

Bellingham Climate Action Plan Task Force

Frequently Asked Questions

Does the City have a Climate Action Plan?

The Bellingham [Climate Protection Action Plan](#) was first adopted in 2007 and a revised plan was adopted by the City Council in 2018. The Plan provides education and support for local programs that improve energy efficiency in homes and reduce emissions associated with personal transportation. The plan also outlines measures to be implemented or adopted to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and electricity use in public and commercial facilities, buildings, and transportation. Many of the measures and actions in the Climate Action Plan are currently being implemented.

What is the Climate Action Plan Task Force?

In 2018 the City Council created the Climate Action Plan Task Force to determine the feasibility of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and transitioning to renewable energy faster than the targets set forth in the Climate Action Plan. The Task Force is a diverse group of community members that provides expertise on a range of energy related issues.

What did the City Council ask the Task Force to do?

The Task Force was requested to determine feasibility, costs and impacts of the following 100% renewable energy ambitions:

- 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
- 100% renewable energy for community heating and transportation by 2035

What is the Task Force doing?

Task Force members are evaluating measures and other actions that could be taken to accelerate reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Measures are being developed using a “Triple Bottom Line” approach, including social, environmental, financial and technical criteria, before being put forward as recommendations for City Council’s review. Proposals to reduce emissions in buildings and transportation, and in the City’s energy supply, have been presented and approved, and these proposals are being refined as the Task Force continues its evaluation.

What is the timeline for the Task Force’s Work?

The Task Force will complete its work and report its recommendations to the City Council by the end of 2019. The City Council will consider the recommendations and decide on which to pursue, with any action to make changes to City policy or ordinances likely occurring in 2020. Members of the public will have opportunities to provide input to the Council before any action is taken. Written comments to the Task Force can be submitted at: <https://www.cob.org/gov/public/Pages/Public-Comment.aspx>

Does the Climate Action Plan Task Force have the authority to make policy?

The Task Force is advisory to the City Council and will not propose legislation but will make recommendations to the Council for future programs or legislation. To date the Task Force has gathered information, formed work groups, and sought guidance from numerous energy experts to identify the most effective ways to decrease emissions. Since no recommendations have yet been presented to the City Council, the Council has not approved any of the actions being considered by the Task Force. Recommendations chosen by the Council for further evaluation will undergo additional research, including a thorough analysis of the cost impacts to businesses and households. The most promising recommendations will receive additional design work to ensure that they achieve the greatest net positive impact at the least cost. The public will have an opportunity to provide input into this process as measures are evaluated and developed.

Why is the City doing this when Bellingham only has a small impact on global greenhouse gas emissions?

If the City of Bellingham was the only organization making changes then our local work would not matter. However, this is not the case. Most countries and thousands of cities around the globe are also acting to do their part. Although China leads in overall emissions, followed by the U.S. and India, in 2017 U.S per capita CO² emissions of 16.5 metric tonnes were the highest in the world. Although the current U.S. administration has announced its intention to withdraw from the Paris Accord, all other countries either remain signatories or have ratified the agreement. Changes to reduce emissions are being implemented elsewhere at a rapid pace. For example, China leads the world in solar energy production and electrification of transportation. Within the U.S., many cities and states have declared their intentions to do their part to honor or accelerate reductions called for in the Paris agreement.

Will the City will require me to put solar panels on my roof?

Claims have been made by various organizations that the Task Force is recommending that all building owners will be required to install solar panels on their roof. This is inaccurate. A proposal endorsed by the Task Force seeks to have every building powered at least in part by renewable energy. Achieving this through installing solar panels would only occur through owner choice. Off-site options, including community solar or participation in a renewable energy credit program, will also be available, and the intent is to provide no-cost versions of these for households at lower income levels. Claims that have been made that some building owners will be required to install a new roof as part of a required solar install are also inaccurate.

Will I be required to install new windows in my house?

No one will be required to install new windows in their home. While new windows can provide increased comfort and reduce energy bills for some homes, this is not part of any recommendation being considered by the Task Force. The Task Force is recommending a set of weatherization measures that include air sealing of a building and retrofitting of insulation in homes built before 1990. Low- and moderate-income homeowners would be eligible to have this work fully or partially paid for through existing programs. If this program support is not available, lower income households would be exempt from this requirement.

Will I be required to install a new foundation in my house?

No. This claim has been made by some organizations and is false. We know of no possible scenarios where foundation work would be required as a result of Task Force recommendations.

Will I be required to install a new electrical panel at my house?

The Task Force is recommending that building owners swap out existing space and hot water heaters for electric versions when the existing gas equipment reaches the end of its useful life. To date, City electrical inspectors have no record of the installation of new electric heat pumps triggering the need to install a new electrical panel. However, it is possible that such a scenario could arise in the future, especially if both space and hot water heating were being replaced with electric heat pumps, and a panel was old and with a low total amperage capacity. Note that panel upgrades occur under many different scenarios occurring as a result of homeowner choice – e.g. adding a hot tub, expanding useable space into a garage, upgrading a basement, etc. If installation of a heat pump were to trigger a need for a new panel, the cost of this would be taken into account by any City program, and a program could be designed to reduce the cost of a panel replacement. In cases of extraordinary expense, exemptions could be possible.

I have a gas cook stove or a gas fireplace in my house. Will I be required to remove it?

No. For existing homes, the Task Force is recommending that gas space or water heaters be replaced with efficient electric heat pump versions when they reach the end of their useful life. There are no proposals to replace existing gas cook stoves or fireplaces.

Right now there is a lot of power from coal in the electrical grid. Won't switching to electric vehicles or electric heat just make things worse?

Even with the current electricity grid, electric vehicles and heat pumps are so efficient that they can be run with less greenhouse gas impacts than fossil fuel alternatives. Grid electricity will also get progressively cleaner. The state's Clean Energy Transformation Act, passed in 2019, requires the accelerated retirement of coal and full conversion to renewable power by all the state's electric utilities by 2045. According to [PSE](#), "Washington state's recently passed 100% clean electricity law mandates that coal be removed from utility power supplies by the end of 2025."

Why is the City asking people to electrify heating -- when the power goes out, people will lose heat.

Unfortunately, in most instances neither electric nor gas space heating will work when the electricity goes out. Most gas furnaces use an electric spark for ignition, but even older models that use a pilot light also require electricity to run the fans that distribute heat. Many thermostats are also electric and are inoperable without power. As a result, when the electricity goes out, both gas and electric heat become inoperable.

For more information:

<https://www.cob.org/gov/public/bc/climate>