



SAN RAFAEL CITY COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

Department: City Manager

**Prepared by: Cory Bytof,
Sustainability Program Manager**

City Manager Approval: _____

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TOPIC: CLIMATE EMERGENCY DECLARATION

**SUBJECT: RESOLUTION ADOPTING A CLIMATE EMERGENCY DECLARATION
AND ESTABLISHING A NEW LONG-TERM TARGET FOR GREENHOUSE
GAS REDUCTIONS**

RECOMMENDATION:

Adopt a Resolution declaring a climate emergency and establishing a new long-term target for greenhouse gas reductions.

BACKGROUND:

Climate Emergency Declaration

To address the growing environmental, economic, and societal threat posed by climate change, The Climate Mobilization, an international campaign formed during the 2014 People's Climate March, and other organizations are calling on governments around the world to adopt a Climate Emergency Declaration (CED) and mobilize their communities to take action to address the climate crisis. To date, over 2,000 local governments in 34 countries have joined the movement, including six in Marin County and dozens in the Bay Area. The City of San Rafael has received requests from several local organizations to adopt a CED, including Sustainable San Rafael, Organizing for Action, the Sierra Club, and the Marin Climate Action Network.

These requests to declare a climate emergency point to the increasing effects of climate change and need for accelerated action to stop and reverse climate change in a shorter time period than had been believed. A Climate Emergency Declaration allows the City to reset its long-term greenhouse gas reduction goal to align with State targets, while recommitting to rapid climate action. It also pronounces the need to include climate considerations in all the City's major decision-making, as implemented through our newly adopted General Plan 2040. The Climate Emergency Declaration has been vetted through and supported by the City Council's Sustainability Liaison, Maika Llorens Gulati, as well as community members and partners in our ongoing Climate Change Action Plan quarterly implementation forum.

FOR CITY CLERK ONLY

Council Meeting:

Disposition:

State of the Climate

2020 was another record-setting year with regard to the climate. 2011-2020 was the hottest decade on record. Wildfires scorched over 4.2 million acres in 2020 in California. The August Complex Fire last year in Mendocino County burned more than 1 million acres, making it the largest fire in California history. Currently there are dozens of wildfires burning in California, including the Dixie Fire, now the 2nd largest fire in CA history. Over 3,000 buildings have been destroyed this year alone, including many homes. In addition to wildfires, 2020 was the second-driest year in 90 years in the Marin Municipal Water District watershed, and Marin could be completely out of water by late summer 2022 at current usage rates if we have another dry winter season.

The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its most recent [report](#) in July 2021. United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres called the report nothing less than "a code red for humanity". While documenting the extreme climate-induced effects currently happening, the report also projects that in the coming years there will be increased drought and fire as well as increased extreme precipitation events. Essentially, there will be longer, dryer periods with higher potential for drought and wildfire, along with higher likelihood of atmospheric river events that cause more severe flooding and landslide events. These changes to the climate affect people dramatically, especially the most vulnerable members of our community, as we experience more extreme heat days, increased flooding and storm impacts, water restrictions, increased health impacts, and higher food costs.

City Actions

In 2006, San Rafael was one of the early signatories to the U.S. Conference of Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, committing the City to working towards meeting the goals of the [Kyoto Protocol](#). In 2009, the City adopted its first [Climate Change Action Plan](#) (CCAP), committing the City to a goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG's), the pollution that causes climate change, 25% by 2020 and 80% by 2050. As of 2019 data, the most recent available, the City had reduced emissions 27% from the 2005 baseline, resulting in a [Platinum Level Beacon Award](#) for Sustainability just last month. In 2019, the City adopted an updated [CCAP 2030](#) setting a new interim target of 40% reduction by 2030 from 1990 levels, applying the State's recommended interim target for GHG reductions. The City conducts annual GHG inventories to track progress and provides reports to the City Council.

