

To: Columbia City Council

From: Climate and Environment Commission

Date: August 24, 2021

Subject: Allocation of American Rescue Plan Act Funding

The Climate and Environment Commission recognizes the significant opportunity for Columbia presented by the federal allocation of American Rescue Plan Act funds for the needs of the community. This is a unique opportunity at a time when the community is faced with many challenges and we wholeheartedly support investing the funds to assist community members in need today and to prepare Columbia for a better future.

The Commission supports the staff recommended projects as documented in the City Manager's Proposed Budget for a Mental Health Treatment Center, Shelter for the Homeless, Stormwater Projects, implementation of the recommendations of the Mayor's Task Force on Community Violence, Workforce Development Initiatives and Broadband infrastructure. The Commission also supports housing initiatives as documented in number seven below. Each of these initiatives can help achieve the goals of the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP) and address existing inequities.

Referencing the proposed list in the City Manager's FY2022 budget, the Commission has the following input:

1. A goal of the CAAP is to create community resilience hubs. These hubs will help the community deal with the negative impacts of climate change such as extreme heat, extreme cold, heavy rain events and weather disasters. Creating a Shelter for the Homeless will protect the unsheltered population from some of these consequences. Adding solar energy and a battery backup to the proposed shelter would be a first step toward creating a community resilience hub. A resilience hub can serve the surrounding neighborhoods and the homeless in a time of disaster. A resilience hub needs to have a source of power even in a disaster and stocks emergency supplies such as food, water and first aid to be ready for a local disaster. This shelter might also be the first step in creating temporary/transitional housing options that would meet the needs of people displaced by a natural disaster or future climate refugees. (CAAP Action HS-1.1.4, H-1.6.2, E-2.1.2)
2. Mental health challenges are expected to increase as the reality of the climate crisis is recognized and as more individuals and families are impacted by negative consequences such as weather disasters. Expanding community mental health crisis resources will help us prepare for the expected increase in mental health needs. (CAAP Strategy HS-1.4)
3. Increase in storm water run-off from significantly heavier precipitation events will be a major consequence of climate change for Columbia. Columbia has recently experienced one of these events with a rainfall of 13 inches from June 19 to July 1 as measured at the Columbia Regional Airport. Investing the storm water funds to make neighborhoods and Hinkson Creek more resilient are sound investments.
4. Climate change impacts are unfortunately expected to have a negative impact on community violence and crime. Increasing temperatures and weather disasters have been shown in other cities to have resulted in increases in domestic violence and crime. Investing now to reduce

violence in the community and create adequate resources to address future needs will make our community more resilient. (CAAP Action HS-1.4.2)

5. Workforce development initiatives present another opportunity for alignment with CAAP goals. As Columbia goes through the necessary transformation to a low carbon future, we hope the transition will create significant employment and entrepreneurial opportunities in areas such as energy efficiency retrofits, renewable energy, infrastructure resilience projects, commercial urban farming, local food production, ecosystem management, and reuse programs. When designing the workforce development initiatives, the Commission recommends keeping the goals of the CAAP in these areas in view. (CAAP Strategies and Actions W-1.1, HS-2.1, H-1.1, H-1.2, H-1.3, H-1.4.2)
6. Broadband infrastructure investments are necessary to improve equity in the community. Broadband infrastructure can also assist with reducing greenhouse gas emissions as more citizens and businesses are able to conduct activities without getting into a car.
7. The Commission would like to suggest any additional American Rescue Plan Act funds be invested in making low-income housing more energy efficient to reduce the energy burden on local low-income households in qualified census tracts. There are at least two local programs where it may be possible to utilize funding quickly and effectively, the Home Rehabilitation and Energy Efficiency Program and the Columbia Housing Authority Affordable Housing Initiative housing rehabilitation program. According to the city website the Home Rehabilitation program has such high demand the program is currently not taking applications. (CAAP Actions H-1.1)

Almost every investment going forward presents an opportunity to mitigate climate change or build resilience to the impacts. The American Rescue Plan Act funds are a wonderful opportunity to fulfill many community goals, help people in need and fulfill the goals of the CAAP at the same time as long as appropriate planning and consideration is done during the process of spending the funds and developing the above listed initiatives.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Amparan

Chair

Climate and Environment Commission