



The Climate Action Movement at the University of Michigan

Dear President Schlissel,

On behalf of the Climate Action Movement at U-M, we thank you for your commitment to pursuing carbon neutrality at the University of Michigan, including your announcement to create a Presidential Carbon Neutrality Commission and partner with Ann Arbor on climate efforts. These are essential first steps in attaining carbon neutrality. Now, we would like to stress the importance of creating concrete guidelines for implementation and accountability, so that this ambitious initiative is successful.

We think the next steps should include:

1. Setting a timeline that aligns with global emissions reduction needs and restores U-M's position as "Leaders and Best."
2. Creating a commission that has appropriate representation from all levels and areas of expertise within the community.

In this letter, we outline our recommendations for these steps, and we look forward to working together towards this shared goal.

We hope you take our letter into consideration when deciding how to move forward with this important step.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

President Schlissel’s announcement to “[put] U-M on a trajectory towards carbon neutrality” is a laudable and critical first step toward a sustainable future. To implement this goal in a practical and scientifically well-founded manner, the Climate Action Movement at the University of Michigan (CAM) strongly suggests the following important next steps:

1. Set a firm date for Carbon Neutrality. CAM stresses the importance of making a goal of carbon neutrality (scope 1, scope 2, and parts of scope 3) by **2035**, aligned with the timeline detailed in the [latest I.P.C.C. report](#).
2. Sign onto the [American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment](#), to take advantage of the framework and [resources](#) already developed and employed by others in the pursuit of carbon neutrality.
3. Employ certain guidelines to ensure the success of the presidentially-appointed Carbon Neutrality Commission, both in achieving our target of carbon neutrality and in serving as a replicable model for other institutions. These include:
 - a. Having both student and faculty representation (see [Recommended Members](#))
 - b. Ensuring the commission members represent a diversity of communities, and includes members specializing in environmental justice
 - c. Having transparent and accountable commission meetings
 - d. Transparency in decisions made in response to commission recommendations
 - e. Ensuring no members have a conflict of interest that in which they would benefit from prolonging U-M’s reliance on fossil fuels

These reasonable and specific steps will provide the foundation needed to achieve the difficult but necessary goal of carbon neutrality in a scientifically well-founded and fiscally responsible manner. Furthermore, by having a strong vision and adhering to the principles of transparency and accountability described herein, U-M will serve as a model institution in the fight for a sustainable future, providing the framework for other institutions to follow. We are eager to work together to ensure U-M is the *Leader and Best* in the fight for a sustainable future.



BACKGROUND

Our goals are based on the most recent [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\) report](#) detailing the necessary deadlines for global emission reductions to limit global average temperatures from warming 1.5°C. Given the vast wealth of resources U-M holds in comparison to most of the world, our goals naturally precede those of the IPCC. The definitions of carbon neutrality we have adopted utilize the [EPA's Scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions](#) and align with the [American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment \(ACUPCC\)](#) guidelines, which Ohio State University and others have signed.

I.P.C.C.: To curb warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius, the following emission reductions must be met. (I.P.C.C. data uses a 2010 baseline.)

- Reduce carbon emissions by **45%** by **2030**
- Reduce carbon emissions by **100%** by **2050**



CARBON NEUTRALITY TIMELINE

We, the Climate Action Movement at the University of Michigan, strongly believe that the University of Michigan must achieve Carbon Neutrality by 2035. We define “Carbon Neutrality” as including all scope 1 emissions, all scope 2 emissions, and three elements of scope 3 emissions: commuting, university-funded air travel, and transmission and distribution losses for purchased electricity. This definition is in keeping with the American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment. We also encourage the University to sign onto the ACUPCC with this deadline of 2035, in order to take advantage of the considerable resources and flexible framework provided through that commitment.

OUR PROPOSED TIMELINE:

Our proposed emission reductions are off a 2006 baseline, the same year that the current Climate Action goal is based.

- Reduce carbon emissions by **45%** by **2025**
- Reduce carbon emissions by **75%** by **2030**
- Achieve **Carbon Neutrality** (scope 1 emissions, scope 2 emissions, and three elements of scope 3 emissions: commuting, university funded air travel, and transmission and distribution losses for purchased electricity) by **2035**
- Achieve **Carbon Neutrality** (all scope emissions) by **2040**.

