

Danny Avula responses:

How would you work to implement the proposals outlined in RVAGreen2050 and the Climate Equity Action Plan 2030? Would you take a different approach to climate planning, or continue the RVAGreen2050 program?

The climate crisis is a public health crisis, and I will accelerate implementation of RVAGreen2050 and our Climate Equity Action Plan. My first action will be to elevate the Director of Sustainability, Laura Thomas, to my cabinet and make that position a permanent cabinet level role.

As a public health practitioner, I understand the connections between environmental factors and health outcomes. Not only would I seek to advance the great work already underway, but I would work to marshal additional local, state and federal resources and further empower the remarkable community leaders and organizations that have been at the forefront of our city's response. I've had the opportunity to hear from over a dozen stakeholders concerned with climate change and environmental equity issues, and if elected I will remain in close dialogue with them.

What proposals would you make to support the Office of Sustainability, and how would you encourage other city departments to adopt sustainable, carbon-neutral and environmentally beneficial practices?

As noted above, OOS will be an integral part of my administration, and I will further empower the Director to work with the Chief Administrative Officer on both concrete directives and our city's budget.

I'm grateful to have the endorsement of Councilmember Katherine Jordan, who championed the city's Climate Emergency Resolution, and has helped share the green successes coming out of City Hall and her perspective on necessary next steps.

There is already great cross-departmental work underway, as evidenced by the newly adopted Sustainable Design Standards for capital projects and renovations and the Joint Energy Committee.

Beyond city facilities, there are growth opportunities regionally and with our state and federal partners. Climate does not stop at our city's border, and while OOS is already on this track, I see my role as making sure they have the staff and support to fully pursue all opportunities.

How would you manage the competing needs of DPU gas system customers and city carbon emissions reductions? Would you support a study on the future of the system?

In 2021, Richmond's City Council passed a resolution to develop a plan to phase out reliance on natural gas. This is absolutely the direction we need to continue on to mitigate the impacts of climate change, and to become a sustainable and resilient city. I would support and fund an independent, third party study on the future of our natural gas distribution system, but prior to doing that, our City needs to have more clarity on the end goals. Are we moving towards full electrification? Are we considering networked geothermal solutions? Are we open to building the infrastructure for hydrogen energy distribution?

The first phase of the work is deciding what type of energy landscape we are building towards, and then we should focus the study on timeline and costs associated with a transition. The study should also have a particular focus on ensuring that we strategically phase out of gas dependence in a way that doesn't leave our most financially vulnerable residents bearing the cost of the gas infrastructure as more affluent residents are able to shift to other renewable sources of energy much more easily.

The city recently restarted its Urban Forestry Commission and formed a Public Utilities and Service Commission. How would you approach working with these oversight commissions?

I am excited by the restart of the Urban Forestry Commission and the launch of the Public Utilities and Service Commission. I will expect my staff to work closely with these commissions to share information freely, garner new data and insights, and respond to both criticisms and suggestions. I will also personally engage with membership of the Commission so I can learn more and so these committed Richmond residents have a regular opportunity to convey their ideas directly to me.

How would you manage Richmond's heat islands and the growing threat of extreme heat in the city?

Here's where the Urban Forestry Commission, the recently hired Urban Forester and our Urban Forestry Master Plan are so important. We need to defend, maintain and expand tree canopies throughout the city, especially in heat islands in the Southside and elsewhere. I will also partner with GRTC to upgrade our bus stops to protect riders and pedestrians from extreme weather and encourage transit use.

We are fortunate to have mapping that shows where climate vulnerability exists in the city, and advocacy groups that will help local government to prioritize the needs. I have a lot of experience working within communities to solve complex problems by bringing together expertise, lived experience, and trusted leaders to improve service delivery.

Outside of residents' homes, one improvement that would have tangible benefits would be to provide free hydration stations throughout our city. Year One priorities include (1) charging OOS and DPU to present options for hydration stations, (2) supporting GRTC's work to improve our bus stops, (3) preserving the work already underway by ARPA on safe and healthy homes and (4) furthering our urban tree canopy goals. We also need to pursue depaving projects and encourage green roofs among strategies already identified by the OOS.

How would you prioritize addressing the causes and effects of climate change in the context of all the other things city government has to do?

Sustainability is not a zero-sum game. Investments in sustainability can have positive implications for us economically, socially, and environmentally, and we need to recognize the intersectionality of this work across the entire footprint of city government.

By making sustainability and climate resiliency a cabinet-level concern, my desire is to see it complementing, not competing with, our city-wide goals of aggressively tackling education, housing needs, disparities in economic opportunity, and City Hall operations.

Frankly, we cannot afford not to prioritize sustainability and climate resiliency, and the next Mayor must be proactive with mitigation and adaptation strategies as well. We are seeing in real time this hurricane season the devastating effects of the climate crisis and

the reality that there are no climate havens. At some point, Richmond will have another Gaston, and certainly more extreme heat. As the only candidate who has led a local, regional, and state-wide emergency response, I will be attuned to ensuring our city staff, infrastructure, systems and Office of Emergency Response are as ready, and most importantly, as resilient as possible.

This is collaborative work, and I have a long track record of successfully leading in this way in my local, regional and statewide roles, especially in my work partnering with the private sector, government and nonprofit organizations in addressing the Covid crisis.