

Seattle for a Green New Deal: Endorsement Letter

Dear Mayor Durkan and Seattle City Council Members,

Climate change threatens everything we love. Here in Seattle, heat waves have become the new normal, wildfire smoke chokes our summer skies, and our salmon and orcas are dying. These impacts are multiplied the world over, as rapidly increasing numbers of people and ecosystems are threatened by rising sea levels, deadly storms, drought and famine.

Despite its commitments to climate action, Seattle's climate pollution has been rising in recent years.ⁱ We can no longer respond to the climate emergency with incremental measures, or empty words. The climate crisis urgently necessitates an all-hands-on-deck mobilization.

We, the undersigned, call for the creation of a transformative Green New Deal for Seattle that will eliminate our city's climate pollution by 2030, address historical and current injustices, and create thousands of good, green, well-paying, unionized jobs.

Furthermore, we urge our city leaders to create a Green New Deal investment vehicle and a Green New Deal Task Force, which will decide how investments will be made, by *no later than the end of 2019*.

Using A Green New Deal To Eliminate Climate Pollution

To reduce our climate pollution, Seattle's Green New Deal should invest in the build-out of tens of thousands of units of affordable housing, without displacing existing communitiesⁱⁱ; more transportation access, including ubiquitous and free electric transit for all Seattle neighborhoods and bus routes that connect every communityⁱⁱⁱ; the equitable transitioning of our city's 160,000 fossil fuel-heated homes to carbon-free, electric heating^{iv}; and the weatherization of our housing stock.^v

A Green New Deal for Seattle must also set up the infrastructure so our communities will be resilient to inevitable climate impacts, such as wildfire smoke, sea-level rise, in-migration, and extended droughts. By investing in local, just, and carbon-free food systems, our Green New Deal can help ensure food security for all residents. As we face sweltering heat and smoky summers, the Green New Deal must roll out universal access to filtered air spaces & cooling centers for the public. Seattle's Green New Deal must strive to do more than simply eliminate our climate pollution; it should seek to build a truly sustainable and just future. To that end, Seattle's Green New Deal should aspire to the goals articulated in the federal Green New Deal: good jobs, affordable housing, access to healthy food and affordable transit, as well as universal healthcare and childcare, should be guaranteed to all people residing in our country.

To ensure that we are not undermining our efforts to reduce climate pollution, Seattle's Green New Deal should be coupled with legislation ensuring that no new homes rely on by fossil fuels, and that new fossil fuel infrastructure is banned in the city.

Using A Green New Deal To Boost our Economy

Eliminating our climate pollution by 2030 will require investing billions of dollars and creating thousands of jobs in our city. It will cost at least \$1.6 billion to transition Seattle's 160,000 fossil fuel-powered homes to electric heating^{vi}; the weatherization of our housing stock could cost around \$800 million^{vii}; and the cost of building tens of thousands of units of affordable housing will also be high. All of this, however, is far less expensive than *not* reducing our climate pollution.^{viii} Furthermore, these investments will create thousands of jobs and benefit our economy.^{ix} In addition to jobs in the traditional construction trades, Seattle's Green New Deal can create green job opportunities for artists, domestic workers, educators, health workers, gardeners, bus drivers, and more.

The jobs created by Seattle's Green New Deal investments, from janitors to construction workers, electricians to service workers, should be unionized and include Project Labor Agreements and Labor Harmony Agreements that would ensure high-quality work and fair treatment of workers. They should also utilize priority hire and be accessible to undocumented people and people with criminal records; being a Sanctuary City means being a place where no one is exploited, and no one thrown away. Additionally, all jobs created by our city's Green New Deal should apply all of Seattle's new worker protection laws: from paid family sick leave to the domestic workers bill of rights. Lastly, high schools in Seattle should add vocational training that provides a pathway to career-bound, green jobs.

Using Seattle's Green New Deal to address historical and current injustices

While climate change affects everyone, communities of color and low-income communities are and will continue to be most negatively impacted.^x This is especially true in Seattle, where environmental pollution is deeply segregated by race and class. Children growing up in the Duwamish Valley are three times more likely to suffer from asthma than those growing up in North Seattle.^{xi} People living in South Park and Georgetown have an expected lifespan that's eight years shorter than the average Seattle resident, and 13 years shorter than the well-off neighborhood of Laurelhurst.^{xii} Our Green New Deal investments must prioritize addressing these environmental injustices and center solutions from communities most impacted. To ensure that this is an integral part of our Green New Deal, individuals deeply rooted in communities of color, Native communities, and immigrant, refugee, and low income communities must be central to a Green New Deal Task Force that will approve how Seattle's Green New Deal investments are made.