As explained in the I.P.C.C. report, to be scientifically well-founded, it is absolutely necessary to have complete carbon neutrality (including all scope 3 emissions) before 2050. However, given that many areas of the world do not have the resources to make this transition as quickly, our comparatively extensive resources compel us to achieve carbon neutrality at a more accelerated pace. **Therefore, our goal should be carbon neutrality, including all scopes, by 2040.**

These goals will not only put us in a position of leadership with our peer institutions but also meet the reductions necessary to ensure a sustainable future.

To enact these goals, we now present conditions that we believe are needed for the formation of the carbon neutrality Commission.



CARBON NEUTRALITY COMMISSION

MEMBER COMPOSITION:

INDEPENDENCE:

To ensure the independence of the carbon neutrality commission from special interests, membership in the commission will exclude individuals or representatives of corporate entities that have a financial interest in the mode, speed, or success of the University's plans to transition to carbon neutrality. Specifically, the commission will exclude representatives of, or persons affiliated with, companies that earn profits from the extraction, processing, transport, or burning of fossil fuels. Examples include, but are not limited to, representatives or employees of energy utility companies, gas or oil pipeline financiers, or energy generation facilities. It will also exclude any stakeholders in fossil fuels, including, but not exclusive to, anyone with significant financial investments in fossil fuels. In addition, the commission will exclude anyone with other conflicts of interest, such as those who stand to profit financially or professionally from potential actions that the University could take to implement its Climate Action Plan. For example, although experts will be routinely consulted, the decision-making body of the commission will exclude employees, representatives, or affiliates of companies that could contract with the University to provide alternative power sources, construct new infrastructure, or sell carbon offsets. This will help ensure that the direction of the University's transition is driven by its relative efficacy, overall environmental impact, and ethical merits, rather than profit motives.

REPRESENTATION

Membership of the commission will include diverse representation to prevent inadvertent injustice being caused during the University's transition. At least one graduate and one undergraduate representative will serve on the commission, with no less than 1 in 6 members being students. Furthermore, the committee will set a schedule of check-ins with a City of Ann Arbor representative to foster community involvement and integration. Furthermore, it is imperative that at least two environmental justice representatives from the faculty, student body, or local community help ensure that the Climate Action Plan is acceptable in terms of social, racial, and economic justice. Among other things, these representatives will assist the commission in identifying communities that may be impacted by the implementation of the plan, in addition to seeking out community members that can be consulted and can attend meetings in which the commission is considering actions that would affect the communities in question. As a part of its permanent membership, the commission will also include members of historically marginalized groups and groups that will be most impacted by the effects of climate change



itself. No single member on the committee will possess executive powers and at least one committee member will be assigned the duties of public liaison, responsible for communicating the progress of the Carbon Neutrality Commission to the public for accountability and educational purposes.

RECOMMENDED MEMBERS

- ***Potential Student Representatives****: Planet Blue Student Leaders, Graham Sustainability Scholars, Student Sustainability Initiative, Climate Action Movement, Citizens' Climate Lobby, Students for Clean Energy, Sustainable Living Experience, Michigan Energy Club, and other organizations as deemed necessary.

* This student representation list is not comprehensive, but merely a list of important views that must be considered and included to ensure success and accountability.

- ***Potential Faculty and Staff Representatives****:
 - **Thomas Princen**; Associate Professor; SEAS, Center for Sustainable Systems
 - Expertise on power dynamics during the process of energy transition
 - **Thomas Lyon**; Professor; SEAS, Ross Business School
 - Expertise in economic analysis to understand corporate environmental strategy
 - **Sucila Fernandes**; Facilities Manager; SEAS
 - Expertise in sustainable and efficient buildings
 - **Sam Stolper**; Assistant Professor; SEAS
 - Environmental and energy economist
 - **Daniel Raimi**; Senior Research Associate; Ford School of Public Policy, Energy Institute
 - Policy researcher and analyst with expertise on energy policy issues including oil and gas markets policy and regulation
 - **Tony Reames**; Assistant Professor; SEAS, Energy Institute, Center for Sustainable Systems
 - Conducts research on energy justice, equitable access to energy, and impacts of energy production on communities
 - **Greg Keoleian**; Professor; SEAS, Center for Sustainable Systems, Civil and Environmental Engineering
 - Expert in life cycle assessment with a focus on energy production and infrastructure

* Some groups have recommended valuable candidates other than those listed above; we would like to offer these additional suggestions, due to the unique viewpoints that they



represent and would be able to add to the discussion. This faculty list is not comprehensive, but merely a list of important views that must be considered and included to ensure success and accountability.

