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Subject: Comments re: Climate Action Committee

June 6 Salem CAP Subcommittee
Comments from 350 Salem Oregon

To Mayor Bennett, City Councilors, and Staff,
Comments by 350 Salem Oregon
Achieving the Council's Adopted GHG Goal for 2035
Phil Carver and Laurie Dougherty
Co-coordinators
June 5, 2022

350 Salem registers the highest level of concern over the agenda of the Climate Action Subcommittee, both the agenda of the June meeting and the agenda for this year.

The three action items on the June agenda are:

EC 7: Financial Assets/Investments
TL 30: City Fleet Electrification
MW 4-5: Sustainable Purchasing

While city fleet electrification will show leadership to the community, this and the other two actions are not key to meeting the Council's goal of a 50 percent reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2035.

All Council members who voted for the GHG goal should tell the Mayor and the Committee that their plan for the year is unacceptable. The Committee is fiddling while Oregon burns. Its actions are a betrayal of the Council's goal and the hard work of staff to prepare the Climate Action Plan.

Having the Committee seriously focus on achieving the City Council's adopted goal of a 50 percent reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2035 from the 2016 base year should not be up for debate. Below we discuss how and why the focus of the Committee needs to change to have a decent chance of achieving the 2035 GHG goal. The Committee, rather than the staff, should decide on which climate action strategies should be pursued in the next year or two.

We do support the emphasis of the last meeting on implementing parking meters for on-street parking downtown (TL 24). However, there was discussion of delaying committee action on this until after the bond levy election in November. There is no need to delay the Committee working with staff to prepare this item for implementation before the end of the year. A detailed proposal should be distributed in November for a public hearing in December. Preparing a proposal will take many months.

We also support immediate action on TL 30 (transition to all electric city fleet). In many cases City fire, police and other fleet vehicles can be replaced with all electric vehicles. In addition, there should also be a performance audit of the use of fire vehicles for health emergencies. The practice of wearing out huge ladder trucks to respond to health emergencies is redundant and wasteful. It should stop immediately. Use appropriate vehicles for health emergencies.

The remainder of the seven action strategies discussed at the May committee meeting are mostly technical in nature. They should not require much discussion by the Committee.

The most important of the 50 or so staff proposed strategies for near term action are part of the tentative bond levy proposal or are already underway (see <https://www.cityofsalem.net/CityDocuments/CAP-Committee-Meeting-Materials-for-May-5-2022.pdf>)

These include:

- TL01-02 Safe bike lanes
- TL03-05 Improvement of safety for walking, biking, etc,
- TL35 Improved pedestrian crossings

These three actions do not require further discussion by the Committee at this time, except that the Committee should tell the full Council that funding the Salem Bike Vision should be a priority for the bond levy. There is no better way to increase the use of bikes than by substantially increasing the safety of biking in Salem. Increased cycling will save lives and reduce both congestion and emissions.

Many of the other strategies among the 50 or so presented by staff are not key to meeting the Council's 2035 GHG goal. They should take a back seat to actions that are key to meeting the goal. Below we outline what we think are the key strategies.

- TL42 Reform SDCs
- EN09 Design a Community Green Power Rate
- EN18 Incentivize construction of smaller more energy efficient homes

- EN31 Implement policies to reduce natural gas usage

- NR06 Create an Urban Tree Commission
- CM37 Public education on reducing GHG emissions (also CM39, EN14 and EN15)

- MW08 City-wide ban on non-essential single use plastics and polystyrene
- MW21 Pay structure for solid waste with lower cost for lower waste
- MW22 Explore sending all Salem's waste to a landfill instead of to Covanta Marion

Many of these strategies will take many years to implement. For them to have a substantial effect on 2035 emissions, work must begin now.

TL 42: Reform the City's system development charges (SDCs) by

- 1) Exempting development in walkable mixed-use neighborhoods in close-in areas (in and around downtown) and development within 1/4 mile walking distance of the core transit network from SDCs, and
- 2) Setting SDCs for individual areas that reflect the actual cost of providing infrastructure needed to serve each area.

This strategy is a key incentive for increased density. Increased density is key to reducing transportation emissions.

While TL42 calls for a broader reform of city SDCs that may take more time and resources, an exemption from SDCs for mixed use development for close-in areas can be done much more quickly. It is a highly-effective, low-cost way for the city to promote development that reduces vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and GHG emissions. It should be moved to the short list of strategies for short term implementation. Here's why and how:

This strategy meets all of the City's criteria for short term implementation:

The City's criteria for short term actions - highlighted in *italic* - prioritize strategies that:

- *Have high potential for reducing GHG emissions* – Encouraging development in close-in areas builds in permanent VMT reductions. Close-in areas have much lower rates of VMT per capita than outlying areas
- *The City is the lead agency* – SDCs are at the city's discretion with State rules.
- *The cost to the City is considered low* – The cost to adopt an ordinance allowing exemptions is minimal. While the exemption reduces revenue, these costs are offset because close-in development has much lower infrastructure costs relative to outlying areas. Close-in areas have adequate existing public facilities. This nets the City money because SDCs cover only 20-30% of cost of facilities needed to serve growth. Over time this shift yields major reductions in maintenance costs.
- *There are community equity co-benefits* – Development in close-in areas also reduces personal transportation costs, reduces traffic congestion, expands transportation choices and improves public health outcomes by encouraging walking and cycling.
- *The initiation of the strategy could occur in the next two years.* As described below, the SDC exemption could be incorporated in the city's code almost immediately.

