



Tacoma Climate and Sustainability Commission

June 18, 2026

Topic: Climate Action Plan Progress & Near-Term Implementation Priorities

Dear Chair Walker and Infrastructure, Planning, and Sustainability Committee,

It is one of the Climate and Sustainability Commission's (CSC) codified responsibilities to annually provide its **independent opinion on the state of progress and near-term priorities for Tacoma's Climate Action Plan (CAP) implementation**. We are the Council-appointed body for community-voice on sustainability and climate matters, for the purpose of bringing both resident oversight and professional expertise volunteered from our related work in facilities and fleet management, energy systems, public education and outreach, solid waste operations, environmental justice, and more.

Near-Term Implementation Recommendation Summary

Make a modest, jumpstart investment through the 2027-2028 biennial budget in cost-effective partnerships that advance community resilience and emergency preparedness before summer hazards:

1. **\$25,000 for residential air filters as well as planning, training, supplies, and equipment enhancements at resilience hubs such as community facilities to protect low income, vulnerable community members** during heat waves, wildfire smoke events, and other emergencies. City Council should also use its voice and platforms as well as direct the City Manager to **coordinate proactive communications and services** about cooling and smoke-safe shelters this summer.

In light of budget and staffing realities, Tacoma City Council and City staff should leverage their platform, smartly deploy resources, and draw on partnerships to advance the following in a cost-neutral manner:

2. Over the next year, use code update processes to [advance tree preservation through smart protections for trees on private properties across all zoning types, eliminate parking minimums citywide, and align critical areas code updates to South Tacoma Groundwater Protection District protections based on the latest best available science](#).
3. During the ongoing 2027-2028 biennial budget process, direct the City Manager to **use a budget proposal development, scoring, prioritization, and reporting process that clarifies and advances climate-equity investments** in fleet, facilities, programs, projects, and services.
4. **Preserve funding for education and partner-led transportation demand management services** in the next budget. In addition, in July 2027, direct the City Manager to **pursue funding opportunities for electric vehicles purchases as well as fleet and public charging infrastructure**.
5. Given reduced staff capacity with the loss of the Green Buildings & Decarbonization Specialist staff role, use your voice and platforms as Councilmembers and direct the City Manager to use the City's communication channels to **promote utilities' decarbonization and efficiency programs as well as green building incentives for residential, commercial, and industrial buildings**.

Recommendations Background

1. City-Led Coordination & Jumpstart Investment: Community Resilience & Emergency Preparedness

Provide \$25,000 in jumpstart funding and leverage the City's platform to coordinate air filter distributions and support partner-run Resilience Hubs to promote heat and smoke safety. Some local organizations already provide critical services during extreme events—such as heatwaves, wildfire smoke days, or flooding events. **The City could better use its platform to centralize and coordinate information and enhanced services** in the critical weeks ahead as a super El Nino event forms. Unhoused people and households without air conditioning or filtration are most at-risk.

Climate Action Plan 2030 targets: Increase the number of Resilience Hubs in Tacoma from one to six

Climate Action Plan 2025-2027 actions: Coordinate organizations to create a Resilience Hubs program

Background: Our region had more days above 90 degrees in 2016-2025 than in the previous two decades combined, and 100 of the 246 90+ degree days since 1946 in the past two decades alone; meanwhile, summertime wildfire smoke became a serious air quality and health risk only since 2015.^{1 2 3} The City recently supported technical assessments and studies with help from partners, including Asia Pacific Cultural Center, Native Daily News, and 350 Tacoma, to identify potential resilience hub sites.

2. Code Updates: Tree Protections, Citywide Parking Minimums Elimination, and Robust Critical Areas

Significant code update opportunities are coming to Council soon. Council should:

- **Continue to elevate tree preservation and retention priorities across City efforts**
- **Eliminate citywide parking minimums**
- **Align critical areas code updates to South Tacoma Groundwater Protection District protections**

The Climate and Sustainability Commission is grateful that recent policy updates, such as Home in Tacoma, have prioritized tree protections. The Commission continues to see a need to preserve and retain trees – particularly the largest landmark trees – as development continues. With code updates related to both trees as well as off-street parking, the City has the opportunity to promote housing, development, density, and affordability as well as healthy urban neighborhoods. In addition, the critical areas code update should expand and improve protections for the Central Pierce County Aquifer:

