

## Item 25-0153: Resolution #2-R-25 Emissions Reduction Recommendation

### Common Council

Wed, Mar 19, 2025 7:00PM

#### Mayor Jake Woodford 41:15

That concludes business presented by the mayor. So, we'll move along now to public participation.

[cut]

#### Mayor Jake Woodford 44:01

All right. Next is Charlie Goff. Is—there he is.

#### Charlie Goff (Appleton Sustainability Advisory Panel) 44:07

Good evening, everybody. I'm Charlie Goff, a member of the advisory panel on sustainability and climate resilience. I wanted to provide a quick update on our efforts to address climate change in Appleton. In December 2021 a city Task Force issued a Climate Action Plan proposal which included a couple key recommendations. First one was to establish a climate change commission to ensure that the task force work would continue, and that's what our group has been doing. Second task in this commission with developing a practical strategy—practical strategies for Appleton to achieve its goal, which was set in a resolution back from 9—2019 of reaching net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 or sooner.

#### Charlie Goff (Appleton Sustainability Advisory Panel) 45:06

Over the past two years, our group has worked diligently, and we released a preliminary report last December outlining key findings and recommendations. Two of those include assembling an emissions inventory of the carbon footprint for the city, and that was included as part of the notes here for this for this task, and secondly, developing a strategy to achieve a net zero emissions goal. However, our analysis concluded that achieving full net zero emissions is unlikely due to a couple of factors.

#### Charlie Goff (Appleton Sustainability Advisory Panel) 45:46

First, a significant portion of the missions generated by the city are what's known as scope two emissions. These are the emissions when you plug something into the wall. It's basically all the electricity that we use, and the renewable portion of that is a function of what the utilities are able to provide, and we obviously have no control over that. And secondly, the scope one emissions, which is primarily a natural gas and methane gas flaring stem from essential city services such as wastewater treatment, the water plant, and public transportation.

#### Charlie Goff (Appleton Sustainability Advisory Panel) 46:26

Recognizing these challenges, we examined how other municipalities treat these emission goals, and we found that many follow what they call ISO recommendations, or International Standard Organization, aiming to cut emissions by 50% or more over a 10-year period. While this is ambitious, we believe it's a realistic and attainable goal for the city of Appleton, and in the coming months, we plan on evaluating specific projects and their costs with plans to report by the year's end on how the city may meet this revised target. So, we look for your support in adopting a resolution and changing our goal, and we look forward to Appleton moving towards a meaningful climate action. Thanks.

**Mayor Jake Woodford** 47:20

Thank you.

[cut]

**Mayor Jake Woodford** 57:47

All right. Then let's get to work. We're going to start with the item from Parks and Recreation. This is 25-0153, resolution 2-R-25 emissions reduction recommendation. We have a motion and a second to approve discussion. Alder Hayden.

**Aldersperson Patrick Hayden (District 7)** 58:19

Thank you, Chair. I just wanted to take a moment to thank the panel for their hard work. They were given a very ambitious goal to cut emissions for the city with very little direction. And I believe that the work they've done has given us a very clear direction for the next step for the city of Appleton to take to reduce emissions. I think it will help the city keep pace with places like Sun Prairie, which have been much more aggressive than the than our city, and I'm excited for the work that they've done and to see what we can do moving forward.

**Mayor Jake Woodford** 58:53

Alder Hartzheim.

**Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13)** 58:56

Thank you, Chair. I respectfully disagree with Alder Hayden in in the statement that there is a now a clear direction in which this will go. I think it was made clear in the Parks and Rec committee meeting that there isn't a clear plan or estimated costs as yet as to how the city would reach this new goal. I believe the current goal of 2050 or sooner already does what this quote new goal would do. Our public speaker (I apologize that I don't recall his name. I did not write it down.) said that by year's end there might be some more plan or estimated costs. I think that this item is putting the cart before the horse without that information. I intend to vote no on this, and I wish that the remainder of this Council would think critically about that as well. Thank you.

**Mayor Jake Woodford** 59:53

Alder Firkus.

**Aldersperson Brad Firkus (District 3)** 59:56

Thank you. This resolution creates a goal, but none of us know how that goal is going to be reached. There is no plan in this resolution. People may be working on a plan, but there is no plan. We don't know what we're walking into. A goal without a plan is just a wish, and when we do stuff like this, we put opportunity out there for us to lose some of our credibility with folks, especially people that want to see us do something on climate action. If we don't deliver but we do stuff like this, we start to lose that credibility with them that we are actually going to follow through on things like when we say we do things like this.