Workers, organized labor and small business leaders must also be at the decision-making table; their input is essential to ensuring that Seattle's Green New Deal supports a thriving local green economy and that workers benefit from the transition away from fossil fuels. There should also be a measure of flexibility in the rollout of different initiatives, so that neighborhoods can help choose the changes they see first.

To further ensure that justice is at the heart of Seattle's Green New Deal, the city should also establish a Free, Prior and Informed Consent policy with regional Tribes.^{xiii}

Funding Seattle's Green New Deal

There are numerous ways we can fund a city-wide transformation, and using multiple mechanisms will be most effective. We can put a climate emergency tax on big business^{xiv xv}, we can price congestion^{xvi}, we can put a one-off climate emergency levy to the voters^{xvii}, we can re-purpose funds from the general fund, and we can dip into Seattle's existing rainy day fund.^{xviii} Of course, all of these funding mechanisms will need to be rigorously studied before implementation. Washington state already has the most regressive tax system of any state in the country^{xix}; it's critical that our Green New Deal funding mechanisms do not further unjustly burden low-income communities.

In addition, the City of Seattle must hold the fossil fuel industry accountable for its role in the climate crisis. We urge City Attorney Holmes to file litigation against the fossil fuel industry for knowingly causing global warming while spending tens of millions funding climate disinformation. Thirteen jurisdictions in the United States are already litigating the fossil fuel industry^{xx}, and these lawsuits can help ensure that the corporations most responsible for the climate crisis pay their fair share.

But we must not wait for new funding sources to begin the work of a Green New Deal: all City departments should be assessing current spending by how that spending reduces climate pollution and achieves the City's environmental equity goals, as defined in the 2016 Equity and Environment Agenda.

The Path Forward

While the climate crisis is global, cities matter; they are the source of most of the world's emissions, and the easiest places to implement change for large numbers of people. Major cities around the world are already responding to the climate emergency: Copenhagen is aiming for carbon neutrality by 2025^{xxi} and Oslo by 2030^{xxii}, and cities worldwide are announcing bans on internal combustion engines.^{xxiii}

Seattle has what it takes to be a global climate leader. We have communities who have been fighting injustice for generations, who can lead the way in showing how we take care of one

another while demanding a healthy, stable future for all of us. We have neighborhoods striving for local resiliency. We have industries full of workers who are increasingly asking how they can use their skills and knowledge for the public good. We have city leaders who have time and again acknowledged that the climate crisis is not just fought at the U.N. or in D.C.; it's fought and won *here*, where we live. This is the moment for all of us to come together and do what must be done for our common future.

Future generations are depending on us. We must step up to this moment, and show what leadership looks like.

Sincerely,

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To add your organization, business or community group's name as a signer of this letter, please visit <http://bit.ly/endorseSeattleGND> or email your name, title and contact info to jonathan@gotgreen.org.

ⁱ City of Seattle, 2016 Seattle Community Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory, available at <https://www.seattle.gov/environment/climate-change/climate-planning/performance-monitoring>

ⁱⁱ Building low-income housing near transit results in the greatest carbon pollution reduction per dollar spent – which means by making massive investments in affordable housing Seattle’s Green New Deal would not only help address our housing crisis, but also reduce climate pollution. For more see Got Green, *Our People, Our Power, Our Planet*; http://gotgreenseattle.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/OurPeopleOurPlanetOurPower_GotGreen_Sage_Final1.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Passenger vehicles are responsible for nearly half of Seattle’s current carbon pollution – a Green New Deal should prioritize investments in alternative transportation options that enable people to get out of their cars, while also contributing to the creation of vibrant, walkable neighborhoods with plentiful civic space and green space

^{iv} There are currently over 160,000 homes in Seattle that are heated by fossil fuels. Transitioning all of those homes to electric heating would reduce our climate pollution and create thousands of good-paying, union jobs in our city.

^v Retrofitting Seattle homes to be more energy efficient would mean not only reducing climate pollution but also thousands of good union jobs, and lower monthly utility bills for Seattle residents

^{vi} It costs at least \$10,000 to transition a single home from fossil fuels to electric heat. With that in mind, it will cost at least \$1.6 billion to transition all of Seattle’s 160,000 fossil fuel-powered homes to electric heat. These costs should be fully covered by Seattle’s Green New Deal, not by renters or homeowners.

^{vii} It costs at least \$5,000 to weatherize an average sized single-family home. With that in mind, it will cost at least \$800 million to weatherize all of Seattle’s housing stock. These costs should be fully covered by Seattle’s Green New Deal, not by renters or homeowners.

