City of Palm Springs
Development Services Department
Office of Sustainability

TO: Sustainability Commission

FROM: Patrick Tallarico, Manager

SUBJECT: Climate Action Roadmap

MEETING DATE: July 20, 2021

The Office of Sustainability began preparing a Climate Action Roadmap in response to some discussions by Council about the Climate Emergency. The purpose of the document is to provide information about what the City has done and plans to do to combat climate change. The attached document was developed in September of 2020 and was put on hold until the GHG inventory was completed. The document will be updated to reflect that information and to include additional reduction opportunities that Council may be interested in pursuing. Specifically, the City will be engaging PlaceWorks (the company that did the GHG Inventory update) to do some additional analyses to help us determine what actions might provide the best opportunities for reductions.

We are hoping to conduct this analysis over the summer and present an updated roadmap to Council at the September 30th Council meeting.

The current document is being provided to members as a refresher. Any feedback is welcome, but a new document will be shared with the Commission in September.

September 22, 2020

City of Palm Springs, California

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF SUSTAINABILITY

Climate Action Roadmap

Introduction

On October 15, 2019, the Palm Springs Sustainability Commission met to discuss how to move forward with discussions and potential further actions to address climate change. At that meeting, the group agreed that the City should develop a roadmap to acknowledge the seriousness of our current climate crisis, describe what the City has already done and plans to do to address climate change, and identify potential additional actions.

This document responds to that request and is intended to serve as a focus for further discussions among the Commission and the City Council. It may also serve as an initial step in developing a broader climate strategy to include in a future iteration of the City's Sustainability Plan.

1. Acknowledgement of the Current Climate Crisis

The City of Palm Springs recognizes that climate change is real and is having a dramatic impact on our environment, our economy, and our way of life. Globally, we know that sea levels are rising, polar ice is retreating, permafrost is melting, and fires are increasing. Here in the Coachella Valley, the summer of 2020 saw new heat records and a wildfire at Snow Creek close to the City limits. Climate change is and will continue to manifest itself in the form of longer periods of drought; more frequent, above-average storm events; longer summers; wildfires and higher temperatures. We also know that changes in climate are having a significant impact on our local habitat. Staff at the Coachella Valley Association of Governments has indicated that populations of mammals and arthropods nearly crashed during recent droughts and dry spells. Although we experience some rebounds during wetter weather, we know that further change is inevitable and could be irreversible.[1] National scientists have also noted that the nearby iconic Joshua trees are threatened and may not last through this century.[2] Indeed, on September 22, the California Fish and Game Commission, in response to a petition filed in October 2019, by the Center for Biological Diversity, determined that listing the western Joshua tree as a threatened or endangered species under the California Endangered Species Act may be warranted.[3] The California Department of Fish and Wildlife will undertake a one-year status review before the Fish and Game Commission can make a final decision on listing.

Our weather and environment are a key factor in why people come to Palm Springs and other Desert Cities to live, work, and play. Changes in our environment will have a significant impact on our economy and quality of life. Based on a recent study by University of California Riverside, claims that "climate change will decimate Palm

[1] Email from Kathleen Brundige at Coachella Valley Association of Governments. September 25, 2019.

[2] Iconic Joshua trees may disappear—but scientists are fighting back. National Geographic. October 15, 2018. https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2018/10/joshua-trees-moths-threatened-climate-change-scientists-seek-solutions/

[3] https://www.desertsun.com/story/news/environment/2020/09/22/california-joshua-trees-advance-endangered-species-listing/5854896002/

Springs, Coachella Valley Tourism."[4] The City recognizes that we need to redouble our efforts to strategically address our contribution to climate change and mitigate the impacts we are already seeing and expect to see in the future.

2. Existing Goals and Plans

The City's current Climate Change & Resilience goal as stated in the **Sustainability Plan** is to **reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020, 80% below 1990 by 2050, and achieve carbon neutrality for municipal emissions by 2030**. This is consistent with the target identified by the state in AB 32 – California Global Warming Solutions Act. In addition to the above Sustainability Plan goals, SB 32 signed by Governor Brown in 2016 requires the California Air Resources Board to ensure that statewide greenhouse gas emissions are reduced at least 40 percent below 1990 levels by December 31, 2030.

When the City conducted a baseline greenhouse gas inventory for 2010 (published in 2013), the results indicated that the City had already achieved its initial goal – to reach 1990 levels by 2020. A recent update of the 2010 greenhouse gas inventory confirmed that result. The City has experienced significant growth since 2010, and a new inventory is being performed to determine where the City is now. This new inventory will use the most current emissions data available (for 2018) and provide a "look ahead" for 2020. It will also reassess the 1990 baseline if needed to ensure that the baseline can be compared to the more current data.

The 2016 Sustainability Plan also outlined some high-level actions such as monitoring and reporting greenhouse gas emissions; developing strategies based on the Climate Action Plan to reach the 1990 levels by 2020; and improving community resiliency to the potential impacts of climate change, including determining what these impacts will be.

The **Climate Action Plan** (issued in 2013) does not include any additional goals, but rather outlines specific actions that the City could take to reduce its emissions. These actions are organized into the following sectors:

- Residential (where we live)
- Business (where we work)
- Building (how we build)
- Transportation (how we get around)
- Municipal (how we govern)
- Hospitality and Recreation (where we visit and play)
- Education (how we teach and learn)

Although the City is planning to update its Sustainability Plan in 2021, it has not done regular progress reports on the Sustainability Plan or the Climate Action Plan in the past several years. As a result, we do not have a clear picture of how we stand today in relation to our stated goals or identified actions.

It is also important to note that the City does not have a climate adaptation strategy that would include an assessment of climate impacts and identification of actions to address these anticipated impacts. The City's focus has primarily focused on reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and not the broader concept of resiliency and adaptation.

[4] https://news.ucr.edu/articles/2020/09/07/climate-change-will-decimate-palm-springs-coachella-valley-tourism

3. Past and Ongoing Activities

The City of Palm Springs has always taken climate change seriously. As early as 2008, the City endorsed the U.S. Conference of Mayors Climate Protection Agreement and issued its own Path to Sustainability. Some of the efforts that have already helped the City achieve reductions in greenhouse gas emissions – the primary contributor to climate change – are listed below.

- Launched the Co-generation Facility in 2015 to help offset energy use at City facilities.
- Installed solar arrays at its Wastewater Treatment Plant and at the Convention Center. The Convention Center is able to offset over 60% of its energy use from its solar output.
- Administered commuter incentive programs for rideshare and electric vehicles (EV) to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from employee commuting.
- Implemented LED and energy efficient lighting retrofit projects at City facilities and at street lights.
- Implemented ban on gas-powered leaf blowers and replaced over 500 gas-powered units with electric.
- Implemented a mobile home energy retrofit program that resulted in a reduction of nearly 92,000 pounds of CO2e.
- Developed a solar policy and solar zoning ordinance to facilitate the installation of solar on residential and commercial properties.
- Installed a network of 36 EV charging stations and updated parking standards to reflect new state requirements and best practices on EV charging stations on private property to help support EV adoption.
- Implemented changes in the California Energy Code and Green Building Standards Code effective in January 2020.
- Expanded cooling center services for the homeless and those in need.

4. Roadmap of Future Actions to Address Climate Change and Its Impacts

Near-term Actions

The Office of Sustainability, in coordination with the Sustainability Commission, has identified the following near-term actions to position the City to make additional reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and address the impacts of anticipated climate change.

- **Update the City's greenhouse gas emissions inventory report.** As noted above, a new greenhouse gas inventory is being performed to determine where the City is now. This new inventory will use the most current emissions data available (for 2018) and provide a "look ahead" for 2020. It will also reassess the 1990 baseline if needed to ensure that the baseline can be compared to the more current data. The results will help inform priority areas for action and determine what additional steps will be needed to meet our stated goals. (Fall 2020)
- **Support the move to the 100% carbon free option for Palm Springs residents under Desert Community Energy (DCE).** The launch of DCE occurred in April 2020 and continues to be a focus of DCE, City staff, and a dedicated Palm Springs Working Group of DCE's Community Advisory Committee. In 2010, the largest percentage of emissions - nearly 65% - came from the electricity used to power residential and

commercial buildings in the City. The City's decision to shift to carbon-free energy as the default for all residents and businesses will have a significant impact on the City's greenhouse gas emissions. The City will work closely with DCE staff to communicate the importance of sticking with the carbon-free energy option not only to reduce our impact on greenhouse gas emissions but also to promote local renewable energy and green jobs. (Fall 2020)

- **Expand the network of EV charging stations.** The market for electric vehicles increased significantly over the past several years since the Climate Action Plan was developed. The City has not needed to promote electric and hybrid alternatives as was described in the Plan. This may be changing as people seem to be reverting to sport utility vehicles, but car manufacturers are also responding with electric and hybrid options. This is leading to an increased need for EV charging stations – something the Office of Sustainability and Engineering Division have been working on together for the past several months. City staff will continue to work with SCE and an approved vendor to identify the infrastructure needed to support this expansion. The City will install the units starting at the end of the year. (Winter 2021)
- **Implement New Incentive Program for Home Energy Assessments.** The Sustainability Commission has approved a new program to provide rebates to residents that conduct a home energy assessment as part of an approved home energy labeling program. This program will begin in Fall 2020. It is hoped that providing homeowners with information about how they can reduce their home energy costs will help boost the energy efficiency of existing housing stock. If the program is successful, it is recommended that DCE continue it as one of their energy efficiency programs for homeowners. (Fall 2020)
- **Promote reusable food ware to reduce emissions from discarded disposables.** City staff have been working with the Sustainability Commission to develop an ordinance to reduce disposable food ware. This is one of our primary contributors to our municipal solid waste and a contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. City staff are working with members of Council to conduct outreach and determine a path forward for the ordinance given the current challenges related to COVID-19. (Fall 2020)

Longer-term Actions

The City is also researching additional potential additional actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and address climate change impacts, including the following:

- **Develop ordinance to require building electrification and cool roofs.** The Sustainability Commission is researching a variety of measures exceeding state building requirements that have been adopted by other California cities and counties. These measures have upfront costs but are all cost-effective over their life cycle. Pending direction from Council, the measures can be further researched, and a draft ordinance presented to the Commission and Council. (Winter 2021)
- **Investigate capture technologies for greenhouse gas emissions from wastewater treatment plant.** Wastewater treatment plant emissions were the single largest municipal emissions source in the 2010 greenhouse gas Inventory. The City may be able to further reduce its direct greenhouse gas emissions by incorporating emissions control technologies that capture emissions from the wastewater treatment process for use as fuel. The Sustainability Commission is working with the water treatment plant operators to investigate whether this idea is feasible. Although the City had pursued similar options in the past, there were legal, technological, and fiscal barriers that prevented implementation. (Winter 2021)

- **Update the General Plan to reflect climate adaptation strategies.** The City is starting the process of updating its General Plan to include climate adaptation strategies. As part of this update, the General Plan will include a greenhouse gas emissions analysis and forecast. This may help the city strategize on new areas to address based on anticipated growth and other changes. (Winter 2021)
- **Development of a Walkability and Safe Routes to School Master Plan.** The Master Plan will help promote pedestrian safety and increase pedestrian traffic to reduce transportation-related emissions. (2020-2021)
- **Develop options for reducing local transportation-related emissions.** Although the State has made significant progress overall in greenhouse gas emissions reductions, one sector is experiencing an increase – transportation. Given that most trips are within 3 miles, it makes Palm Springs a great candidate to explore new ideas to address transportation-related emissions. This effort would be linked to the planned expansion of EV infrastructure, improvements to bike infrastructure that may be identified in the General plan update, and improvements in pedestrian safety that will be identified through the Walkability and Safe Routes to School Master Plan. The City intends to explore this issue in more depth as those projects progress and identify opportunities to incorporate this concept into City planning efforts. (2020-2021)
- **Implement new organics waste management requirements.** One of the challenges that the state continues to have in managing greenhouse gas emissions broadly is managing emissions from landfills – much of which is generated by organic waste. The State is working on a new law – SB 1383 – that is designed to reduce the amount of organics going to landfills. The City is currently working with PSDS to anticipate and respond to this new law. This will help the city reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by reducing the amount of waste sent to landfills. (2021-2022)

5. Next Steps

The Sustainability Commission and City staff continue to identify opportunities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate impacts and looks forward to additional discussions with Council, especially following the results of the greenhouse gas emissions inventory.