



Sustainability Commission

Regular Meeting

~ Agenda ~

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Monday, June 16th, 2025

4:00 PM

Providence City Hall- Committee Room "A"
(with virtual option available)

- 1) Roll Call
- 2) Approval of Minutes from April 21, 2025 (for vote)
- 3) Department Updates (for discussion)
- 4) Commissioner Updates: (for discussion)
 - a) Recent and Upcoming Events
 - i) Resilient Rhody meeting on June 18, 2025, 5:30-7:00 at Providence Public Library on Empire Street (Greg) | RSVP: bit.ly/RICoastRSVP
 - ii) DTPOC 2Queer4Fear: Refuge & Resistance gathering on June 20, 2025 5:00-8:00 at Southside Cultural Center (Justice)
 - b) PVD Tree Plan Updates (Kufa)
- 5) July Meeting Planning (for discussion)
- 6) Sustainability Reserve Account Committee Update and Scheduling (for discussion)

- 7) FY2026 City budget (for discussion)
- 8) Public Comment
- 9) Executive Session - Sustainability Commissioner Applicant Review (for discussion and vote): (a) *(The Sustainability Commission will seek to go into Executive Session pursuant to Rhode Island General Law 42-46-4 and Rhode Island General Law 42-46-5 (a)(1)).*
- 10) Disclosure of Executive Session
- 11) Adjourn

[Meeting Packet](#)

PER ORDER THE SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION

Julian Drix, Chair

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SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION CITY OF PROVIDENCE

Sustainability Commission Meeting | April 21, 2025, 4 p.m. | Minutes

Attendance

Present: Chair Julian Drix, Greg Gerritt, Dwayne Keys, Jaylyn McNeill, Chandelle Wilson, Justice Gaines (4:10 p.m.), Vice-Chair Vatic Kuumba (4:12 p.m.) [Priscilla De La Cruz, Director of Sustainability, Kevin Proft, Deputy Director of Sustainability, Sophie Worsh-Farnum, Sustainability Policy Associate, Nicholas Poulos, Legal Department, Patricia Pedriali, City Council Staff]

Absent : Leandro Castro, Enza Cucitrone, Jesus Holguin (virtual)

- 1) Approval of Minutes from March 17, 2025
 - a. The Commission did not have a quorum at the beginning of the meeting. After additional Commissioners arrived, a quorum was reached and the minutes were revisited.
 - b. *Greg Gerritt makes a motion to approve the minutes. Chandelle Wilson seconds the motion. All in favor and the motion passes.*
- 2) Department Updates
 - a. A full list of department updates were included with the agenda packet for review.
 - b. Director De La Cruz said that in the interest of time, the Department will not be discussing all Department updates and asked if Commissioners had specific questions or inquiries.
 - c. *Commissioner Justice Gaines arrives and the Commission reaches a quorum.*
 - d. Commissioners requested an update on the 5-year Climate Justice Plan update. Director De La Cruz said that REJC and Sustainability met to discuss the update. REJC and Sustainability agreed that fall 2025 is a good time to begin the process, when there is more clarity on capacity and funding for the effort.
 - e. *Commissioner Vatic Kuumba arrives.*
 - f. Commissioners requested updates on the ProvPort Master Plan process. Deputy Director Proft said he presented to the City Council Committee on Environment and Natural Resources about the Department's and Commission's role in administering the Sustainability Projects Reserve Account. ProvPort's consultant, GZA, presented on the plan more generally at the same meeting. There will be one more public meeting before the draft plan is finalized and presented to council.
- 3) Commissioner Updates
 - a. State Climate Action Strategy and Engagement Approach
 - i. Director De La Cruz and Commissioner Jesus Holguin said the Act on Climate requires an emphasis on robust community engagement, but reported that engagement efforts have been lacking or ineffective at reaching EJ communities. Chair Drix said that in the current political moment, institutions of power are demonstrating their values – is what they say is important what they prioritize.

