

Climate Justice as the Basis of the Springfield Climate Action and Resiliency Plan

The Springfield Climate Justice Coalition is dedicated to ensuring that climate justice is the basis of every aspect of the City's Climate Action and Resiliency Plan, from design and implementation to evaluation and modification.

Climate justice begins with the recognition that low-income individuals and communities, people of color and indigenous people bear a disproportionate impact on their health and lives from environmental pollution and climate change. It ensures that a just transition creates economic and other opportunities for those who have been most affected by climate change. Climate justice acknowledges the debt owed to the community by those who have benefited economically from the burning of fossil fuels, and does not allow financial institutions and corporations to exercise undue influence on the climate change planning process.

Because low-income people and people of color have relatively little power, their neighborhoods are more likely to be chosen for toxic dumping, extractive processes, refineries, factories and transportation infrastructure. They are more likely to live with air, water and soil pollution. Climate change places additional burdens on the poor, who do not have the financial resources to move away from rising waters, to install air conditioning to survive heat waves, to grow food on marginal lands, or to afford the rising price of food caused by droughts and floods.

Our carbon-based economy must necessarily evolve to meet the challenge of climate change, providing Springfield with both the opportunity and the responsibility to place climate justice at the center of its climate change planning. With the rapid growth of solar and other renewable energy industries, and with growing support by the federal government for a "Green New Deal," we have an opportunity to remake our communities with an eye to healing the economic divide, empowering those who have been powerless, strengthening our democracy, and creating a more just and sustainable society. A thoughtful, rapid, and responsible transition to a just, clean, and low-carbon economy will develop new jobs, create new community organizations, and integrate into our political and economic structure the people who until now have been marginalized and under-served.

We offer the City of Springfield our time, energy and support as we work together to carry out these principles and reach these goals.

1. All decision-making processes that are undertaken by the Climate Action Resiliency Planning group in regard to climate change must be open and transparent, and must be translated into the languages spoken by our city's low-income, immigrant, and marginalized communities.
2. All efforts that are undertaken by industry in regard to climate change must be open and transparent, and must be translated into the languages spoken by our city's low-income, immigrant, and marginalized communities.
3. All decision-making processes that are undertaken in regard to climate change must include poor and indigenous people, people of color, and their legitimate representatives. Members and representatives of these communities must be directly involved in formulating the approach, issues, questions, and possible solutions, and participants should receive

compensation for their work. In many instances interpreters will be necessary, and will be provided as part of the process.

4. The jobs that are created in the process of addressing climate change, which might include planning, surveying, communicating, installing renewable energy, installing insulation, sealing leaky pipes, shoring up dams, planting trees, building and driving new public transit including bike paths, will go preferentially to members of local environmental justice communities and their organizations.
5. The immediate co-benefits of climate change mitigation and adaptation will also be ensured for these communities. For example, these communities can have ready, affordable access to renewable energy and to insulation. Industries polluting their neighborhoods can be the first to be converted to non-polluting energy sources. Dikes and dams can be maintained and built for low-lying neighborhoods and plans developed to ensure safe evacuation. Public transit can be expanded, and public support provided for community gardens and for food coops that sell locally grown sustainable food. Already-existing local businesses can be patronized; trees can be planted; green space can be created and protected from development; and solid waste reduction and recycling can be made more effective and convenient.
6. Fighting climate change means educating a new generation of students who can become experts in sustainability. Society will need specialists in every field – from engineering to biology, science writing to environmental ethics, solar installation to organic agriculture – who have the skills to help transform society. Resources for this purpose must be given to our region’s public schools. Culturally appropriate environmental studies, including opportunities for urban youth to connect with the land and to have hands-on learning outdoors in natural settings, must become a core component of our children’s education. Our local colleges and UMass/Amherst can and should recruit students from Climate Justice neighborhoods so that young people can help their communities to thrive.
7. All governmental bodies, community organizations and commercial entities bear the responsibility to educate their constituencies and the community at large about climate change and environmental pollution, and how the above named entities and the community can take actions to prevent and mitigate their effects.
8. Asthma, COPD, heart and vascular disease will be aggressively treated in the neighborhoods that have borne the brunt of air pollution. Adequate and affordable health care will be provided for all, including the undocumented.

Springfield is rich in diversity and brings together the talents and cultures of many people. We can and must be leaders in our region. Together, we can prepare for climate change, reduce our city’s carbon footprint, and build a more just and sustainable community.

The Springfield Climate Justice Coalition