^{viii} Leading EPA climate scientists have estimated that the anticipated cost of climate change to the United States will be at least \$224 billion per year by 2090 if we do not radically reduce our emissions. For more see Yale Climate Communications, *Climate Change Could Cost U.S. Economy Hundreds of Billions*,

<https://www.yaleclimateconnections.org/2019/04/climate-change-could-cost-u-s-economy-billions/>

^{ix} See Forbes, *The Economic Case for a Green New Deal*, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/washingtonbytes/2019/02/20/the-economic-case-for-the-green-new-deal/>

^x Among the many findings in the 2018 U.S. Fourth National Climate Assessment was the fact that “People who are already vulnerable, including lower-income and other marginalized communities, have lower capacity to prepare for and cope with extreme weather and climate-related events and are expected to experience greater impacts.” For more, see the Fourth National Climate Assessment summary at: <https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/>

^{xi} For more, Toxic News, *Seattle’s Segregated Landscape*; www.toxicnews.org/2019/02/21/seattles-segregated-risks

^{xii} For more, *The Seattle Times*, *Study Finds Life Is Shorter For Some in the 98108 Zip Code*; <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/study-finds-life-is-shorter-for-some-in-the-98108-zip-code/>

^{xiii} Washington State’s Attorney General recently announced a Free, Prior and Informed Consent policy that, “requires the Attorney General’s Office to obtain free, prior and informed consent before initiating a program or project that directly and tangibly affects tribes, tribal rights, tribal lands and sacred sites. This is especially relevant in Seattle watersheds, rivers and Puget Sound basin, where the Muckleshoot and Suquamish have traditional fishing rights

^{xiv} From Amazon to the Ash Grove cement plant, our city’s biggest businesses are also our largest polluters, and they should pay their fair share. To ensure that they do, we could raise the city’s B&O Tax on the city’s largest businesses. For more on B&O taxes see: <https://www.seattle.gov/business-licenses-and-taxes/business-license-taxes>;

^{xv} Additionally, Seattle could implement a measure similar to Portland’s Clean Energy Fund, which passed at the ballot in 2018 with 64% of the vote. Portland’s “Clean Energy Surcharge” applies a 1% tax to large retailers with annual tax year total gross income from retail sales of \$1 billion or more in the U.S. and \$500,000 or more within the City of Portland, excluding utilities, co-ops, credit unions, and sales of qualified groceries, medicine or drugs, and health care services. Portland’s Clean Energy Surcharge is expected to raise between \$54 million and \$71 million annually. For

more details, see Portland Clean Energy Community Benefits Fund FAQs,
<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/bps/article/713039>

^{xvi} New York, London, Stockholm, Oslo and many other cities around the world have already implemented a congestion price. Fourteen years of the London congestion charge has enabled \$2 billion investment in the city's transportation infrastructure – see Transportation of London website for more:

<https://tfl.gov.uk/corporate/transparency/freedom-of-information/foi-request-detail?referenceId=FOI-2271-1617>

^{xvii} In February 2019, Seattle voters passed two public schools levies that will raise over [\\$2.2 billion over six years](#).

^{xviii} The City of Seattle has \$51.1 million set aside for spending on unforeseen costs. The climate crisis warrants the City using some of this money to seed its Green New Deal Fund.

^{xix} Institute of Taxation and Economic Policy, *Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax System in all 50 States*, <https://itrep.org/new-report-finds-that-upside-down-state-and-local-tax-systems-persist-contributing-to-inequality-in-most-states/>

^{xx} Eight cities and counties in California, as well as municipalities in Colorado and Washington state, the cities of Baltimore and New York and the state of Rhode Island have already filed civil lawsuits against several oil and gas companies. For more, see, *Inside Climate News*, Fossil Fuels on Trial: Where the Major Climate Change Lawsuits Stand Today, <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/04042018/climate-change-fossil-fuel-company-lawsuits-timeline-exxon-children-california-cities-attorney-general>

^{xxi} For more see *The Guardian*, Copenhagen's Ambitious Push to be Carbon Neutral by 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/apr/12/copenhagen-push-carbon-neutral-2025>

^{xxii} For more see the City of Oslo's Climate and Energy Strategy, retrieved at <https://www.oslo.kommune.no/english/politics-and-administration/green-oslo/plans-and-programmes/#gref>

^{xxiii} *Business Insider*, 13 Cities That Are Starting To Ban Cars, retrieved at <https://www.businessinsider.com/cities-going-car-free-ban-2017-8#berlin-is-building-bike-super-highways-9>