- b. PVD Tree Plan Updates: No update. Commissioner Castro not in attendance.
 - c. Upcoming Groundworks Event: Commissioner McNeil shares that Groundwork RI is hosting a Microforest Volunteer Event on May 10 from 10:30-3:00. It will be held at 219 Pearl Street.
 - d. Commissioner Chandelle Wilson said that Southside Community Land Trust is hosting their annual plant sale at Farm Fresh on May 17 & 18. They accept EBT edible plants.
 - e. Commissioner Jesus Holguin said that People's Port Authority is hosting an Earth Day event on April 22 at 5:00 at Columbia Park.
 - f. Commissioner Justice Gaines said there is a May Day rally beginning at City hall on May 1 at 3:00 for "no business as usual."
 - g. Chair Julian Drix said that his work is hosting a webinar on a guide to the "inside/outside strategy" on April 29 from 1:30-3:00.
 - h. Commissioner Jesus Holguin said REJC is hosting a fundraiser on Thu, May 1 at CIC called "Climate in this Climate" where three female climate authors will discuss their books.
- 4) Discussion on Smiley Administration proposed FY26 budget and vote on Sustainability Commission position
- a. Director De La Cruz said that the Sustainability Department's budget hearing is on May 8 at 5:30pm [following the meeting the date changed to May 14]. She said that FY26 is a difficult budget year and that the PPSD legal settlement put pressure on an already overburdened budget. She said the Administration is proposing a tax increase, new sources of revenue (increased fees and fines) and department cuts. She said legally the City must adopt a balanced budget.
 - b. Regarding the Department's budget, the proposed budget includes funding for the Climate Justice Plan update, stormwater public engagement, and grant matches for Public Street and CJP implementation. It eliminates the Policy Associate position at the end of fiscal year 2025. She said that about 20 positions are proposed for elimination, but our position is somewhat unique as it is one of two layoffs, not the elimination of a vacant position. Director De La Cruz said that in addition to its own operating budget, the Sustainability Department manages the HPL Utilities Budget (Heat, Power, and Lighting), which is around \$12 million. Director De La Cruz noted that there are also important software investments in the IT budget that help the department manage utilities and the BERO program.
 - c. Deputy Director Proft stated that the elimination of the Policy Associate position is in no way a reflection on the performance of the current Policy Associate, Sophie Worsh Farnum. She has excelled in the position.
 - d. The Commissioners discussed the proposed FY26 budget.
 - i. Commissioners noted that there has been mobilization among organizations in opposition to the tax burden being placed on renters and not corporate entities.
 - ii. Chair Drix said that budgets are moral documents and that funding and cut choices indicate priorities. The administration indicated that the two positions that were cut were not important.
 - iii. Commissioners noted that a significant proportion of the budget is given to Public Safety and Police.
 - iv. Commissioners asked how other departments are impacted by these cuts. Director De La Cruz said that the position cuts are impacting PEMA (Providence Emergency Management Agency), PERA (Providence Ethics Review Agency), Archives, Public Property, Communications, Fire, Public Works, and

ACT (Arts, Culture, and Tourism). All position cuts are vacancies, except for the Sustainability Policy Associate and the position in ACT.

