

January 12, 2024

Vermont Climate Council
Agency of Natural Resources
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2
Montpelier, VT 05620

House Speaker Jill Krowinski
Vermont State House
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

Dear Speaker Krowinski,

Thank you for including members of the Vermont Climate Council in your August 25, 2023 letter to Kristin Clouser, Secretary of the Agency of Administration.

Like you and Secretary Clouser, we remain devastated by this summer's catastrophic floods, and we continue to be alarmed by the increasing frequency of extreme weather events around our state. We also share your sense of urgency about our changing climate, which threatens all Vermonters' health, safety, and quality of life—sometimes in ways we cannot readily predict.

Since receiving your letter, the Council has worked together to determine which adaptation and resilience priorities we believe merit near-term consideration during the next legislative session. As you can probably guess, it was difficult for our diverse group to collectively prioritize climate-adaptation and climate-resilience actions—particularly in the absence of clearly articulated objectives, metrics, and timelines.

Work is under way, however, to develop these. Efforts toward this goal (and others) include:

- The 2021 Initial Climate Action Plan and the Council's forthcoming updates to the Climate Action Plan in July 2025
- The Administration's complementary updates to the 2023 State Hazard Mitigation Plan
- The 2022 Comprehensive Energy Plan
- The work of the Climate Action Office to develop a Measuring and Assessing Progress tool, which includes the development of resilience metrics
- Governor Scott and Treasurer Pieciak's Resilience Implementation Strategy Initiative

This and other ongoing work across the state should be central to considering how the priorities included in this letter should be implemented. We have included several attachments that describe the work many State Agencies are doing to increase resilience to climate change. This work is both in support of and in addition to what is included in the Climate Action Plan. We urge legislators to carefully review these attachments to fully understand the priorities the state is already working on as well as the

gaps in funding and resources needed to move forward with our recommendations, which are outlined below.

Fundamental Considerations

We also suggest this work not proceed without consideration of the following.

The Council strongly urges an ***inclusive, all-hazards approach*** to climate adaptation and resilience—one that takes all community members' exposure, vulnerability, and risk into account. This will help ensure we adhere to a science-based methodology for our planning and preparations and that we prioritize wise, equitable investments in adaptation and resilience.

We also must consider ***cascading and longer-term impacts of a warming climate***. Higher average annual temperatures will mean a loss of reliable snow, maple sugaring, and vibrant fall foliage, with resulting impacts to key businesses and industries reliant on those conditions. Higher average annual temperature will also mean increased incidence of certain pests and diseases, drought, and high heat days, with impacts to our farms and to those who are already most vulnerable in our communities. Direct impacts of climate change will cascade, with implications for human health, businesses, and our natural communities, resulting in economic, public health, and quality-of-life effects. We must prepare for these potential losses—and others—if we are to maintain a thriving economy and protect all Vermonters from the potentially disastrous consequences of inexorably rising temperatures.

These foundational elements should be considered by legislators when assessing our recommendations for additional support for our communities, our businesses, and all the people of Vermont.

Resilience & Adaptation Priorities

The Council has reached consensus on the attached priorities. We have grouped our recommendations into the four categories you requested in your letter:

- **Community, business, and residential resources** for facilitating expedited adaptation, greater resilience, and more equitable communities
- **Types of supports** that communities, businesses, and people need in order to make decisions about which property to defend and how to assist Vermonters in leaving endangered property
- What **adaptation strategies** should be prioritized statewide for federal and state funding
- What **additional state capacity** is necessary to support Vermonters in accelerating adaptation and resilience strategies

We continue to strongly support all recommended actions regarding resilience and adaptation identified in the initial Climate Action Plan released in 2021. Our recommendations for near-term legislative consideration focus on a subset of resilience and adaptation actions for communities and the built environment in the Climate Action Plan, but we acknowledge there are other sectors such as natural and working lands that should be addressed when considering recommendations to increase climate resilience. **Specifically, for this subset of action, we are including only recommendations for actions the state has not already begun to advance or implement.**

Resilience & Adaptation Priorities for Communities and the Built Environment from the
Vermont Climate Council

FOR THE LEGISLATIVE SESSION BEGINNING IN JANUARY 2024

| CAP Pathway, Strategy, Action (page) | Priority | Further considerations | Relevant Committee(s) |
|--|---|--|--|
| COMMUNITY, BUSINESS, AND RESIDENTIAL RESOURCES | | | |
| P3, S2, all (157) | Equitably expand access to programs that provide options to rural homeowners, landlords, municipalities, school districts, universities, and hospitals for weatherization, electrification, and utility upgrades. | <p>Equitable access to weatherization and other energy-related improvements is a top priority with far-reaching benefits: it protects vulnerable Vermonters from certain climate impacts and advances energy equity, health equity, and environmental justice. When operating at scale and paired with workforce development, weatherization, electrification, and utility upgrade efforts can create high-wage jobs, seeding a virtuous cycle that would improve the economy statewide.</p> <p>And yet no state entity is responsible for overseeing all the weatherization and energy-efficiency programs managed by the state, leaving large gaps in access, program implementation, and accountability. The inequitable socioeconomic perils of climate change call for a systemic, justice-centered solution with sustained assessment and accountability measures to ensure effective implementation and equitable access to energy-related benefits and services.</p> <p>Action in this space must consider the Clean Heat Standard (CHS)(Act 18 of 2023) recommendations of the PUC to be filed with the VT General Assembly by January 15th, 2023.</p> | <p>General, Housing, and Military Affairs</p> <p>Commerce and Economic Development</p> |
| P1, S1, d (221) | Expand eligibility for the existing downtown and village tax credit to offset the cost to elevate or flood-proof existing buildings located in areas with increased flood risks. | Tax credit programs can be difficult to navigate, especially for smaller towns with limited staff. Legislators should also consider alternative funding mechanisms that are simpler to access and more equitable. | Ways and Means |
| CCP1, 2.4 (xx) | Audit existing residential building codes to ensure that standards account for anticipated climate change impacts to Vermont, including but not limited to increased temperature extremes and precipitation. | Vermont does not have comprehensive statewide building codes for single-family or low-rise multi-family buildings, though the State Residential Building Energy Standards do apply. To provide municipalities with the necessary guidance to adopt climate-resilient building codes, the legislature should undertake a study to determine the need for a statewide residential building code that includes climate preparedness. | General, Housing, and Military Affairs |

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|---|--|---|--|
| | | Note that the Vermont Division of Fire Safety is using FEMA BRIC funding to evaluate the feasibility of residential building codes, but they may not be considering climate resilience or adaptation. | |
| SUPPORT FOR ADAPTATION DECISIONS AND ASSISTANCE WITH RELOCATION | | | |
| P5, S1, b (164) | Expand the existing programs to relocate homes and residents in mobile home parks outside of flood-vulnerable locations. | Existing programs include the Flood Resilience Communities Fund, Community Development Block Grants, Section 404 Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, and the Section 406 Public Assistance Program for relocation of mobile home parks in a floodplain, and programs housed in the Agency of Commerce Community Development for flood-damaged homes. Expansion of these programs should include funding to ensure high-quality, energy-efficient, and resilient housing, including manufactured homes as well as programs for the unhoused and other vulnerable populations. | Natural Resources and Energy |
| P2, S3, a (152) | Identify mission-critical facilities in collaboration with local and regional planners, utilities, and transportation providers to identify actions, procedures, or investments to mitigate the impact of extreme weather events to services provided by these facilities. (See the Climate Action Plan for full details.) | Reducing barriers to making resilience investments in mission-critical infrastructure is also important. For instance, utility investments to harden electric distribution facilities have been granted a temporary exemption from the requirements of Act 250 to facilitate a more rapid response to weather hazard risks (see S. 100, 2023). Legislators should consider making this exemption permanent and reducing other barriers. | Natural Resources and Energy General, Housing, and Military Affairs |
| ADAPTATION STRATEGIES TO PRIORITIZE FOR FUNDING | | | |
| P4, S2, a (162) | Establish a dedicated, comprehensive state-level program with funding to strategically purchase or match funding for hazard-prone properties, easements to conserve river corridors, floodplains, forests, and wetlands to reduce overall flood risk and enhance flood storage statewide. | The Flood Resilient Communities Fund, currently funded through ARPA, has been serving this function and should be made permanent through continued state funding. | Natural Resources and Energy |
| ADDITIONAL STATE CAPACITY TO ACCELERATE ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCE STRATEGIES | | | |
| CCP1, 2.28 (xx) | Authorize the creation of a multi-stakeholder committee process | Act 250 governs specific categories of development and subdivision activities to | Natural Resources and Energy |

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|--------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| | with funding to support the development of a statewide land-use-planning policy and implementation plan that guides development to growth areas, town centers, and appropriate rural locations, and limits the development within ecologically sensitive/risk-prone areas. The Legislature should clarify how and if this plan informs or directs land-use planning, policy, and regulation at the local, regional, and state level. | ensure environmental and community impacts are addressed. However, much development falls outside of Act 250, indicating the need for a more comprehensive statewide approach that also considers climate impacts and vulnerabilities. | General, Housing, and Military Affairs Commerce and Economic Development |

Thank you for requesting our feedback on the climate actions we need to prioritize in order to protect and improve the health, safety, and quality of life of all Vermonters.

We welcome further dialogue on the recommendations above—and on how best to invest our time, our energy, and our other common resources in the future well-being of Vermont and Vermonters.

Sincerely,

The Vermont Climate Council with abstention from the Council members of the Governor’s Cabinet.

Climate Council members of the Governor’s Cabinet abstained from voting on this letter due to their dual role as members of the Climate Council and the Administration, which as its own stated list of resilience priorities.

Attachments:

- [Table on the status of Rural Resilience Actions in the Initial Climate Action Plan, December 2021](#)

Additional detail on ongoing climate resilience work within State Government:

- [Climate Action Office Resilience Work Memo](#)
- [VTrans Flooding Resilience Activities Memo](#)
- [Public Service Department](#)
- [Vermont Emergency Management - Hazard Mitigation](#)
- [Vermont Department of Health – Climate and Health Program](#)