**(2) Executive Summary**

Vermont is committed to moving forward actions that set the state on the path to building a resilient and adaptive future that meets our statutory emission reduction requirements, as laid out in the Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA). The Vermont Legislature passed Act 153, also known as the GWSA on September 22, 2020, creating the Vermont Climate Council (hereinafter the Council) and set forth specific greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction requirements for the State to achieve. The Act requires reductions in Vermont’s GHG emissions tied to three time periods: 2025, 2030, and 2050. Vermont is required to reduce its GHG emissions by no less than 26% below 2005 GHG emission levels by January 1, 2025; by no less than 40% below 1990 GHG emission levels by January 1, 2030; and no less than 80% below 1990 GHG emission levels by January 1, 2050.

The 23-member Council, comprised of eight administration officials and 15 appointments from the legislature representing various sectors, is charged with:

* identification, analysis and evaluation of strategies and programs to reduce GHG emissions, to achieve the State’s GHG reduction requirements, and to prepare the State’s communities, infrastructure and economy to adapt to current and future effects of climate change;
* adoption of the Vermont Climate Action Plan by December 1, 2021, to be updated at least every 4 years, that sets forth specific initiative, programs and strategies that the State will pursue to reduce GHG emissions, achieve the reduction requirements, and build resilience in communities, infrastructure and the economy; and
* identification of accurate means to measure the state’s GHG emissions and progress towards meeting the reduction requirements; effectiveness of initiatives, programs and strategies included in the Plan; the effect of climate change on wildlife, climate and natural resources of the State, and the State’s existing resilience and progress towards improving resilience and adaptation.

To achieve the Council’s mandate, the GWSA established four Subcommittees and charged them to assist with preparing the Climate Action Plan and carry out other duties which are spelled out in detail in their charges (See Appendix INSERT). The four Subcommittees specifically identified in the GWSA are: Rural Resilience and Adaptation; Cross-Sector Mitigation; Just Transitions; and Agriculture and Ecosystems. The GWSA also allowed the Council to create additional Subcommittees to advise the Council. To address the technical complexity and data needed for this effort, the Council also created a fifth Subcommittee: Science and Data.

The core function of the Subcommittees is to recommend draft initiatives, programs, and strategies for the Council to review, refine and compile into Vermont’s Climate Action Plan. As outlined in the legislation, the Subcommittees collectively must further the following objectives:

* Prioritize the most cost-effective, technologically feasible, and equitable GHG emissions reduction pathways, adaptation and preparedness strategies;
* Provide for GHG emissions reductions that reflect the relative contribution of emissions from different sectors;
* Minimize negative impacts on marginalized and rural communities and individuals with low and moderate incomes;
* Ensure that all regions of the state benefit from GHG emissions reductions;
* Support economic sectors and regions of the state that face the greatest barriers to emissions reductions, especially rural and economically distressed regions and industries;
* Support industries, technology, and training that will allow workers and businesses in the state to benefit from GHG reduction solutions;
* Support the use of natural and working lands to reduce GHG, sequester carbon and increase resilience; and
* Maximize the state’s involvement in interstate and regional initiatives and programs designed to reduce GHG emissions, and build upon state, national, and international partnerships and programs.

To ensure the Subcommittees had the right composition to accomplish their charges, recruitment focused on:

* Council members and some measure of balance across the three designations;
* Specific expertise necessary to create the work;
* Geographic balance;
* Sectorial balance; and
* Equity and representation of vulnerable populations.

The recommendations ultimately put forward in this Plan are the collective work of these subcommittees. These recommendations were reviewed and adopted by the Council over the period of several months and together represent the necessary actions needed to advance the objectives of the GWSA. The recommendations are organized around five areas:

* Emissions reductions;
* Building resilience and adaptation in Vermont’s natural and working lands;
* Building resilience and adaptation in Vermont’s communities and built environment;
* Enhancing carbon sequestration and storage; and
* Cross-cutting pathways.

In conjunction with developing the recommendations found within, the Just Transitions Subcommittee supported the work by ensuring that the strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build resilience to climate change impacts will benefit and support all residents of the State of Vermont fairly and equitably. The term “Just Transitions” encompasses both public policy and business action that address the impacts of the transition away from greenhouse gas emissions for jobs and livelihoods (the transition "out") and the generation of low or zero greenhouse gas emission jobs and livelihoods of a sustainable society (the transition "in"). The Just Transitions Subcommittee designed six key principles to guide the recommendations of the Climate Council in development of the Climate Action Plan. These include:

1. Ensuring *Inclusive, Transparent, and Innovative Engagement* in the development of the plan and associated policies and program.
2. Creating *Accountable and Restorative* recommendations that recognize inequality and seek to resolve them using clearly identified strategies.
3. Moving at *The Speed of Trust* where candor and honesty are recognized as essential for public trust and preparing Vermonters for transition to a sustainable climate future.
4. Incorporating *Solidarity* to create inclusionary spaces for all traditions and cultures, particularly for Indigenous communities, recognizing them as integral to a healthy and vibrant Vermont.
5. Prioritizing *The Most Impacted First* through recommendations that addressthe needs of impacted and frontline communities first, providing the greatest benefits of transitions to these communities.
6. Developing *Supports for Workers, Families, and Communities* that consider and plan for potential impacts on workers, families and their communities based on the implementation of Vermont’s Climate Action Plan

The Just Transitions Guiding Principles provide a framework for climate action to be utilized during the continued development and ongoing implementation of the Climate Action Plan. These principles set expectations for the Climate Council and its subcommittees to conduct their work, what recommendations they make and how investments, implementation and oversight of the plan must occur. The Guiding Principles have helped to shape the beginning of a process of community engagement, co-creation, and the prioritization of recommendations that speak to issues of equity and justice. The Climate Council has taken some important first steps, however, the Council has heard significant frustration around the timeline which has prevented adequate and inclusive engagement. Time and resource constraints have prevented a robust equity analysis and public engagement process. Both are essential to move away from a status quo that exacerbates inequities and places impacted communities at greater risk from climate change.