- v. Commissioner Dwayne Keys said that he is very disappointed in this budget and noted that he is willing to meet with the administration to clarify his position. He said that the budget shortfall is not a new issue and new revenue generation is a constant conversation. He said the PPSD settlement is only highlighting this fact. He said that this administration should have been thinking about and focusing on revenue generation all along and doing strategic planning. The school settlement did not create this issue, just exacerbated it. Director De La Cruz notes that she will bring these comments to the administration.
- vi. Commissioner Justice Gaines asked why \$125,000 is allocated for police horses as opposed to resident services and city staff.
- vii. Commissioner Vatic Kumba said that he is concerned about community engagement around climate. He said that now is the worst time to cut the Policy Associate position when communication with residents around climate and environmental issues is imperative and particularly when the state is not doing a thorough job with state engagement around climate engagement.
- viii. Commissioners said that during the ProvPort lease extension process, the administration left money on the table and pushed the agreement through without community support. The administration could have gotten more money.
- ix. Chair Drix said that with the loss of the Policy Associate position, there is not a staff person in the Department to implement the Climate Justice Plan. There is no Climate Justice Plan without the people to work on implementing it.
- x. Commissioners restated that revenue generation through fees and fines on port/industrial businesses as an avenue that should be explored through zoning amendments and other mechanisms. Director De La Cruz said that could be an element of the FY27 conversation.
- xi. Commissioners said that there should be a pollution/corporation tax as opposed to a tax on people/individuals who are already financially overburdened.
- xii. Chair Drix said that last year, the Commission sent a letter of support for the Department of Sustainability's budget. This year, Chair Drix suggests to the Commission that they write an opposition letter outlining their discontents.
- xiii. Director De La Cruz emphasized that the Sustainability Department saves the City money, particularly on energy-saving costs. She requested cost-saving benefits derived from the Department be central to any letter given the budgetary environment.
- xiv. *Commissioner Chandelle Wilson makes a motion to draft and submit a letter to the Smiley Administration regarding the 2026 budget, stating concern about the loss of the Sustainability Policy Associate and the impacts that will have on the implementation of the Climate Justice Plan and the work of the Department.*
- xv. *Chair Drix entertains the amendments, including that the letter should be to the Administration and City Council and that it should speak to budgets as moral documents that demonstrate the priorities of the Administration and Council.*
- xvi. *Commissioner Justice Gaines seconds the motion as amended. All in favor and the motion passes.*
- xvii. Chair Drix and Commissioners Gerritt and Gaines agreed to write and submit the letter.

- 5) Sustainability Projects Reserve Account Policy Review and Approval
 - a. Deputy Director Kevin Proft presented the Sustainability Projects Reserve Account process for the administration of the account to the Environment and Natural Resources Committee. He told the Committee that the Commission was interested in codifying the policy either through the Climate Justice Plan update or the establishing ordinance for the Department or Commission and that the Council was open to that.
 - b. Chair Drix said that it should be codified through the Sustainability enabling ordinance, not through the CJP update because it's more binding.
 - c. Patricia Pedriali, City Council staff, recommended that the Commission reach out to Councilwoman Anderbois about codifying the policy.
 - d. Nick Poulos, Legal Department, said that regardless of whether the policy goes through the Council or Administration, the legal department can assist with language.
- 6) ProvPort Master Plan "Sustainability Projects" brainstorming and identification for (a) inclusion in ProvPort Master Plan and (b) upcoming Sustainability Projects Reserve Account RFP
 - a. The Commissioners discussed the engagement process for the ProvPort Master Plan so far and expressed concern that many residents in the area still don't even know this process is happening. Commissioner Dwayne Keys questioned if the sample size of engagement is adequate and if we're getting to the ideas that the community would want.
 - b. Commissioner Chandelle Wilson says that the process expects South Side community show up to the meetings, but that's not how the South Side, writ large, engages. There are pockets, but the people who show up to public meetings are the same faces.
 - c. Vice Chair Vatic Kumba says that based on the Commissioners discussion, the first project funded by the Sustainability Projects Reserve Account should be a robust community engagement process.
 - d. Chair Drix says that these funds should be supporting existing community organizations to hold meetings and do outreach. The community is organized and has the power to engage in a meaningful way.
 - e. Nick Poulos notes that when the RFP subcommittee meets it can meet in South Providence.
 - f. The Department agreed to share request GZA include community engagement as a "sustainability project" in the ProvPort Master Plan.
- 7) Sustainability Projects Reserve Account Sub-Committee Selection
 - a. Jaylyn McNeil, Chandelle Wilson, Greg Gerritt, Jesus Holguin, and Dwayne Keys agree to serve on the first iteration of the committee.
 - b. *Vice-Chair Vatic Kumba makes a motion to create the committee with the members above. Justice Gaines seconds the motion. All in favor and the motion passes.*
- 8) Executive Session - Sustainability Commissioner Applicant Review (for discussion and vote)
 - a. The Commission did not go into executive session after determining that additional conversations with applicants needed to occur prior to making a selection.
- 9) Public Comment
 - a. No public comment was taken at this meeting.
- 10) Adjourn.



DEPARTMENT OF SUSTAINABILITY CITY OF PROVIDENCE

Sustainability Department Update | 6.11.25

Staffing Updates

- No Vacancies

Commission Membership Updates [11.2024]

- One City Council seat is vacant due to Kevin Essington's resignation.