1. Fully cover the Central Pierce Co. Aquifer area with So. Tacoma Groundwater Protection District
2. Include building setbacks of 10 feet for new structures
3. Create and maintain vegetated buffers for streams and wetlands⁴

Climate Action Plan 2030 targets:

- Exceed the national average per capita rate spent on tree care from \$2.00 to \$6.00 dollars per capita
- Increase trees in high heat neighborhoods by planting 25,000 trees, from 4,507 planted to date

¹ <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/data/the-rise-in-seattles-90-degree-days-charted-all-the-way-back-to-1945/>

² <https://www.weather.gov/wrh/climate?wfo=sew&tab=cliplot&sid=SEAthr&view=monthly&month=2026-06>

³ <https://www.pscleanair.gov/695/2023-Data-Summary>

⁴ https://cms.tacoma.gov/sustainability/stccommission/meeting%20packets/2026/may/critical%20areas%20update_climate%20%20sustainability%20commission_%20final%20letter_5.21.2026.pdf

Climate Action Plan 2025-2027 actions: Consider tree preservation citywide, including in code and policy

Background: Tacoma's overall goal is to increase canopy cover from 21% to 30% by 2030 with equitable distribution across neighborhoods. Trees are essential to clean air, cool neighborhoods, reduce stormwater runoff, and improve public health.⁵ Today, Tacoma has the least tree canopy coverage in the Puget Sound region likely due to a lack of tree protections, code enforcement, and planting incentives.

The City is updating its off-street parking regulations for new development and redevelopment to comply with new state laws and better align local parking requirements with Tacoma's goals for housing affordability, walkability, climate, and multimodal transportation. Staff are evaluating two approaches:

- A. State Compliance Only: Update Tacoma's parking standards to meet minimum state requirements
- B. Citywide Parking Reform: Consider removing minimum parking requirements citywide⁶

By state law, critical areas include: wetlands, streams, fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas, geologically hazardous areas, flood hazard areas, and critical aquifer recharge areas.⁷ The Central Pierce County Aquifer is one of our natural resources addressed by the critical areas code update. The Health Department has assessed that current aquifer use is typically around 5-10% of total water demand, but as much as 40-50% during summertime peak.^{8 9} This aquifer draws from much of Tacoma's land mass and is partially covered and regulated by the South Tacoma Groundwater Protection District. However, there is a gap in protections for the remainder of the aquifer recharge area in Tacoma city limits.¹⁰

3. Budget Process & Reporting: Climate Equity Investments

Track, assess, and prioritize investments in climate equity through the City's budget process. The Commission acknowledges both the City's challenging fiscal realities and that climate action is not solely led by the Sustainability Office. Because of this, it is vital for City Council and staff to understand how its existing financial resources are supporting climate action across departments. Screening budget requests with a climate lens is a mechanism to do so. **The Commission requests a staff presentation on the budget process** and wishes to give feedback on the proposal process and criteria.

Climate Action Plan 2025-2027 actions: Pilot a budget report outlining City funding for climate equity work

Background: the City does not have a robust formal process to organize and track climate-related investments in proposals developed, scored, and prioritized. The Charter Review Committee recommended a climate initiatives- and emissions impact-tracking budget process in future cycles.

4. Capital Projects & Supporting Education: Tacoma Transportation System and Fleet

Significant progress was made with impact fees implementation and reduced vehicle-related fatalities. **The City should maintain momentum in Transportation and Mobility Plan implementation and continue investment in active transportation infrastructure, fleet electrification, and public charging**

⁵ <https://tacoma.gov/government/departments/environmental-services/urban-forestry/>

⁶ <https://tacoma.gov/project/parking-code-update/#frequently-asked-questions-faqs>

⁷ <http://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=36.70a.030>

⁸ https://tpchd.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/STGPD_HIA_Report_04-30-2025.pdf

⁹ <https://tpchd.org/professionals/waste-management/business-pollution-prevention/south-tacoma-groundwater-protection-district/>

¹⁰ <https://www.piercecountywa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/22597/Draft1-Sole-Source-Aquifer>

to accelerate equitable electric vehicle adoption. Visible system improvements have grown interest in walking and biking. Pedestrian infrastructure and protected lanes, supported by education, can improve transit connections and take us to the next level. A connected, multi-modal city depends on steady investments over years – and even with difficult budgets there are resources. **Multiple state grants are available for EVs and chargers, and the City should pursue each one.** The Commission applauds and encourages further efforts to educate about the Connect Tacoma initiative, and understands its funding is critical to future active transportation infrastructure and mobility services.¹¹ Elimination of the Sustainability Small Grants program, which funded partners like Second Cycle and Tacoma on the Go, **makes the transportation demand management partnership important to preserve this budget.**

