

Bellingham Climate Action Fund Resolution

WHEREAS, climate change is an existential threat to humanity and most living organisms on the planet and requires quick, effective, and sustainable action; and

WHEREAS, prompt local action is called for in the Whatcom Democrats platform, and this resolution is in support of specific local actions that address climate change and create beneficial impacts for the citizens of Bellingham and by extension, Whatcom County; and

WHEREAS, Bellingham City Council Resolution 2018-06 identifies ambitions for the city to achieve: 100% renewable energy for municipal facilities (electricity, heating and transportation) by 2030; 100% renewable energy use for the Bellingham community's electricity supply by 2030, and 100% renewable energy for community heating and transportation by 2035; and

WHEREAS, recent actions by the mayor and several council members of the City of Bellingham have not contributed to public trust in the commitment to addressing climate change: • The City Council voted 4 (Stone, Hamill, Huthman, Williams) to 3 (Lilliquist, Martens, Anderson) **not** to ask the Department of Natural Resources to halt the Bessie timber sale to protect legacy forests within the Lake Whatcom Watershed, which sequester carbon and protect the drinking water supply for over 100,000 residents of Bellingham and Whatcom County¹;

- At the April 2022 meeting, the Mayor of Bellingham and the two Bellingham City Council members serving on the WTA board of directors (Lilliquist, Huthman) voted to purchase eight new diesel buses²; and

WHEREAS, the current proposed City of Bellingham Climate Action Fund Levy contains no provisions or proposals for natural means of carbon sequestration via tree planting nor saving of valuable local legacy forests³; and

WHEREAS, the current draft City of Bellingham Climate Action Fund Levy also contains no disincentive to the use of fossil fuels³; and

WHEREAS, the City of Bellingham has increased its General Fund Ending Estimated Reserves from \$15.3 million in the December 2012 Monthly Financial Report⁴ to \$39 million in the December 2021 Monthly Financial Report⁵ (not including the American Rescue Plan Act money of \$10.5 million⁵, \$39 million is effectively a 45% General Fund Reserve⁵) The City of Bellingham calls for a 12-15% target for the General Fund Reserve in the 2021-2022⁶, 2019-2020⁷ and 2017-2018 Biennial Budgets⁸; and

WHEREAS, the February 2022 Bellingham School District bond measure barely passed; with only 60.6% of voters approving the ballot measure.¹⁰ Normally the District enjoys 70+% approval^{11,12,13 14,15}; and

WHEREAS, current inflation is at the highest rates¹⁶ in 40 years¹⁷. The country is currently experiencing an annual inflation rate of 8.6% according to the Consumer Price Index published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics¹⁸ and Bellingham has higher than national average expenses^{19,20,21}; and

WHEREAS, Whatcom County is already planning to have two property tax measures on the November 2022 ballot, for EMS and child care^{22,23,24}; and

WHEREAS, Mayor Fleetwood has proposed to devote up to 75% of Climate Action Fund revenue to purchase renewable energy, potentially through a direct purchase agreement from Puget Sound Energy (PSE)^{25,26}; and

WHEREAS, PSE still generates 50% of its electricity production from fossil fuels²⁸ and uses additional money from generous community members to maintain its profit and meet its goals through its Green Power and Green Direct Programs^{29,30}; and

WHEREAS, the costs of electricity generation from renewable sources are continually falling below the costs of conventional fossil fuel generation³¹;

WHEREAS, the 40th Legislative Districts Democrats oppose the current profiteering by PSE and call on our local governments to shift to public power³²; and

WHEREAS, the 40th Legislative Districts Democrats support local use of the Climate Action Fund in order to support good jobs and regional "Just Transition" goals. The 40th Legislative Districts Democrats recognize the value of local spending and encourage tax dollars to be spent within our community to ensure maximum benefit to our region and local residents^{32,33}; and

WHEREAS, the purchase of electricity from the Green Direct Program and Green Power Program from PSE does not guarantee development of renewable energy infrastructure and generation capacity within Whatcom County and could result in unintended additional profits to PSE, based on electricity costs^{34,35,36,37}; and

WHEREAS, 40th Legislative Districts Democrats supports prioritizing climate action projects that *reduce* energy use through improved efficiency, such as weatherization and conversion to heat pumps³²; and

WHEREAS, all electric utilities in the State of Washington, including PSE, are legally mandated to eliminate coal-power by 2025³⁸, become carbon neutral by 2030^{38,39}, and to generate 100% of their power from zero-carbon sources by 2045³⁹; and

Now, therefore, be it RESOLVED that the 40th Legislative Districts Democrats support the establishment of a funding mechanism for the Climate Action Fund. However, given the current economic and political environment the 40th Legislative Districts Democrats propose the City of Bellingham not place a Climate Action Fund property tax levy on the Ballot until 2023. Failure of a levy can make passage a second time extremely difficult, as we have seen with the failed jail tax proposals ^{40,41,42,43,44};