Climate Justice Plan Update [6.2025]

- *The Climate Justice Plan, published in 2019, is the plan that guides most of the Sustainability Department's work. Its goal is to create an equitable, low-carbon, and climate resilient future for Providence. The plan is due for a 5-year update as required by the Sustainability Department's establishing ordinance.*
- The Department is in the early stages of planning for the 5-year update, which it plans to begin in fall 2025. The Department intends to approach the update in a manner consistent with how the plan was originally developed, including collaboration with frontline community members and shared decision-making.
- The Department's proposed FY26 budget includes funding to update the plan, which will help the department conduct equitable public engagement and higher technical consultants to ensure the plan's targets are science-based.

Zoning Amendments [4.2025]

- *Project Description: Following approval of the comprehensive plan, the City is required to update its zoning ordinance to align with the goals and strategies included in the comprehensive plan. This process is ongoing. Zoning Amendments are drafted by the Planning Department for the City Plan Commission's and City Council's approval.*
- The Sustainability Department is working with the Planning Department to recommend zoning amendments that align with the updated comprehensive plan, the Climate Justice Plan, and Sustainability Department priorities.
- An amendment including zoning map changes, language changes around R-4, the elimination of R-2 and C-1, and inclusion of new dwelling types in residential zones has already been approved. One goal of this amendment is to permit higher density in all zoning districts to increase housing supply and decrease overall housing costs.
- Future amendment topics could include the Port of Providence and industrial development, student housing, design standards, parking minimums, gas station prohibition, and inclusionary zoning. Beginning in summer 2025, these amendments are expected to advance individually or in groups as they are ready to be presented to the CPC by the Planning Department.
- An amendment relating to the port and industrial zones is expected to be taken up after the completion of the Port Master Plan in the fall or winter.

ProvPort Master Plan [6.2025]

- *Project Description: As part of the ProvPort lease agreement, ProvPort is required to partner with the City's Planning Department to develop a Port Master Plan. This plan will guide the strategic direction of the port over the 30-year time horizon of the lease. Among other elements, the plan will include chapters on community development and sustainability. Public engagement is required.*
- ProvPort and its consultant (GZA) convened a Master Plan Advisory Committee (MPAC) of local stakeholders, including near-port residents, who advise ProvPort on the planning process. The Sustainability Department is participating in MPAC meetings, and working internally with the Planning Department and ProvPort to incorporate Sustainability Department and Climate Justice Plan priorities into the Master Plan.
- Per the recommendation of the Sustainability Commission, the Department requested that ongoing public engagement on Sustainability Projects be included as an eligible use of funds for the Sustainability Projects Reserve Account. This will help ensure Sustainability Projects funded by the Sustainability Projects Reserve Account are aligned with the goals of port-impacted neighborhoods.
- The Master Plan [website](#) includes resources and public engagement opportunities/dates. The final public meetings will be held in June 2025. The Plan will then be presented to the City Council. Public comment on the plan will also be accepted at that hearing.

Sustainable Stormwater and Sewer Study [4.2025]

- *Project Description: The sustainable stormwater and sewer study is analyzing the City's existing stormwater system, identifying deficiencies, and recommending a sustainable financing mechanism to make improvements and maintain the system into the future.*
- The Sustainability Department supported the Stormwater Task Force which is comprised of individuals from several key stakeholder groups that represent a wide set of interests. Task Force members' unique knowledge and skills helped guide the project by making recommendations and providing key information.
- The full Sustainable Stormwater and Sewer Study will be published in July 2025. The Sustainability Department is aiming to schedule a joint meeting of the Sustainability Commission and Green and Complete Street Committee in the summer to present the study, including the recommended sustainable and equitable funding mechanisms the study recommends.

