

City of Watsonville
Public Works and Utilities Department



M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: February 21, 2019

TO: Matthew D. Huffaker, City Manager

FROM: Steve Palmisano, Director of Public Works & Utilities
Michelle Templeton, Public Works & Utilities Assistant Director

SUBJECT: A Resolution Endorsing a Climate Commitment by the City of Watsonville and Requesting Regional Collaboration on a Mobilization Effort to Restore a Safe Climate

AGENDA ITEM: February 26, 2019 City Council

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that City Council approve the resolution endorsing a Climate Commitment by the City of Watsonville (City) and requesting regional collaboration on a mobilization effort to restore a safe climate.

BACKGROUND:

In April 2016 world leaders from 175 countries recognized the threat of climate change and the urgent need to combat it by signing the Paris Agreement, agreeing to keep warming “well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels” and to “pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C.” While the United States (U.S.), under the Trump Administration, has indicated its intention to withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, 40 mayors in the greater San Francisco Bay Area have committed to adopt, honor, and uphold the Paris Agreement.

The City of Watsonville reaffirmed its commitment to uphold the Paris Agreement by joining the Climate Mayors (aka Mayors National Climate Action Agenda), a network aiming to mutually strengthen grassroots-level, city-led activity on undertaking climate action by greening our energy sources, making our infrastructure efficient and low impact, and growing the economy through investing in the sectors that enable a climate-compatible future.

Despite these proactive commitments, historical emissions have increased global temperatures by 1°C already and the climate continues to change, causing extreme and intensified natural hazard and weather conditions. According to the National Centers for Environmental Information, in 2017 the U.S. was impacted by 16 separate billion-dollar disaster events that matched 2011 for the record number of billion-dollar disasters for within a calendar year. The cumulative cost of \$309.5 billion in 2017 shattered the previous U.S. annual record cost of \$219.2 billion in 2005 due to hurricanes.

The October 2017 Northern California wildfires caused more than \$9.4 billion in damage, destroying over 8,900 structures, displacing many people, killing 44, and injuring another 192. With over 7,000 wildfires to date in California over 2018, damage, injury and mortality are set to exceed those of 2017. Worldwide, climate change-fueled droughts, famines, and diseases have already killed millions of people in the Global southern hemisphere, and displaced millions more.

According to the latest climate projections, global temperatures are expected to increase an average of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels as soon as 2026, causing long-term “continuous thaw” of the Arctic permafrost, which could turn the tundra which has acted as a carbon sink, into a source of carbon release in the 2020s. Moreover, it is estimated that the Greenland Ice Sheet is likely to completely collapse at 1.6°C of sustained warming, which NASA scientists have concluded would lead to 23 feet of sea-level rise, billions of climate refugees, and a “global-scale catastrophe.” Unfortunately, as is often the case, indigenous and low-income communities and communities of color in the U.S. and abroad have suffered the gravest consequences of global warming. In addition to the devastating toll on human health and safety and the financially overwhelming impact to infrastructure, climate change is causing species extinction at rates 1,000 times higher than the natural rate. Vertebrate populations are predicted to decline 65% by 2020 and up to 37% of all plant and animal species by 2050.

According to both the 4th California Climate Change Assessment report, published August 27, 2018, and the IPCC report, published October, 8 2018, climate change is accelerating and urgent action is needed. Common sense and morality indicate that humanity must lower the excess carbon from the atmosphere in order to restore a safe level of greenhouse gas concentrations and global average temperatures. In order to proactively address this climate emergency, corrective and preventive action requires mobilization on a scale not seen since World War II, requiring those that have contributed the most to this global climate crisis to play a greater role in reversing it. To this end, in August 2018, the state of California hosted a Global Climate Action Summit, the purpose of which was to “bring together leaders from state and local governments, business, and citizens from around the world, to demonstrate how the tide has turned in the race against climate change, showcase climate action taking place around the world, and inspire deeper commitments from each other and from national governments.”

DISCUSSION:

The City of Watsonville has been on the forefront of efforts to combat climate change through the development of an Urban Greening Plan in 2012 and an ongoing Climate Action Plan developed in 2015. Most recently, the City’s participation in a community choice energy program, Monterey Bay Community Power, significantly reduced city-wide electricity emissions. With that effort, the City’s largest emissions source is now from the transportation sector. Furthermore, Watsonville is particularly vulnerable to increased flood events, salt water intrusion to coastal wells, and various other challenges exacerbated by extreme weather events and increased temperatures that affect the local economy, the influx of climate refugees to coastal communities, and the general health and quality of life for Watsonville residents.

Through this resolution, the City of Watsonville declares that a climate crisis threatens our cities, towns, region, state, nation, civilization, humanity and the natural world and endorses a just, countywide climate action mobilization effort to reverse global warming to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions and safely draw down carbon from the atmosphere as quickly as possible. Specifically, the City commits to:

- Consider revising its existing policy, priorities, processes, and distribution of resources to enable critical climate action measures in the City;
- Explore and develop guidelines or policies that address Socially and Environmentally Responsible Purchasing and Governance Policies;
- Explore new, or expand existing, options for reducing auto dependency through robust alternative transportation and transportation efficiency projects, programs, and other measures as appropriate;
- Support both affordable housing and transit oriented development;
- Support funding for an update to City Climate Action Plan, which sunsets in 2020, and consider ambitious but achievable goals, consistent with or exceeding state goals and objectives, integrated into a Climate and Energy Action Plan 2030;
- Keep the considerations of vulnerable communities and climate resiliency central to all climate action planning processes and to inviting and encouraging communities to actively participate in order to advocate directly for their needs;
- Continue to educate Watsonville residents about the climate crisis and support climate mobilization at the local, regional, state, national, and global levels to protect our residents as well as all the people and species of the world.

By passing this resolution, the City also will rise to the challenge of this great crisis with the active consultation, participation, and benefit of workers and disadvantaged communities, creating well-paying local jobs in building and installing renewable energy infrastructure, growing healthy plant-based food that stays in the community, restoring ecosystems, and retrofitting and redesigning our current environment, electric grid, and transportation systems.

The City underscores the need for full community participation and support, and recognizes that the residents of Watsonville and local organizations such as Regeneration Pajaro Valley, Citizens Climate Lobby, and several other community organizations will be integral to the emergency climate action mobilization effort. The City of Watsonville calls on the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission and other appropriate local agencies to participate in this regional emergency climate action mobilization effort.

STRATEGIC PLAN:

The Climate Emergency Resolution is consistent with the City Council's strategic plan in Focus Area 3 – Infrastructure and Environment.

Additionally, the plan helps promote a sustainable community and align with goals outlined in the Urban Greening Plan, Climate Action Plan, and promotes economic development through the use of green technology, decreases reliance on the reserve fund through increased grant funding and energy efficiency savings, and improves the short and long term health and

safety of Watsonville residents as it pertains to climate impacts such as heat effects on sensitive community members, increased severity impact of flood/drought fluctuations, and the impacts on specific job sectors.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

Adopting the Climate Emergency Resolution will not have a financial impact on the City. However, future resource allocation will be a key consideration for the City to address as it works towards the commitments called for in the resolution and the Climate Action Plan.

ALTERNATIVES:

The City Council can choose not to approve the resolution.

ATTACHMENTS:

None

cc: City Attorney