Climate Action Plan 2030 targets:

- Eliminate fatal/serious injury collisions by 2035 to achieve Vision Zero, reducing collisions from 93 to 30
- Increase miles of bicycle infrastructure by 80%, from 92 miles to 140 miles
- Increase miles of sidewalks by 14%, from 997 miles to 1,105 miles
- Reduce GHG emissions from the municipal fleet by 50%, from 10,426 MTCO₂e to 9,529 MTCO₂e

Climate Action Plan 2025-2027 actions: Create finance plan & seek funding to complete Vision Zero by 2035 and the City's bicycle and pedestrian network by 2050

Background: Transportation is the largest GHG emissions source community-wide. Promoting transit, active transportation, and charging to support electric vehicle adoption are effective strategies. Despite significant progress on fleet emissions, it remains the largest municipal operations GHG emissions source. With high and difficult-to-predict gasoline prices, and less EV maintenance needs, accelerating light-duty electric vehicle adoption is a significant money-saving opportunity for fleet and community.

5. Promote: Home and Business Energy Programs, Green Building Incentives

Use the City's platforms to spotlight partners' building decarbonization and efficiency programs as well as green building incentives. Puget Sound Energy and Tacoma Power's programs supporting energy retrofits, heat pump installations, and other decarbonization projects are key collaborators. Using creative channels to raise awareness is needed given elimination of the Green Buildings & Decarbonization staff role and two-year vacancy for the Building Deconstruction & Salvage staff role.

Climate Action Plan 2030 targets:

- Reduce fossil fuel energy use from buildings by 33%, including a reduction of commercial and residential natural gas use from 4,190,446 MMBtu to 3,151,127 MMBTU
- Increase green certified commercial and residential buildings by three times, including commercial building certifications from 55 to 143 and residential housing certifications from 2,492 to 5,039 units

Climate Action Plan 2025-2027 actions:

- Ensure existing repair/rehabilitation programs support low-carbon, healthy, or efficient equipment
- Increase awareness of codes, loans, and incentives for energy-efficient upgrades
- Seek grant funding for retrofit programs for rental and income-qualified single- and multi-family homes

¹¹ <https://tacoma.gov/government/departments/public-works/connect-tacoma-safe-streets-and-sidewalks/>

Background: Buildings are the second largest source of community-wide GHG emissions in Tacoma. Electric heat pumps used for space heating and cooling are the most effective tool to cut building emissions. They are very efficient, and ducted heat pumps' enhanced ventilation improve indoor air quality. Local utilities Tacoma Power and Puget Sound Energy offer incentive and rebate programs, as well as funds from the Climate Commitment Act. The City offers residential and commercial "green building" incentives for using natural resources more efficiently. Tacoma offers priority permitting, height and density bonuses, and other incentives.¹²

Climate Action Plan Implementation Progress & Conclusion

Overall, Tacoma has made laudable progress on its climate priorities. The Commission thanks City Council for local match dollars to leverage a grant and multi-partner effort for the [Commencement Bay Resilience and Restoration Master Plan](#). The Commission also applauds Council advancing multiple smart growth and urban forestry initiatives. City staff delivered the [2025 progress report](#) in May 2026.

The City has nimbly navigated limited funding, reduced staffing, and federal policy shift impacts. And yet, **the Commission must clearly advise: implementation of Tacoma's Climate Action Plan is not feasible at current funding levels. The Commission's recommendations nonetheless focus on lagging work areas with strong benefits and minimal budget impacts.** With a super El Nino projected to intensify heat and drought conditions, even modest City investments are important. Steady and even robust investments are needed in the years ahead. There is real hope from action: scientists now agree that years of decarbonization work made the ["worst case" climate scenario \(RCP8.5\) is much less likely](#), though more effort is needed to reduce climate-related impacts and avoid permanent damages.

We appreciate City Council's attention to this matter, and hope our recommendations offer insightful, budget-conscious priorities for action.

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¹² <https://www.tacomapermits.org/green-tools>