RESOURCES AND FUNDING

Adequate funding resources are the necessary foundation for the efficient development and implementation of an effective climate action plan. Funding will be required for (but not limited to):

- Training and education of committee members
- Contracting energy and financial experts
- Compensation for labor
- Implementation

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Committee members will require extensive training regarding current standards, technologies, and other universities' efforts. This may consist of participation in a workshop and community listening session.

DATA GATHERING AND ANALYSIS

It is not expected that committee members will possess expertise in all necessary areas of knowledge. Funding may be necessary to engage outside resources for data gathering and analysis efforts.

COMPENSATION

For the university to achieve carbon neutrality in a meaningful timeframe (i.e. by 2035), members of the commission will be expected to expend considerable time and effort developing and implementing a climate action plan. Such labor will be compensated in accordance with fair employment contracts. All committee members will receive compensation on an hourly basis, not based on output, and no retaliatory action may be taken against committee members by the university for differences in opinion. Recommendations for compensation are as follows:

Undergraduate students: Work study employment rates, UROP position, or independent study credits.

Graduate Students: GSSA position.



Faculty: Committee work can fulfill the ‘university service’ requirement outlined in their employment contract. If extensive service is not an expected aspect of employment, compensation can be negotiated.

Outside members: Hourly rate consistent with a GSSA, or compensation to match the hours of work they are missing, whichever constitutes the higher amount.

IMPLEMENTATION

As part of its mandated mission, the commission will provide an assessment of the long-term financial impacts of their carbon neutrality plan. The University must formally agree at outset to a financial commitment that aligns with the purported goals of efficiently achieving carbon neutrality. This will include reappropriation of resources applied to the maintenance of fossil fuel energy sources as they are able to be replaced by renewables, as well as investment in the installment and management of up-to-date infrastructure. Finally, the University will dedicate funds explicitly to ensuring potential justice issues are addressed as recommended by the commission (with representative input and membership as outlined above).

TRANSPARENCY

An effective commission requires full transparency. The commission will periodically report on progress by publishing accessible interim reviews. There will also be an online forum for submission of public comment, as well as regularly scheduled sessions during which the commission will receive and respond to public comments in person. During conventional meeting times, in-depth notes will be taken and made publicly available, including names and contact information of individuals associated with decisions (i.e. a vote count). Finally, a comprehensive list of the professional title and place of employment of any outside consultations which occurred will be provided along with meeting minutes.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability of the Carbon Neutrality Commission to the public:

The commission will incorporate public input into their discussion and decision-making process. Periodic public comment sessions will be followed by commission meetings during which public concerns will be discussed, with ideas for incorporating those concerns recorded in the meeting minutes.

Accountability of the university to the Carbon Neutrality Commission:



The University must make a formalized statement of commitment to a carbon neutrality plan, which will be submitted to the Presidents' Climate Leadership Program. If at any point the University elects not to act on aspects of the commission's recommendations, they will explicitly state reasons for doing so. Alternative actions will be developed in dialog with the commission and must align with the goal of achieving carbon neutrality in a meaningful timeframe.

After a climate action plan is outlined, including recommended pathways for achieving intermediate goals and carbon neutrality by 2035, the commission will continue to meet periodically and publicly report on progress throughout the implementation process. Assessment of progress will involve the use of clearly defined and scientifically sound metrics to calculate emissions (e.g. the Campus Carbon Calculator developed by the non-profit group Clean Air-Cool Planet), as well as continual input from experts and updates to the plan as appropriate.



CONCLUSION

President Schlissel, you are fully correct in your assertion that “climate change is the defining scientific and social problem of our age” and, as such, the success of this commission is of the utmost importance. We have created this document after much deliberation in the hopes that it will anticipate and avoid some of the pitfalls that would hinder the essential work of this commission, but we require your leadership to ensure that their work is not in vain. We have the opportunity and imperative to be leaders in the transition to a clean energy future. We believe that these guidelines, coupled with a specific and scientifically well-founded commitment to carbon neutrality by 2035, are crucial components of this endeavor.

Thank you,

On behalf of the Climate Action Movement at the University of Michigan

Sasha Bishop, *PhD Candidate, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, LS&A*

Catherine Garton, *Undergraduate Student, LS&A*

Julian Hansen, *Undergraduate Student, LS&A*

Kristen Hayden, *Undergraduate Student, LS&A*

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