September __, 2020

City of Palm Springs, California

OFFICE OF SUSTAINABILITY

Climate Action Roadmap

Introduction

On October 15, 2019, the Palm Springs Sustainability Commission met to discuss how to move forward with discussions and potential further actions to address climate change. At that meeting, the group agreed that the City should develop a roadmap to acknowledge the seriousness of our current climate crisis, describe what the City has already done and plans to do to address climate change, and identify potential additional actions.

This document responds to that request and is intended to serve as a focus for further discussions among the Commission and the City Council. It may also serve as an initial step in developing a broader climate strategy to include in a future iteration of the City's Sustainability Plan.

1. Acknowledgement of the Current Climate Crisis

The City of Palm Springs recognizes that climate change is real and is having a dramatic impact on our environment, our economy, and our way of life. Globally, we know that sea levels are rising, polar ice is retreating, permafrost is melting, and fires are increasing. Here in the Coachella Valley, climate change is and will continue to manifest itself in the form of longer periods of drought; more frequent, above-average storm events; longer summers; and higher temperatures. We also know that changes in climate are having a significant impact on our local habitat. Staff at the Coachella Valley Association of Governments has indicated that populations of mammals and arthropods nearly crashed during recent droughts and dry spells. Although we experience some rebounds during wetter weather, we know that further change is inevitable and could be irreversible.[1] National scientists have also noted that the nearby iconic Joshua trees are threatened and may not last through this century.[2]

Our weather and environment are a key factor in why people come to Palm Springs and other Desert Cities to live, work, and play. Changes in our environment will have a significant impact on our economy and quality of life. The City recognizes that we need to redouble our efforts to strategically address our contribution to climate change and mitigate the impacts we are already seeing and expect to see in the future.

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[1] Email from Kathleen Brundige at Coachella Valley Association of Governments. September 25, 2019.

[2] Iconic Joshua trees may disappear—but scientists are fighting back. National Geographic. October 15, 2018. https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2018/10/joshua-trees-moths-threatened-climate-change-scientists-seek-solutions/

2. Existing Goals and Plans

The City's current Climate Change & Resilience goal as stated in the **Sustainability Plan** is to **reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020, 80% below 1990 by 2050, and achieve carbon neutrality for municipal emissions by 2030**. This is consistent with the target identified by the state in AB 32 – California Global Warming Solutions Act. When the City conducted a baseline greenhouse gas inventory for 2010 (published in 2013), the results indicated that we had already achieved that level of emissions. The City has experienced significant growth since that time, and these emissions may have increased. The City has not done another inventory since that time to assess progress.

The 2016 Sustainability Plan also outlined some high-level actions such as monitoring and reporting greenhouse gas emissions; developing strategies based on the Climate Action Plan to reach the 1990 levels by 2020; and improving community resiliency to the potential impacts of climate change, including determining what these impacts will be.

The **Climate Action Plan** (Issued in 2013) does not include any additional goals, but rather outlines specific actions that the City could take to reduce its emissions. These actions are organized into the following sectors:

- Residential (where we live)
- Business (where we work)
- Building (how we build)
- Transportation (how we get around)
- Municipal (how we govern)
- Hospitality and Recreation (where we visit and play)
- Education (how we teach and learn)

Although the City is planning to update its Sustainability Plan in 2021, it has not done regular progress reports on the Sustainability Plan or the Climate Action Plan in the past several years. As a result, we do not have a clear picture of how we stand today in relation to our stated goals or identified actions.

It is also important to note that the City does not have a climate adaptation strategy that would include an assessment of climate impacts and identification of actions to address these anticipated impacts. The City's focus has primarily focused on reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and not the broader concept of resiliency and adaptation.

3. Past and Ongoing Activities

The City of Palm Springs has always taken climate change seriously. As early as 2008, the City endorsed the U.S. Conference of Mayors Climate Protection Agreement and issued its own Path to Sustainability. Some of the efforts that have already helped the City achieve reductions in greenhouse gas emissions – the primary contributor to climate change – are listed below.

- Launched the Co-generation Facility in 2015 to help offset energy use at City facilities.
- Installed solar arrays at its Wastewater Treatment Plant and at the Convention Center. The Convention Center is able to offset over 60% of its energy use from its solar output.
- Administer commuter incentive programs for rideshare and alternative vehicle to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from employee commuting.
- Implemented LED and energy efficient lighting retrofit projects at City facilities and at street lights.
- Implemented ban on gas-powered leaf blowers and replaced over 500 gas-powered units with electric.

- Implemented a mobile home energy retrofit program that resulted in a reduction of nearly 92,000 pounds of CO2e.
- Developed a solar zoning policy and now ordinance to facilitate the installation of solar on residential and commercial properties.
- Installed a network of 36 electric vehicle charging stations to help support EV adoption and approved a zoning ordinance establishing requirements for the installation of EV charging stations in commercial and multifamily parking areas.
- Launched Desert Community Energy with carbon-free energy for the City's electric consumption and as the default for all residents and businesses.

4. Roadmap of Future Actions to Address Climate Change and Its Impacts

New or Near-term Actions

The Office of Sustainability, in coordination with the Sustainability Commission, has identified the following near-term actions to position the City to make additional reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and address the impacts of anticipated climate change. Most of these actions are already underway.