SDC exemptions near the core transit network can be implemented within the next 6 to 12 months. Reforming the inequitable structure of uniform SDCs will take several years so it should begin now.

EN09 Design a Community Green Power Rate

Starting this year (or next) the City will purchase its power from PGE under a green power rate with a very small premium. The City should ask PGE to design a similar rate that would apply to all power purchased by residential customers. The rate should have a protection of no price increase for low or lower income residents. The City would then judge whether the premium was reasonable to apply to all other residents. If adopted, this would be a major step toward meeting the 2035 electric emission goal. Designing the rate and working with the Public Utility Commission to approve the rate for Salem residents will take several years.

EN18 Incentivize construction of smaller more energy efficient homes

City staff should explore how residential codes might be revised to accomplish this strategy. Homes built now will be used well past 2050. Smaller homes include multifamily and middle housing. Because most of these homes have shared walls, they use less energy than single-family homes of the same size.

EN31 Implement policies to reduce natural gas usage

City staff should explore how to increase the NW Natural gas franchise fee to increase the funds for the Energy Trust to weatherize existing natural gas homes. Weatherizing a home now will lower the gas bill and reduce greenhouse gas emissions for the life of the home. The bill savings will be especially helpful to lower income residents. It will take many years to address all existing natural gas homes.

In 2023 the City should evaluate whether the natural gas actions already taken by the Dept. of Environmental Quality and being considered by the Public Utility Commission are sufficient to meet the 2035 goal.

NR06 Create an Urban Tree Commission

City staff should create an Urban Tree Commission composed of community residents knowledgeable of urban forestry concerns to guide the expansion of Salem's urban canopy, eliminate neighborhood heat deserts and preserve mature trees. In addition, the Commission could provide added oversight for tree removals from real estate development, improved enforcement of current tree removal codes and help educate community members on tree care and the importance of a robust and thriving urban canopy.

CM37 Public education on reducing GHG emissions

Work with local schools, neighborhood associations, and media (in English and Spanish) to implement an educational campaign that updates Salem residents about:

- (1) Opportunities and how to access them - Energy Trust of Oregon, weatherization funding from the Healthy Homes Bill, EV rebates (state and federal), and solar programs (ETO, PGE & Community Energy Project on access to solar for low-income Oregonians), etc.
- (2) Resilience related to wildfire, power outages, and earthquakes. How to sign up for alerts in English or Spanish.

Also let local businesses and nonprofits know about grant opportunities for EV charging infrastructure.

MW08 City-wide ban on non-essential single use plastics and polystyrene

The City voted to ban single use plastic bags in 2019, but lack of enforcement has resulted in the resumption of the distribution of some plastic bags in some stores.

There are other single-use plastics. Plastic waste has long been known to be of significant ecological concern and is increasingly recognized as a public health risk. Plastic particulate matter has been found in human blood and bodily organs. Plastic production contributes to planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions at every point in its life cycle and will release more greenhouse gas emissions than coal plants in the U.S. by 2030. It is now known to release methane and ethylene - two powerful greenhouse gases that can exacerbate climate change, when

exposed to the elements and UV radiation. Single-use plastics and polystyrene are non-essential products created solely for consumer convenience and have been banned in numerous states and cities.

City ordinances throughout the U.S. can guide the implementation of a polystyrene ban in Salem and to expand the single-use plastic bag ban to include other single-use plastic items.

See:

<https://www.charlestoncounty.org/ordinances/2000-2099/2047.pdf>

<https://berkeleyca.gov/doing-business/operating-berkeley/food-service/single-use-foodware-rules>

<https://www.eugene-or.gov/4235/Single-Use-Ordinances>

<https://www.portland.gov/bps/garbage-recycling/business-garbage-policies/single-use-plastics#:~:text=Policy%20overview,be%20provided%20upon%20customer%20request.>

MW21 Pay structure for solid waste with lower cost for lower waste

For 2023 the City Council should adopt a “Pay-As-You-Throw” (PAYT) rate structure for municipal garbage service for Salem residents like residents of Vancouver, WA and Eugene and other cities have used for years. PAYT gives more control to residents to save money by reducing their garbage so they can use a smaller bin and have it picked up less frequently. In Vancouver residents can opt for a 20 or 32 gallon bin and have it picked up every other week or even monthly. Such an option reduces waste; and reduces the unnecessary additional emissions of garbage trucks that result from more frequent stops. In Salem we are forced to pay for weekly pickup even when we don’t need it. This must change in 2023.

MW22 Explore sending all Salem’s waste to a landfill instead of to Covanta Marion

Since 1986, Salem, with the exception of West Salem, has been forced to send its solid waste to the Covanta Marion incinerator just north of the city. State law gives sole authority to the Marion County Commissioners to burn all of the County’s solid waste in the aging facility that is the #1 emitter of greenhouse gases in the county, in addition to emitting toxic chemicals and fine particulate matter that harms our health and constitutes an environmental justice issue for the lower income, largely Latinx, population living near the facility. We need leadership from the Salem City Council to pursue vigorous Zero Waste policies and then send the remaining solid waste to less toxic and less harmful landfill. State law should be changed to allow this.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.