Public Street Waterfront Access Project [2.2025]

- *Project Description: The Sustainability Department is working to finalize design and construct improvements at Public Street between Allens Avenue and the river. This street has been designated a public right-of-way to the waterfront by the Coastal Resources Management Council, but to offer meaningful access to the waterfront, the site needs safety and aesthetic improvements.*
- The Department secured \$175K towards final design (NBEP and local funds) and has hired Fuss & O'Neill as the project consultant. The City has secured ~\$1.5M towards construction (SNEP, RIIB, local funds).
- The Department conducted additional public and stakeholder engagement during summer 2024-winter 2025 and adjusted the schematic design to align with feedback.
- Prior to advancing to the final design, the Department is working through an existing underground infrastructure issue that needs to be addressed before the project can be permitted by CRMC. The Department is working with Fuss & O'Neill to clear sediment from a stormwater pipe as a means to investigate the origin of oily stormwater that is discharged into the Providence River. This has slowed the progress of the project.

Resilience Hubs [6.2025]

- *Project Description: The Olneyville Resilience Hub at Joslin Recreation Center is the City's first pilot resilience hub. The goal of the resilience hub is to provide a space where residents can connect to needed community services and go to for safety in the event of a disruption like a storm or high heat.*
- The Department and hub partners facilitated a public engagement effort relating to major building renovations at Joslin Recreation Center funded by the State's Capital Project Fund. The goal of the engagement is to understand community priorities so that the architects can design the renovation to meet community needs. Renovations will include new multi-purpose rooms, community room improvements, a new roof for the gym, and electrified heating and cooling throughout the facility. Construction will commence in August 2025.
- Recent activity at the hub has included language exchange classes and English classes with Coalition for a Multilingual RI and Community Libraries of Providence, Nuevas Voces classes, a Spanish-language Until Help Arrives class taught by multilingual community members in partnership with PEMA, among others.
- The Department is currently hiring a part-time Resilience Hub Coordinator. Interviews are ongoing.

BERO Implementation [4.2025]

- *Project Description: The Building Energy Reporting Program ordinance (BERO) requires building owners of buildings over 20,000 square feet to report their building's energy use to the City for public disclosure. The goal of the program is to permit building owners to understand how their building performs compared to peer buildings and enable cost-effective energy upgrades. The program will also provide the City with data to inform future decarbonization policies. The Sustainability Department was tasked with designing and implementing this program.*
- The City was required to report on its own buildings in May 2024, privately-owned buildings over 50,000 sf are required to report in 2025, and buildings over 20,000 sf are required to report in 2026. Disclosure of energy use will typically happen annually in October.
- The Department is currently conducting outreach and working with building owners of buildings with over 50,000 square feet.

Municipal Energy [4.2025]

- The Department has executed an agreement with PowerOptions to develop a decarbonization plan for municipal buildings, required by City ordinance. The study will focus on efficiency improvements, HVAC upgrades, operations management, and electrification strategies. The study will prioritize facility upgrades based on equipment age and environmental benefits. The study will also include a high-level feasibility analysis of rooftop solar on City-owned buildings. We expect the plan to be completed summer 2025. [4.2025]
- The Department has developed a strategy to deploy renewable energy on municipal rooftops and property. The strategy includes an initial round of pilot projects to be installed over the next two years and a study to inform future project selection. The initial round of pilot projects includes the Public Safety Complex, The Roger Williams Park Maintenance Facility, Narducci Learning Center, D'Abate Elementary School, and Spaziano Elementary School. Together, these projects will have a capacity of 722 kW (DC), producing enough energy to power 129 New England homes.

The Public Safety Complex is the first of the pilot programs to move forward. Plans for a 188 kW (DC) rooftop solar system are now under an installation and maintenance contract with Solect Energy. Construction is anticipated in summer 2025. The system will be owned by the City and go online in fall 2025.

The City is monitoring whether the Trump Administration and Congress roll back the investment tax credit (ITC) and low-income community bonus funding for solar projects. Of the \$1.9 M in solar pilot development costs, federal funding is expected to provide \$770K, or 40% of the total cost. Alternative funding sources and system ownership models are being investigated as a fall back should federal funding become unavailable. [4.2025]

- The City signed an agreement with C-Power, an approved vendor for RI Energy and ISO New England, to participate in their respective New England demand response programs at the Public Safety Complex. The goal of the programs are to encourage buildings with high energy loads to roll back usage during peak demand periods in return for payment. The Public Safety Complex is the first building to enroll in the program and has the potential to earn \$62,000 over five years. In total, 20 City and school buildings are eligible to enroll in these programs. Participation in these programs is highly dependent on the ability to manage energy usage via modern building management systems. The Public Safety Complex is currently upgrading its BMS, which has enabled its participation. The Sustainability Department secured a \$100,000 RIOER grant to assist with this upgrade. [4.2025]