The Council acknowledges that to realize the transformative change that is needed, ongoing engagement with Vermonters will be needed to consider solutions and understand the barriers to implementation. This Fall, the Council engaged with a total of 1,602 Vermonters to discuss the development of the Climate Action Plan. Public events were held over a few weeks, an online survey was conducted, and public comments received through the online portal were summarized. Through these forums, Vermonters engaged in formulating the actions for inclusion in the Climate Action Plan, helping the Council consider how it will advance climate action in Vermont. Despite the engagement, the Council was challenged due to both the timeline and the ongoing pandemic. The velocity of the process influenced the participation level of groups that are likely to be more highly impacted by climate change including low-income communities, BIPOC communities, and disability advocacy groups in particular. The public engagement plan outlined additional opportunities for broader partner outreach and support that were not fully realized during this phase due to the lack of time to build trust and respectfully coordinate with multiple partners.

Vermont's Climate Action Plan is a vital opportunity to build a stronger, healthier, more vibrant, and resilient future for Vermont, but it is only the first step. The work of the Climate Council is ongoing, and the Council has been clear that this is an initial plan. The timeline made it very challenging to address all the objectives identified in the Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA) to the level of detail needed to advance them immediately. As such, there are several pathways for further work beyond December 1.

While the legislature and the Agency of Natural Resources will work to advance numerous actions put forward in this plan through legislative action and rulemaking, the Council will work to further advance areas work in several key areas, including but not limited to:

* Funding and financing options, with a specific emphasis on prioritizing the expenditure of the American Rescue Plan Act dollars to advance the implementation of this plan.
* Overseeing the rollout of the Climate Action Plan and a comprehensive public engagement strategy.
* Furthering the implementation of the Guiding Principles and the Scoring Rubric in the program design of priority actions.
* Organizing the subcommittees work to focus on next steps to further the resilience, adaptation, and sequestration actions prioritized in this plan.
* Prioritizing future technical analyses to inform future iterations of this plan.
* Advancing the measuring and assessing action tool contemplated in this plan.

To make progress on all these fronts, the Council will need to determine what the necessary organizational structure will be in the coming year. That said the work is imperative and enduring. As such, we envision a robust engagement from the Council for the foreseeable future to continue to work on behalf of Vermonters to realize the transformative change needed to meet both the challenges and opportunities of climate change.

**Acknowledgements**

Members of Council

Members of Subcommittees

State staff

Consultants

**Using this Plan**

This Climate Action Plan outlines the steps Vermont needs to take to impact meaningful climate action. This plan includes recommended actions for state, regional, local, private, and non-profit sector partners. It also includes actions that individual Vermonters can take, highlighting the request the Council heard many times for a set of implementable actions at all levels of society and government.

This plan is organized around five areas:

* Emissions reductions;
* Building resilience and adaptation in Vermont’s natural and working lands;
* Building resilience and adaptation in Vermont’s communities and built environment;
* Enhancing carbon sequestration and storage; and
* Cross-cutting pathways.

These areas cover the broad scale change and shifts that are needed to reach the emissions reduction requirements established in the Global Warming Solutions Action (GWSA), as well as ensure that Vermont’s communities and landscapes are resilient to the impacts of climate change. Each area identified above contains a set of pathways, strategies, and actions, that while not exhaustive, meet the intent of the emissions reduction requirements, and adaptation, resilience, and carbon sequestration goals of the GWSA.

Pathways are the high-level mean to achieving GHG emissions reduction or adaptation, resilience, and sequestration goals. The pathways identified in this plan illustrate the framework needed for climate action in Vermont. Under each pathway are a set of strategies that illustrate how we are going to get to a particular pathway. Within each strategy are a set of actions. Actions are the tasks that define the policy, program, project, initiative, and plans, that should be undertaken to meet the pathways and strategies.

The pathways for emissions reduction identify steps that need to be taken together to meet the GHG reduction requirements established in the GWSA. Achieving these requirements is a significant undertaking, requiring aggressive immediate and sustained efforts, and the set of actions included in that section must be taken as a whole to ensure Vermont both can meet its 2025 requirements, and be on the path to compliance with the 2030, and 2050 GHG reduction requirements. The Climate Council has identified a lead implementor, and timeline for implementation, to ensure a shared understanding of what will be needed to bring each recommendation to fruition.

The pathways for adaptation, resilience, and carbon sequestration include specific actions for implementors at the state, regional, and local level, but do not identify a lead implementor or timeline to implement by action. Unlike emissions reductions, requirements and benchmarks for progress related to resilience and adaptation were not as clearly laid out in the GWSA. A requirement was set for carbon sequestration and storage which requires the state to be net zero by 2050 but intermediate benchmarks to ensure we are on track to meet that requirement was not identified. The Climate Council acknowledges more work needs to be done to identify clear metrics and goals for those areas of work.

The release of this Climate Action Plan is a step in the Council’s work to inform climate action in Vermont. This plan includes a section on implementation that should be used by legislators, state agencies, and other stakeholders to inform the work needed to fulfill the charge of the GWSA In parallel, the Council will continue to build out a framework for measuring and assessing progress that government, non-profit, private sector, and municipal partners to track the impact of their actions, as well as supporting the Council in periodically assessing progress and recommending changes in approach that will be needed to fully implement the GWSA..