**Aldersperson Brad Firkus (District 3)** 1:00:36

Another thing is when we take up resolutions that don't have any firm action, I feel like that erodes the confidence people having us to do the actual work that we're sent here to do. I'm going to ask you all to vote—I know this is probably going to pass. I know this isn't the most consequential resolution we're going to take up probably this year, but this stuff does not help us. Thank you.

**Mayor Jake Woodford** 1:00:59

Alder Smith.

**Aldersperson Martyn Smith (District 4) 1:01:00**

Thank you, honor. I would like to respectfully disagree with Alder Firkus on this, and in my mind, this is a statement of an aspiration and a goal, and aspirations—statements of aspirations and goals have a value. Pass—by passing this, we will acknowledge that reducing emissions is a shared aspiration for this cam—Council. When choices come up in the future which are hard to predict, we will have sometimes the option to kick the can down the road and continue doing the same thing or to invest in a long-term solution that we'd like to do. And this kind of a resolution can be a reminder that we can hold up for ourselves and think about what would be the best thing that we can do.

**Aldersperson Martyn Smith (District 4) 1:01:46**

Now that being said, all our decisions in the future would take place within the same budgeting framework that we've used. So, this is not some kind of a license to overrule our normal operating procedures when it comes to budget options. I think we as a city have a record of being safe and following and staying within our limitations, and that would continue, but when it comes to hard choices, we can together look back on the fact that we made this kind of a choice, and that could be something that would guide our decisions as they come up in the next—over the next decade.

**Aldersperson Martyn Smith (District 4) 1:02:24**

This is a modest resolution I'd like to emphasize once again. This is not for the whole city of Appleton, as in the all the residents. It's for the municipality of Appleton, and it's also a kind of retrenching in order to find a space for us to do something positive about emissions, given the fact that we don't have control over the decisions of WE Energy. And as a modest resolution and as an aspiration for our city, I would I would urge us to pass this and hold this up as something that we can look to for the next 10 years. The need for this is obvious with world events and the continuing issue of climate change, and this is, again, very modest step in recognizing that and saying that publicly. Thank you.

**Mayor Jake Woodford 1:03:13**

Alder van Zeeland.

**Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 1:03:16**

Thank you, chair. You know I hear what Alder Firkus is saying regarding the concerns with the resolution, and I think that they would be valid except that we have a resolution from 2019 that establishes a goal that we have admitted is not attainable. I want to remind everyone that any kind of spending to attain this new goal would still come through the Common Council. And I wanted to ask in the Parks and Recreation Committee we did ask staff what they anticipated in savings for cutting the emissions of the water treatment plant, and I'm wondering—it didn't make its way into the materials for the vote this evening. I'm wondering if staff has that information available.

**Mayor Jake Woodford 1:04:09**

Director Gazza, what mic? Go ahead.

**Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 1:04:14**

I do not have that information. It would take more time to assemble that. It would also depend on what kind of actions are taken to mitigate and to reduce those CO2. So just depending on what kind of project it is and what the cost of that project is at that time.

**Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 1:04:37**

Thank you. I appreciate that answer because it's not stating "We will save X, Y or Z." Ultimately, it's just reinforcing that whatever would need to be done would likely come through the Council for approval. Thank you.

**Mayor Jake Woodford 1:04:51**

Alder Fenton.

**Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 1:04:52**

Thank you, Your Honor. All my colleagues have made valid points. Alder van Zeeland had, um, said the thing that I had come here to say, which was we—I liken this resolution in place of the goal in our 2019 resolution as a little bit like when we had to reject the bids for the library. We had a goal, and we realized that within—that that was not feasible within the parameters we'd established. And in 2019 we established a very lofty goal of being net zero by 2050 and as part of the project the climate Task Force, we got some consultants who helped us with the how you do an emissions inventory. So, we were able to take that information and develop that ourselves so that we have something that's a little more actionable and discovering, you know, the Scope I and Scope II. Okay, we can't do the net zero, because we're reliant on WE Energies and other providers. And at the point we talked about then—WE Energies has gotten better. At that point, when we were in 2019, WE Energies was getting 40% of their fuel from coal, and they've made some progress there.

**Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 1:06:23**

And as every—as my colleagues have said, any specific actions are going to come before the council, and when I think about the things that have reduced emissions that have come before Council, I think about things like the solar panels on city buildings which not only reduce emissions, they save the taxpayers money in reduced utility bills. The bio digesters at the water wastewater treatment plant not only reduce methane gas being burned off into the air, but reduce the heating costs for that facility, and Mr. Shrage and the whole team there, they give us good numbers for these projects, so that when we vote for them, we know what the projected savings are.

**Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 1:07:13**

I think just in passing, we heard at the opening of the library because of the geothermal which reduces emissions, but they said, you know, basically, we're not going to have a heating bill at the library. So, all of the projects that we take up under, say, the guise of this alleged do-nothing resolution, we have a goal in mind, and because we can talk and chew gum at the same time, we reduce emissions, but we also take into account the taxpayers and the cost to the city. So, I think moving forward, I fully trust staff to continue with the good work they've been doing, and I think that the resolution is necessary to refine our goal, and I hope that we'll pass it. Thank you.

**Mayor Jake Woodford 1:08:10**

Alder Hartzheim.

**Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 1:08:12**

Thank you, Chair. Alderman Smith mentioned that this is aspirational, that these are goals. But we've just now heard two other speakers talk about Resolution 13-R-19 which was aspirational in goals as well and remains in place. But then they stated that as—13-R-19 is not was not feasible, or has been found to not be feasible. How do we know that this next resolution is not feasible? I feel that we're still in this wishy-washy land. As Alder Firkus said, we will likely pass this resolution. But again, I hope that more than two of us think a little more critically about rejecting this resolution at this point and waiting until we hear by year's end more of this information about costs and plans. Thank you.

**Mayor Jake Woodford 1:09:05**

Alder Schultz.

**Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 1:09:07**

Thank you, Mayor. It's important to sort of reflect on the fact that 13-R-19, was six years ago, and to my knowledge, this is one of the first actionable sort of items that has come forth from six years' worth of work from those two committees and all of the efforts that have gone on behind the scenes to get us moving towards something sustainable as far as climate action is concerned. So, it might not have much teeth to it, but I think as often happens when we're doing things in Council and we're sort of ratifying or reiterating our goals or aspirational or not, it makes an impact on the public and also says that we're concerned about and we're doing something.

**Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 1:09:49**

Yes, the city has been doing some exceptional work with the digesters, solar cells, geothermal, all of that great work that's being done, but very infrequently does the public have an understanding of all that work that's being done. It only happens when we pass something like this and have a public conversation about it. So, while we did establish a goal in 2019 it's essentially the same thing. We're trying to reach a target. This is a slight adjustment to that knowing the challenges that we face to get there. It does make an impact if we take an action in this body, and the public becomes aware of the fact that, yes, we're listening to our climate panel and the recommendations they're bringing forth and this is one of the things they're asking us to do. And a lot of good work was done to catalog the numbers, get some measurements, and sort of start us along the path to working towards this lofty goal.

**Mayor Jake Woodford 1:10:41**

Alder Alfheim.

**Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 1:10:43**

Thank you Chair. I think it's fun for me that the first thing that the mayor threw me on when I joined this body was this task force, and tonight, being my last meeting, we get to have a discussion about passing a resolution from it.

**Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 1:11:04**

Alder Schultz meant—mentioned six years. I think the first two years, which was before I got involved, it was, "Let's save the world." And a lot of very passionate people started throwing a lot of ideas together in a, I think, about a 40-page mish mash of all the things that we really could or should be doing, and then the next two years, we're trying to settle that down into a palatable piece that, working with the city, we could acknowledge, what have we been doing? What are we trying to do, and what could we do together that's actually actionable? And in the last two years, with an official committee, I think that they have worked very hard at saying "We want to do this better."

**Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 1:11:48**

So, all of the feedback that I'm hearing is valid. I think, to Alder Firkus' point and Alder Hartzheim, we're not saying "This is the tool we're going to use to accomplish this in this," which leaves a little bit to be desired. However, I think the good thing that it has done is we have taken the goal that was initially thrown out there, which some have challenged we should have been more aggressive on, and we have come to the realization that we can't do that. We cannot—we're going to really have a hard time hitting that original, lofty goal, because we're not in control of all the dynamics.

**Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 1:12:26**

So, what are we in control of? And it seems to me that that's what the city and the committee or the council have figured out together, that what we can control in this organization is this math. We can control, reducing the CO2 emissions by 50% of what we can control. That, to me, is a unified statement between our passionate environmentalist panel and the city, and I think that is what I was hoping we would get to in this organization. So, to me, no, it's not perfect, but we've got something now that is more black and white, that we can be good stewards to both the taxpayers and our planet in our city, and move forward towards a goal that we actually can accomplish because we're in control of all of the levers where we haven't been in the past. So yes, it's imperfect. Yes, it could be better, but it's a damn good job, and I think we should pass it.

**Mayor Jake Woodford 1:13:30**

Any further discussion? We have a motion and a second to approve. Please cast your votes. The motion passes 11 to three. The item has been approved.