resources. Many of the local issues that city leaders and residents care about -- such as affordable housing, high energy burdens, transportation, workforce development, water management, access to nature, and community health -- are addressed in the plan. For example, the proposal to make homes more energy efficient will decrease carbon emissions while also reducing energy costs for residents - and creating new green jobs to expand the workforce. Likewise, the recommended implementation of Complete Streets provides an example of how we can reduce auto emissions while making our city safer for drivers and pedestrians.

¹ <https://philanthropynewsdigest.org/news/study-ranks-milwaukee-worst-for-african-american-well-being>

As money from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Act and the Inflation Reduction Act flow into the state, Milwaukee will be better positioned to apply for climate and equity related funding once it has adopted the Climate and Equity Plan.

The enactment of Milwaukee's Climate and Equity Plan will likely be one of the most important local pieces of legislation in our lifetime. It aligns with the Common Council's 2017 resolution to support the Paris Climate Accord and it reflects two years of work by more than eighty community leaders and residents, along with input from the community. Now is the time for public officials to honor that commitment and join other great cities such as Cincinnati and Minneapolis, which have formally adopted climate action plans tailored to the specific needs of their communities.

We believe that every member of our community deserves a healthy climate, a safe neighborhood, and a living wage job. We urge you to take advantage of this opportunity to lead our community in adopting the Climate and Equity Plan as the first step in making that vision a reality.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Evans and Linda Frank, Co-chairs

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