The City's CCAP was integrated into the recently adopted [General Plan 2040](#). This includes dozens of climate action and adaptation [policies and programs](#), as well as a Flood Risk and Sea Level Rise Adaptation Report. One Policy, C-5.2, ensures that decisions regarding future development, capital projects, and resource management are "consistent with San Rafael's CCAP and other climate goals, including greenhouse gas reduction and adaptation." Every two years the Sustainability Division develops a priority work plan and reports on CCAP progress, the latest of which was brought to the City Council on [May 17, 2021](#).

Councilmember Llorens Gulati acts as the Sustainability Liaison to the Council. As Liaison, Councilmember Llorens Gulati chairs the quarterly public CCAP implementation forums comprised of staff, partner agencies, and interested members of the community. The Liaison helps prioritize requests from the public and in shaping projects and programs for City Council action. As part of the CCAP implementation, a City Council Sustainability Liaison meets quarterly with primary staff involved with implementing the CCAP as well as the president of Sustainable San Rafael, with occasional additional meetings as needed to address specific initiatives of high importance such as the CED.

California Climate Goals

The State of California has responded to growing concerns over the effects of climate change by adopting a comprehensive approach to addressing emissions in the public and private sectors. This approach was officially initiated with the passage of the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 (AB 32), which requires the state to reduce its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. The AB 32 Scoping Plan was developed to identify strategies for meeting the AB 32 goal and was adopted by the California Air Resources Board (CARB) in December 2008. Among many other strategies, it encouraged local governments to reduce emissions in their jurisdictions by 15 percent below 2005 baseline levels by 2020, and proposed an initial long-term goal established by Executive Order S-3-05 to reduce emissions 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050.

In 2016, the State Legislature passed [SB 32](#), which set interim targets of 40% reductions below 1990 levels by 2030. CARB subsequently updated its Climate Change Scoping Plan in 2017 to lay out a strategy to achieve the 2030 target. In 2018, Executive Order B-55-18 committed California to achieve carbon neutrality – the point at which the removal of carbon from the atmosphere meets or exceeds emissions – by 2045.

ANALYSIS:

Alignment with Other Jurisdictions

As noted above, over 2,000 local governments in 34 countries have declared a climate emergency, including six here in Marin: Tiburon, Novato, Fairfax, San Anselmo, Corte Madera, and most recently the County of Marin. Most commit to similar measures and resolves, although some differ on the target date of carbon neutrality. Other large institutions such as the University of California have made declarations as well. Most recently, the American Institute of Architects declared a climate emergency “to immediately accelerate the de-carbonization of the built environment.”

Resetting the City’s Long-term Target

One primary aspect of this CED is to reset the City’s long-term greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction target from the current 80% below 1990 levels by 2050 target to becoming carbon neutral by no later than 2045 (i.e., zero emissions). This will be a challenging target to meet based on the current rate of reduction and lack of clear, evidence-based pathways. However, conformity with State targets is important for cities such as San Rafael in that it allows the City to align policies and take advantage of State mandates, incentives, and programs that help in reducing GHG’s. In addition, technologies and opportunities are changing rapidly and this target will keep San Rafael committed to innovation and leading edge practices and products. The City will continue to monitor and adjust targets and climate action programs as necessary. For example, if the State sets a sooner date for carbon neutrality and lays out a strategy to achieve it, the City will be able to amend our target to match.

Commitment to Implementation and Advocacy

This CED provides language committing the City to continue robust implementation of the CCAP. This aligns with our current practices, annual reports, [biennial priority-setting](#), and collaborative approach to climate action. It also commits the City to advocacy on behalf of climate action, giving examples such as advocating at the State and Federal level for a carbon tax and extended producer responsibility (EPR). This is a practice the City currently engages in for items that are in line with City Council Goals/Objectives or other legislative priorities. For example, the City has sent letters of support for community choice aggregation energy policies and product stewardship initiatives, among others. One of the four current [City Council Goals](#) Focus Areas is *Sustainability*,

Climate Change, and Disasters. The CED also commits the City to taking our CCAP and the CED into account when deliberating major decisions. San Rafael recently incorporated the CCAP into General Plan 2040, which is the guiding document for all major decisions the City will make.