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that 40th Legislative Districts Democrats calls on the City of Bellingham to include a provision in the Council Resolution requiring all Climate Action Funds be expended locally, thus contributing to our local economy and employment for community benefit;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the 40th Legislative Districts Democrats does not support a ballot measure that allows for the use of Climate Action Funds to purchase power from PSE. Levy funds used for electrical supply conversion should be expended for investment in local distributed energy resources and renewable energy supply purchases only from public or non-profit entities operating within Whatcom County, such as local energy cooperatives, public utilities, and community-solar projects^{32,45};

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the 40th Legislative Districts Democrats call on the Mayor of Bellingham and the Bellingham City Council to dedicate revenue from natural gas utility taxes, implementing progressive tiers to ease cost burdens for residents, incentivize a shift to electricity⁴⁶ and subsidize transition for low-income residents;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the 40th Legislative Districts Democrats call on the Mayor of Bellingham and the Bellingham City Council to use the surplus reserves in multiple funds⁴⁷ to initiate actions in the Climate Action Fund proposal until such time as the Climate Action Fund has a dedicated funding mechanism;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the 40th Legislative Districts Democrats call on the Mayor of Bellingham and the Bellingham City Council to incorporate an effective and actual “Just Transition” program⁴⁸, with funding, into the proposal for the Climate Action Fund;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the 40th Legislative Districts Democrats call on the Mayor of Bellingham and the Bellingham City Council members on the Whatcom Transit Authority Board to use the short-term option to convert the order for new diesel buses to purchase all-electric buses for the Whatcom Transit Authority, as called for in the WTA 2021-2026 Transit Development Plan⁴⁹ and also in accordance with the WTA Long Range Transit Plan⁵⁰.

1. <https://meetings.cob.org/Documents/DownloadFile/City Council Regular Meeting 2618 Minutes 1 24 2022 7 00 00 PM.pdf?documentType=2&meetingId=2618> (page 7)
2. <http://www.ridewta.com/Meeting%20Docs/Mar%202022%20Executive%20Committee%20Packet.pdf> (page 9)
3. <https://meetings.cob.org/Documents/Downloadfile/Climate Action Committee 2672 Agenda Packet 4 25 2022 9 30 00 AM.pdf?documentType=5&meetingId=2672> (pages 6-46)
4. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AiiuzoXR8og-DUDaFpzWHYvHpgh_ZtK8/view (page 2 of 16)
5. <https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/December-2021-Financial-Report.pdf> (page 4 of 17)
6. <https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/2021-2022-Adopted-Biennial-Budget.pdf> (pages 34,36,42)
7. <https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/2019-2020-Adopted-Budget-for-Web.pdf> (pages 32, 34, 40)
8. <https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/2017-2018-Budget.pdf> (pages 38, 39, 46)
9. <https://cob.org/event/climate-action-fund-public-feedback-forum>
10. <https://results.vote.wa.gov/results/20220208/whatcom/>
11. <https://www.whatcomcounty.us/DocumentCenter/View/46810/WM-Final-Summary-Feb-Special-2020>
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14. <https://www.cascadiadaily.com/news/2022/feb/09/voters-narrowly-pass-bellingham-public-schools-bon/>
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18. https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/CUURN400SA0&output_view=pct_12mths
19. <https://www.payscale.com/cost-of-living-calculator/Washington-Bellingham>
20. <https://zerodown.com/cost-of-living/bellingham--wa>
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22. <https://whatcom.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=10700167&GUID=796B8083-5499-4EAE-992F-0DE452BCD493> (page 22)
23. <https://www.cascadiadaily.com/news/2022/feb/23/new-tax-would-support-whatcom-preschoolers/>
24. <https://www.whatcomcounty.us/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Agenda/02092022-3063>
25. <https://engagebellingham.org/climate-action-fund-community-feedback>
26. <https://meetings.cob.org/Documents/Downloadfile/Committee Of The Whole 2664 Agenda Packet 4 11 2022 9 00 00 AM.pdf?documentType=5&meetingId=2664> (pages 71-74)
27. <https://meetings.cob.org/Documents/Downloadfile/Climate Action Committee 2672 Agenda Packet 4 25 2022 9 30 00 AM.pdf?documentType=5&meetingId=2672> (pages 20,45)

28. <https://www.pse.com/en/pages/energy-supply/electric-supply>
29. <https://www.pse.com/green-options/Renewable-Energy-Programs/green-power>
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31. <https://www.iea.org/reports/projected-costs-of-generating-electricity-2020>
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46. https://meetings.cob.org/Documents/Downloadfile/Climate_Action_Committee_2672_Agenda_Packet_4_25_2022_9_30_00_AM.pdf?documentType=5&meetingId=2672 (pages 13-15)
47. <https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/December-2021-Financial-Report.pdf> (page 15 of 17)
48. https://meetings.cob.org/Documents/Downloadfile/Climate_Action_Committee_2629_Agenda_Packet_2_28_2022_1_00_00_PM.pdf?documentType=5&meetingId=2629 (page 24)
49. <http://www.ridewta.com/Published%20Docs/WTA%20Transit%20Development%20Plan%202021-2026.pdf> (page 3)
50. <http://www.ridewta.com/Documents/WTA2040.pdf> (page 63)