

**Statement to Harrisonburg City Council October 25, 2022 from  
50by25 Harrisonburg, Climate Action Alliance of the Valley, Vine & Fig, Shenandoah  
Valley Faith and Climate, Sierra Club/Shenandoah Group, and Voluntary Gas Tax Group**



Our organizations commend and thank City Council for the steps you have taken to address the City's need to reduce its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions: Creating EPSAC, approving the Environmental Action Plan, issuing the 100% Clean Energy Resolution, and achieving SolSmart Bronze designation. We also commend and thank HEC for increasing the net metering cap, making the Acorn Drive Solar Farm happen, collaborating on Community Housing Partners' energy efficiency project, and funding solar on Bluestone Elementary School.

Now let's build on this great foundation. It is abundantly clear from the science that we are in a climate crisis, and we must reduce emissions faster than we are now doing. Harrisonburg's Greenhouse Gas Inventory shows that electricity, diesel, gasoline, and natural gas now collectively produce 88% of our total emissions. With increased electrification of buildings and transportation, most gasoline, diesel, and natural gas will be shifted into electricity demand. Our municipal grid will expand greatly, and it needs to be supplied to a much greater extent by clean energy.

Success requires us all to work together—the City, HEC, residents, businesses, faith communities, universities, and other organizations. The transition must be fair to all stakeholders.

Fortunately, the City owns a well-run municipal utility. HEC operates according to City Code, but the Code, unchanged since 1973, greatly limits what the City can ask its own utility to do. While the Code requires HEC to provide the City a percentage of its gross revenues, it says nothing about operating in keeping with City goals, particularly environmental ones. HEC is required to buy 100% of its energy from Dominion until 2031. Dominion's compliance with the Virginia Clean Economy Act is welcome, but not in line with City goals, the IPCC's 1.5°C target, or the US commitment in the Paris accords.

2031 is a long time to wait. If the next contract is again 20 years long, it will take us far past the IPCC deadlines for complete decarbonization of electricity. We must have a

better contract next time around to help us reach our greenhouse gas emission goals. Our utility cannot again be blocked by another contract from deploying locally owned, fairly-priced renewable resources. We also need a competitive bidding process for awarding that contract, to ensure that we receive competitively priced clean energy, and the freedom for HEC to produce locally owned renewable energy as well.

We ask City Council to provide the appropriate direction to HEC to pursue sustainability goals and assist in emission reductions; the time has come. City Council also needs to work with community members on opportunities for action. We must be thoughtful and deliberate, but we must begin now. We have a once in a generation opportunity for the City, HEC, and the community to act on the City's clean energy goals, as spelled out in the Clean Energy Resolution and the Environmental Action Plan.

Because HEC is constrained by contract until 2031, the City and the community must step up in the interim. The City can start solarizing all municipal buildings. HEC can eliminate the net metering cap. Of course, our actions must keep HEC financially strong, benefit the entire community, and not place additional financial burdens on HEC customers. There are numerous approaches we can consider, consistent with those outlined in the EAP. We stand ready to work with you to develop plans and actions, and look forward to doing so.

Our coalition has joined together to send you this urgent message. The time to act is now.

We request that this statement be entered into the minutes of this meeting.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak.