



Legislation Text

File #: 24-0209, Version: 1

PROPOSED RESOLUTION

RESOLUTION DECLARING A CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND MOBILIZATION TO LIMIT THE PROCUREMENT OF SINGLE USE PLASTICS

WHEREAS, on July 6, 2023, the world reached the highest recorded average temperature ever. Re: *World Meteorological Organization* (July 26, 2023). The month of July 2023 was the hottest month on record globally (NASA, August 2023); and

WHEREAS, 2023 was the warmest year on record since global temperature records began in 1850, and 2023 marked the 47th consecutive year (since 1977) that global land and ocean temperatures have been above the 20th century average; and

WHEREAS, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) data, which tends to be more conservative, warns that the year 2024 has a 99% chance it will rank among the top five warmest years in human history; and

WHEREAS, humankind is experiencing death and destruction caused by global warming demonstrated by extreme weather patterns, mass extinction, wildfires, increasing air pollution, rising sea levels, floods, droughts, coastline erosion, rapidly diminishing Arctic Sea ice, decreased crop production, and many other alarming changes; and

WHEREAS, in April 2016, world leaders recognized the urgent need to combat climate change thereby signing the Paris Agreement, agreeing to keep global warming at temperatures "well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C"; and

WHEREAS, in October 2018, the United Nations released a special report which projected that limiting global warming to a temperature increase of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels will require an unprecedented transformation of every sector of the global economy by 2030; and

WHEREAS, according to the United Nations' Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty, 1.5°C of global warming above pre-industrial conditions could expose 500 million people to water poverty, 36 million people to food insecurity due to lower crop yields, and 4.5 billion people to extreme heat waves; and

WHEREAS, an Arctic Ocean free of ice in summer would likely happen once every hundred years if average temperatures increase 1.5 degrees C above pre-industrial levels, but would be likely to happen every ten years if average temperatures increase 2 degrees C above pre-industrial levels; and

WHEREAS, Coral reefs are in an alarming and unprecedented decline and will continue to decline by 70-90 percent with a global warming temperature increase of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and virtually all coral reefs (> 99 percent) will die with a 2°C increase,

WHEREAS, Warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels or higher will increase all environmental risk factors associated with long-lasting and irreversible changes, including a devastating loss of global ecosystems; and

WHEREAS, limiting total global warming to a temperature increase of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels will require "rapid and far-reaching" changes in the use of land, energy, industry, buildings, transport, and cities; and

WHEREAS, Global net human-caused emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) will need to fall by 45 percent from 2010 levels by 2030, reaching true ‘net zero’ around 2050, meaning that any remaining emissions will need to be balanced by removing CO₂ from the air; and

WHEREAS, ocean acidification is a process that results from excess carbon dioxide in the air being absorbed into water, causing a range of problems which are significant and happening at an ever rapid pace. Approximately 26% of all carbon dioxide released from fossil fuel burning and other activities between 2002 and 2011 was absorbed into the oceans, making them more acidic and causing shells of marine animals to slowly dissolve in the increasingly acidic water. Ocean acidification reduces the number of shelled organisms in the oceans, damaging the food chain and will reduce the availability and variety of food; and

WHEREAS, even if carbon in the atmosphere reaches optimal levels, the oceans will release carbon previously captured into the atmosphere, causing continued carbonization of the atmosphere for hundreds of years to come; and

WHEREAS, key Atlantic Ocean circulation called the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation includes the Gulf Stream, and is a part of a global conveyor belt that moves water around the world. Climate models indicate a slowdown of the worlds’ AMOC and water circulation patterns, which could ultimately trigger sever weather changes, resulting in extreme cooling; and

WHEREAS, restoring a safe and stable climate requires emergency mobilization tactics to reach zero greenhouse gas emissions across all sectors of the economy through the rapid drawdown of excess carbon from the atmosphere while implementing measures to protect all people and species from the consequences of impending climate calamities; and

WHEREAS, such necessary measures to restore a safe climate include:

- (a) A rapid, just, managed divestment and phase-out of fossil fuels; and
- (b) Ending greenhouse gas emissions as quickly as possible to establish a zero-emissions economy through an increase in infrastructure to support public transportation; and
- (c) A widespread effort to safely draw down excess carbon from the atmosphere through reduced energy use, nature-based carbon sinks such as trees, wetlands and soil, and direct air capture of CO₂; and
- (d) A full transition to a regenerative agriculture system;
- (e) An end to the projected Sixth Mass Extinction through widespread conservation and restoration of ecosystems; and

WHEREAS, the United States of America has disproportionately contributed to the climate and ecological emergencies and thus bears an extraordinary responsibility to rapidly solve this crisis; and