Equity and Engagement

There are two other significant items to note in the CED. The CED acknowledges that the City cannot do this alone, and that all levels of government, institutions, residents and businesses need to be engaged in climate action if we are to meet our goals. This calls for increased community engagement and increasing support for programs like Resilient Neighborhoods. The CED also acknowledges the need to address racial justice and social equity, noting critically that frontline communities bear the brunt of the worst of climate impacts and need to be included in the benefits of climate action and adaptation planning. These considerations match the programs and priorities in the CCAP and General Plan.

Summary

Adopting a Climate Emergency Resolution puts the City in alignment with other local jurisdictions in Marin and adds our voice to the chorus calling for rapid climate action at the local, State, and Federal levels. It resets our long-term GHG reduction target to align with the State goal of carbon neutrality by 2045. It also recommits the City to robust climate action with a focus on equity, while acknowledging the need to include climate considerations in all of the City's major decision-making. It has been vetted through and supported by our community members and partners in our ongoing CCAP implementation forum.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH:

City Council Sustainability Liaison Llorens Gulati and staff have been in conversations with community members about this topic and the CED was discussed at the last CCAP quarterly community implementation forum. This item was also sent to the public through the City Manager's Snapshot.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no direct fiscal impact to adopting this resolution. However, funding for implementation of programs in the CCAP and the biennial priorities that require funding will come from grants, utility programs, the General Fund, and through other means. Any significant impacts to the General Fund not currently included in the budget will be brought to Council for review and formal acceptance prior to execution.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

1. Adopt the Climate Emergency Declaration Resolution

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A: Resolution

RESOLUTION NO.

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SAN RAFAEL ADOPTING A CLIMATE EMERGENCY DECLARATION AND ESTABLISHING A NEW LONG-TERM TARGET FOR GREENHOUSE GAS REDUCTIONS

WHEREAS, the City Council of the City of San Rafael is charged with protecting and promoting the health, safety, and welfare of San Rafael's residents, and sustaining the city's environment and livability; and

WHEREAS, the City Council concurs with the consensus among climate scientists that global climate and ecological crises are happening now, and that the current pace and scale of global climate action is not sufficient to avert substantial and increasing damage to the environment, economy, and human health; and

WHEREAS, atmospheric CO₂ is now 50 percent higher than at any time in human history, and global average temperatures are at the highest level ever recorded, and both trends are increasing; and

WHEREAS, our planet is rapidly approaching critical climate tipping points, as defined by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Sixth Assessment Report, released August 9, 2021, that must be avoided to prevent cascading and uncontrollable effects on the survival of our species; and

WHEREAS, in 2018, the 4th National and California Climate Change Assessments warned that extreme weather and climate-related events in the United States are worsening, predicting increased heat waves in the western U.S., larger wildfires of greater intensity, declining snowpack and increasing drought, increased flooding and sea level rise, impaired agriculture, and substantial damage to the economy and human health, unless greenhouse gas emissions are immediately and dramatically curbed; and

WHEREAS, in 2016, the California State legislature passed SB 32, setting interim greenhouse gas reduction targets of 40% below 1990 levels by 2030, and on September 10, 2018, California Governor Brown signed Executive Order B-55-18 setting a new statewide goal of net zero greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible and no later than 2045; and

WHEREAS, humanity can no longer safely emit greenhouse gases and must undertake an emergency mobilization across all sectors to: (1) reduce and remove excess greenhouse gases from the atmosphere; (2) preserve and restore the Earth's biodiversity; (3) implement measures to protect all people and species from the consequences of global warming; and (4) cultivate a just and equitable transition toward climate justice and resilience; and