City Vehicle Fleet [5.2025]

- The City's 2024 Master Lease, the method by which the City procures vehicles and equipment, included \$100,000 in funding for EV infrastructure to be administered by the Sustainability Department. The Department is working with the City's Fleet Manager and the Parks Department to plan and implement a project at the Carriage House in Roger Williams Park with this funding. The goal is to pilot the City's first electric pickup truck at this location. [4.2025]
- The Charging and Fueling Infrastructure Grant awarded to the State for public-facing EV charging remains on hold due to the Trump administration's actions. [2.2025]
- Work on the Technical Assistance portion of the Department's USDOE Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant awarded to the City for fleet charging has resumed. The Department is working with USDOE's TA provider NREL to update its EV fleet transition plan. The Department has also learned that the Equipment Voucher portion of the grant, which would pay for the installation of a limited amount of EV charging infrastructure has also been unpaused by USDOE. [5.2025]

Waste Reduction [5.2025]

- The City has entered into a new contract with WM for curbside trash and recycling services. The new contract includes a number of provisions aimed at improving waste diversion rates. [2.2025]
- The City issued an RFP for new trash and recycling carts. The RFP requests pricing to replace all carts and one route day worth of carts. The Sustainability Department has secured a EPA grant to replace at least one route day of carts. The Department also secured additional grants and identified low-interest loan opportunities to help the City potentially replace all of the carts. The City received five bids on May 5, 2025. A vendor will be awarded on June 16, 2025. [5.2025]
- The Department is procuring services to provide recycling education and outreach. The City has procured Zero Waste Providence to provide in-person education and outreach, and Adam Graphic to help implement a print/mail education and outreach campaign. The City has secured grant funding from multiple sources to implement these programs through January 2027. [5.2025]

SNEP Opportunity to Advance Resilience Flooding Studies [5.2025]

- The Department received a SOAR grant from SNEP to study flooding in up to two recurring flood locations within Providence. Phase 1 of the project includes the recruitment of a community cohort of interested residents, the delivery of a curriculum on flooding to the cohort, and shared decision making about which areas to study and what solutions to prioritize. Phase 2 will include the selection of an engineering firm to conduct the flood studies. The community cohort has participated in 4 of 5 initial sessions to date.

Revenue Generation from Fees and Fines of Industrial Land Uses [5.2025]

- Per the request of the Sustainability Commission, the Department has been exploring potential mechanisms to raise revenue from industrial land uses with negative environmental and health impacts on Providence residents. The Department will keep the commission updated on progress as this effort progresses.

Annual Report [5.2025]

- The Department is finalizing its draft of the 2024 Annual Report. The report describes the mission, financials, and work of the Department. The Department intends to share the draft report with the Commission in July 2025 for comment.

Grants [5.2025]

- Pending Applications:
 - Lowe's Hometowns Grant – Resilience Hub circulation and ADA improvements - \$100,000
 - Thriving Community Grant – Resilience Hub commercial kitchen - ~\$350,000
 - Awarded, but grant funds being withheld by the Federal Government.
 - CNCA – Climate Justice Plan Update - \$40,000
 - Application rejected for misalignment of priorities.
- The Department is experiencing uncertainty regarding funding it has secured from the Federal Government. A summary of grants is included below:
 - USDA CFWR (Compost) – No impact to date
 - USEPA SWIFR (Recycling) – No impact to date
 - USEPA SOAR (Flooding) – No impact to date
 - EPA/SNEP SWIG (Public Street) – No impact to date
 - EPA NBEP (Public Street) – No impact to date
 - USDOE EECBG (EV Infrastructure) – Project resumed in May 2025
 - RIOER CFI (EV Charging – Public Facing) – Paused
 - RIFPC Community Change (Compost) – Grant cancelled in April/May 2025



SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION
CITY OF PROVIDENCE

To: Councilwoman Helen Anthony, Chair, Committee on Finance

Cc: Providence City Council Committee on Finance
Vice-Chairman James Taylor
Councilor Sue Anderbois
Councilwoman Althea Graves
Councilor Miguel Sanchez
Priscilla De La Cruz, Director, Department of Sustainability

From: Julian Drix, Chair, Sustainability Commission

Date: May 2, 2025

Re: **Opposition to Mayoral Budget -- Support for Sustainability Department**

Dear Councilwoman Anthony and members of the Committee on Finance,

On behalf of the [Sustainability Commission](#), I am submitting this letter to request that the Sustainability Policy Associate position be restored to the Sustainability Department's FY26 budget.

The Sustainability Commission discussed the budget at our April 21st 2025 meeting and agreed unanimously that we cannot support a budget proposal with such damaging cuts to Providence's essential and valuable sustainability work. In a year when we are due for the five-year update of Providence's nationally-recognized Climate Justice Plan, cutting the Sustainability Policy Associate position would mean effectively defunding and derailing the Climate Justice Plan.

Last year the Sustainability Commission wrote a letter of support for the Sustainability Department's FY25 budget request. At the time we were concerned that the department was essentially level-funded while taking on major new responsibilities such as the Providence Community Electricity Program and Building Energy Reporting Ordinance. But we knew that the incredible staff in the Department would find a way, and over the past year they have been highly effective and efficient with relatively minimal resources as a small department. In addition to being efficient with City resources, the Sustainability Department saves the City money and brings in revenue. Sustainability secures favorable energy contracts and saves money through energy efficiency, while bringing in millions of dollars through grants and incentives for energy, waste, resilience, and environmental justice projects. They do this hand in hand with community partners, and we appreciate them. All of this is possible because of staffing – cutting staff threatens to undo this important work and reduce the amount of revenue and savings that Sustainability provides.

The Climate Justice Plan goals are adopted by the City in Ordinance [ORD-2021-18](#) and it is incumbent on the City to implement its responsibilities to meet these goals, in co-governance collaboration with community. This is a critical time with the 5-year update due at a time with increasingly frequent and severe extreme weather events alongside federal cuts and attacks on environmental justice and climate science. As a climate-vulnerable city, Providence needs to step up and meet the challenges of our time. We literally cannot afford to fail. And we certainly cannot afford to cut critical staffing, since none of this is possible without staff.

Most of the staff positions that the Mayor's budget eliminates are unfilled vacant positions, but two are currently filled with amazing public servants, including the Sustainability Policy Associate. The loss of a valued staff person is significantly more impactful in a small department like Sustainability which only has six staff, particularly in a year when the Department Director will be out for maternity leave. This places an unjust burden on a small department. If personnel cuts are truly necessary they should come from larger departments that can better absorb cuts.

The police budget consistently takes one of the largest shares of the budget, and is getting another increase this year while other departments are cut. It's offensive for the Mayor to prioritize funding for sound cameras, horses and police supplies over dedicated public servants doing essential work with and for community. The Mayor's priorities are upside down, and it's now up to City Council to step in and correct it.

As a Commission we know that this is a challenging fiscal environment where additional revenue is needed for a balanced budget. The Commission requested that the Mayor's administration consider generating additional revenue from heavy industrial polluters by increasing the taxes, fees and fines levied on the bad actors that are polluting our city and sickening our residents. But this proposal has been tabled and is not included in the Mayor's budget. Instead, fees and fines are being increased through tickets that will impact low-income residents most.

Budgets are moral documents, and the Mayor's decision to cut sustainability while extracting revenue from everyday people instead of wealthy companies and investors is immoral. It places a disproportionate burden of costs on low-income residents while giving breaks to wealthy property owners. It defunds Sustainability and undercuts the Climate Justice Plan while letting industrial polluters off the hook.

The Sustainability Department's work advancing the Climate Justice Plan is good business for the City. It brings in revenue, saves money on expenses, and prepares the City to better respond to life threatening and costly climate disasters. On behalf of the Sustainability Commission, we urge City Council to restore the Sustainability Policy Associate position and remove the harmful cuts to this important Department.

Sincerely,



Julian Drix, Chair
City of Providence Sustainability Commission