WHEREAS, to stay within a temperature increase of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, major cities will need to significantly reduce their per capita emissions by 2030, and as the second largest county in the United States, Cook County is obligated to lead by example; and

WHEREAS, cities account for 70% of greenhouse gas emissions, and an urgent, collaborative effort by cities and counties to comprehensively address issues associated with climate change is necessary to alleviate the detrimental effects; and

WHEREAS, Cook County has the highest total greenhouse gas emission rates compared to all other Illinois counties, demonstrating the urgency Cook County needs to embody when addressing climate issues; and

WHEREAS, Cook County is experiencing direct and devastating consequences from its rising lake front levels, scorching temperatures and severe weather events including recent flooding and tornados; and

WHEREAS, on July 2, 2023, several rounds of storms dumped nearly nine inches of rain in less than 24 hours in parts of Cook County, leading to severe flooding and other storm damage to houses and businesses, causing the Cook County Board President to issue a Proclamation of Disaster; and

WHEREAS, the heavy rainfall that delayed farmers' growing season reduced both the quantity and quality of crops harvested, especially corn, wheat and soybeans, which are essential parts of Cook County's, and the Midwest's, economy, Midwestern farmers were unable to plant almost 20 million acres of crops due to unprecedented flooding in 2019, leading to approximately \$6.4 billion worth of crop insurance payouts, and nearly one-quarter of the corn and soybeans in Illinois rated poor or very poor; and

WHEREAS, in August 2019, the USDA declared all 102 Illinois counties an agricultural disaster due to flooding and in 2023, the USDA issued four separate disaster declarations for the state of Illinois due to tornadoes and drought that occurred during the 2023 Illinois growing season; and

WHEREAS, climate change will continue to make basic human necessities such as food, housing, health care, transportation and energy more expensive and difficult to obtain, causing a disproportionately negative effect on vulnerable communities; and

WHEREAS, justice requires that frontline and marginalized communities participate actively in the planning and implementation of this mobilization effort, and that they benefit first from the transition to a climate-safe economy; and

WHEREAS, in May 2023, three members of Congress introduced the Climate Emergency Resolution, which demands that the President of the United States wield both existing authorities and emergency powers to unleash every resource available to mitigate and prepare for the climate crisis; and

WHEREAS, a study conducted by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning highlighted the profound impact of the Forest Preserves of Cook County on mitigating climate change, revealing that the nearly 70,000 acres within its landholdings, absorb an impressive 1,544,887 tons of CO₂ annually, playing a pivotal role in carbon sequestration and climate change mitigation; and

WHEREAS, the Forest Preserves of Cook County is committed to mitigating climate change, increasing biodiversity and providing essential ecosystem services as guided by the Next Century Conservation Plan, the Forest Preserves aims to restore 30,000 acres of land to good ecological health. To date, the Forest Preserves has successfully restored more than 15,000 acres of land, increasing its capacity to mitigate climate change impacts; and

WHEREAS, the Forest Preserves of Cook County through the implementation of its Sustainability & Climate Resiliency Plan, has integrated sustainability principles into various facets of its operations including enhancing building efficiency, facilitating widespread access to recycling bins across all picnic groves, and educating its staff and the public on sustainability matters; and

WHEREAS, Most single-use plastic is neither biodegradable nor recyclable. Eliminating or drastically limiting plastic use will align and support state efforts of limiting plastic and reaching our zero-waste sustainability goals; and

WHEREAS, The persistence in the environment of single-use plastics leads to extensive pollution of ecosystems, harms wildlife, and poses a significant threat to environmental and human health; and

WHEREAS, About 22 million pounds of plastic, including straws, drink lids, and single-use plastic bags, flow into the Great Lakes each year which are particularly dangerous for wildlife and when eaten they can easily accumulate inside an animal's body and cause health issues like punctured organs or fatal intestinal blockages.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, The Board of Commissioners of the Forest Preserves of Cook County hereby declares a climate emergency that threatens the health and well-being of Cook County, its inhabitants, and its environment; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, The Forest Preserves of Cook County shall limit the procurement of single-use plastics (except for health emergencies or disability needs) while encouraging the purchase of biodegradable and reusable alternatives to plastic using internal guidance and policies, include green purchasing guidelines in the Forest Preserves' procurement manual and within the year 2024 will formally limit the procurement of single-use plastics via ordinance; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, The Forest Preserves of Cook County will support its vendors and concessionaires to limit the use of single-use plastic while continuing to educate the public about plastic alternatives and the benefits of limiting the use of plastics; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, The Forest Preserves of Cook County will provide training and support to staff to transition to purchasing biodegradable/compostable single-use alternatives to plastic and purchase regular dishes and plates, etc. in the upcoming years to the importance of transitioning away from plastic.