- **Update the City's greenhouse gas emissions inventory report.** The Office of Sustainability had planned to conduct a greenhouse gas inventory internally in 2019, but we were not able to complete this with limited staff resources. Funds will be moved around in the Sustainability Budget to hire a consultant early in 2020. This is a critical first step in understanding where we are with our stated goals and to identify the highest priority areas to address. The inventory update will focus on 2018, because it is unlikely that all of 2019 data will be available until later in the year. It is hoped that we can complete the inventory by the end of May 2020. The results will help inform priority areas for action and determine what additional steps will be needed to meet our stated goals. (Spring 2020)
- **Implement Changes in the State Energy Code and Green Building codes effective in January 2020.** The changes in the building codes that will be in effect in January 2020 have several new energy efficiency and clean energy requirements for residential and commercial construction projects. As the Council knows, one of these requirements is that all new residential projects are required to install solar panels. These requirements along with improved energy efficiency and building envelope requirements should have a significant impact on reducing greenhouse gas emissions from new residential and commercial buildings moving forward. (Spring 2020)
- **Expand the network of EV charging stations.** The market for electric vehicles increased significantly over the past several years since the Climate Action Plan was developed. The City has not needed to promote electric and hybrid alternatives as was described in the Plan. This may be changing as people seem to be reverting to sport utility vehicles, but car manufacturers are also responding with electric and hybrid options. This is leading to an increased need for EV charging stations – something the Office of Sustainability has been working on with Engineering for the past several months. City Staff will continue to work with SCE and an approved vendor to identify the infrastructure needed to support this expansion. The City will install the units starting in summer 2020. (Summer-Fall 2020)
- **Implement New Incentive Program for Home Energy Assessments.** The Sustainability Commission has approved a new program to provide rebates to residents that conduct a home energy assessment as

part of an approved home energy labeling program. This program will begin in 2020. It is hoped that providing homeowners with information about how they can reduce their home energy costs will help boost the energy efficiency of existing housing stock. If the program is successful, it is recommended that DCE continue it as one of their energy efficiency programs for homeowners. (Fall 2020)

- **Expand cooling center services for the homeless.** The City has expanded its programs for cooling centers and services for the homeless to address the impacts of higher summer temperatures. These centers now offer overnight accommodations because temperatures often do not fall below 90 degrees. (Summer 2020)

Planned Actions

The City is also planning additional actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and address climate change impacts, including the following:

- ~~{~~**Promote reusable food ware to reduce emissions from discarded disposables.** City staff have been working with the Sustainability Commission to develop an ordinance to reduce disposable food ware. This is one of our primary contributors to our municipal solid waste and a key contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. ~~The~~Following direction received from Council at its July 9 meeting, the draft ordinance will go before the City Council early in October 2020. (Summer/Fall 2020)~~}~~

- **Update the General Plan to reflect climate adaptation strategies.** The City is starting the process of updating its General Plan to include climate adaptation strategies. As part of this update, the General Plan will include a greenhouse gas emissions analysis and forecast. This may help the city strategize on new areas to address based on anticipated growth and other changes. (Fall 2020)

- **Development of a Walkability and Safe Routes to School Master Plan.** The Master Plan will help promote pedestrian safety and increase pedestrian traffic to reduce transportation-related emissions. (2020-2021)

- **Develop options for reducing local transportation-related emissions.** Although the State has made significant progress overall in greenhouse gas emissions reductions, one sector is experiencing an increase – transportation. Given that most trips are within 3 miles, it makes Palm Springs a great candidate to explore new ideas to address transportation-related emissions. This effort would be linked to the planned expansion of EV infrastructure, improvements to bike infrastructure that may be identified in the General plan update, and improvements in pedestrian safety that will be identified through the Walkability and Safe Routes to School Master Plan. The City intends to explore this issue in more depth as those projects progress and identify opportunities to incorporate this concept into City planning efforts. (2020-2021)

- **Implement new organics waste management requirements.** One of the challenges that the state continues to have in managing greenhouse gas emissions broadly is managing emissions from landfills – much of which is generated by organic waste. The State is working on a new law – SB 1383 – that is designed to reduce the amount of organics going to landfills. The City is currently working with PSDS to anticipate and respond to this new law. This will help the city reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by reducing the amount of waste sent to landfills. (2021-2022)

Research Actions

In addition to its current and planned activities, the City is working with the Sustainability Commission to research additional potential actions that, if supported by Council, could further promote GHG reductions. These research items include the following:

- **Investigate capture technologies for greenhouse gas emissions from wastewater treatment plant.** Wastewater treatment plant emissions were the single largest municipal emissions source in the 2010 GHG Inventory. The City may be able to further reduce its direct greenhouse gas emissions by incorporating emissions control technologies that capture emissions from the wastewater treatment process for use as fuel. The Sustainability Commission is working with the water treatment plant operators to investigate whether this idea is feasible. Although the City had pursued similar options in the past, there were legal, technological, and fiscal barriers that prevented implementation. (Fall 2020)
- **Develop ordinances to require building electrification or electric features and cool roofs.** The Sustainability Commission is researching a variety of measures exceeding state building requirements that have been adopted by many other California cities and counties. These measures have upfront costs but are all cost-effective over their life cycle. Pending direction from Council, the measures can be further researched using cost-effectiveness data from studies prepared under the auspices of the California Energy Commission, and a draft ordinance presented to the Commission and Council. (Fall 2020)
- **Identify community energy resiliency projects.** The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) recently adopted a decision adopting short-term actions to accelerate microgrid deployment and related resiliency solutions. This work would be done in conjunction the SCE, DCE and the Riverside County Emergency Management Department (Fall 2020-Winter 2021)

5. Next Steps

The Sustainability Commission and City staff continue to identify opportunities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate impacts and looks forward to additional discussions with Council, especially following the results of the emissions inventory.

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