WHEREAS, low-income communities, indigenous communities, and communities of color are experiencing the greatest impacts of climate change, and remediation of these impacts requires active collaboration with and protection of these and other vulnerable and historically exploited populations; and

WHEREAS, young people will inherit the legacy of our decisions on climate, and youth from diverse backgrounds are organizing locally and worldwide to demand climate justice and government action to mitigate the catastrophic impacts of the climate emergency and to restore a safe climate; and

WHEREAS, San Rafael has demonstrated climate leadership to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and enhance the quality of life in our community, including sustainable land use planning, adoption of its first Climate Change Action Plan in 2009, and an updated Climate Change Action Plan 2030; and

WHEREAS, in adopting its General Plan 2040, the City resolved to vigorously implement programs to achieve or exceed State GHG goals, including actions pursuant to its current Climate Change Action Plan priorities to reduce emissions through building electrification, electric vehicle adoption, and mandatory organics recycling, thereby addressing the three largest sectors of San Rafael's GHG footprint, and

WHEREAS, despite significant actions by San Rafael and other governmental entities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, we currently face an increasingly urgent climate crisis that demands dramatic and accelerated action by all, including all levels of government, major institutions, residents, and businesses and that we must work with and empower our community to do their part if we are to avoid catastrophic consequences from climate change;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the City Council of the City of San Rafael hereby declares that we are in a climate emergency, which threatens our city, region, state, nation, humanity and the natural world, requiring urgent action; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, in addition to the current goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 40% below 1990 levels by 2030 currently in the Climate Change Action Plan, that the City Council of the City of San Rafael adopts the State of California's goal of achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible and no later than 2045, including potential acceleration of these dates by the State; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the City Council of the City of San Rafael directs the City Manager to continue to work with staff to mobilize municipal and community actions to meet the growing climate emergency by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, increasing carbon sequestration, and preparing for climate impacts, including such actions identified in General Plan 2040 and the Climate Change Action Plan 2030, as amended or updated, to meet or exceed City climate goals as quickly as feasible; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the City Council of the City of San Rafael regards climate change to be a high priority in its annual goal-setting process and directs the City Manager to continue to identify financial and regulatory means to support San Rafael's climate actions and to consider specific funds for greenhouse gas and climate change mitigation and resilience measures, including for rapid implementation of those measures identified in the City Council's biennial climate action priorities; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the City Council of the City of San Rafael directs the City Manager to include a consideration of consistency with this Climate Emergency Resolution and San Rafael's Climate Change Action Plan in all relevant decision-making, just as it considers fiscal impact and General Plan consistency; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the City Council of the City of San Rafael commits to regularly assess and augment San Rafael's greenhouse gas reduction actions, policies and goals, and provide progress reports and metrics at least annually; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the City Council of the City of San Rafael commits to pursuing climate actions in an equitable and inclusive manner that furthers social equity, environmental justice, and economic vitality; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the City Council of the City of San Rafael affirms the need for the understanding, active participation and collaboration of the broader community for all actions and initiatives San Rafael may adopt in response to the climate emergency and commits to provide outreach, information and education for residents, businesses, and City staff on the urgency of climate responses and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, as well as policies and strategies to advance sustainability and resilience; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the City Council of the City of San Rafael joins and will advocate for appropriate county, regional, state, national, and international climate action emergency mobilization efforts at all levels of government, including advocacy for actions beyond local authority, such as carbon pricing and extended producer responsibility, in order to reverse global warming and associated ecological crises.

I, Lindsay Lara, Clerk of the City of San Rafael, hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was duly and regularly introduced and adopted at a regular meeting of the San Rafael City Council held on the 20th day of September 2021, by the following vote to wit:

AYES: COUNCILMEMBERS:

NOES: COUNCILMEMBERS:

ABSENT: COUNCILMEMBERS:

LINDSAY LARA, City Clerk