

July 19, 2020

Mayor Jesse Arreguin
Vice Mayor Sophie Hahn and Councilmembers

Subject: Comments to July 21, 2020 Special Council Meeting, Agenda item No. 5
November City ballot measure to create a Climate Equity Action Fund

We have reviewed the Council agenda item recommending a City ballot measure to create a Climate Equity Action Fund. The Energy Commission has done excellent work analyzing our status to meet our Climate Action Goals and in bringing forward this recommendation. We offer the following comments to the proposal.

- 1. Timing of the initiative** – the Covid-19 pandemic has put financial hardships on Berkeley’s communities and shortfalls in the City of Berkeley’s budget. We urge caution in putting more tax burden on our residents in their time of need.
- 2. Funding options** – the proposal is to increase the electricity and gas portion of the Utility User Tax (UUT) by 2.5%. We believe that the Seismic Rebate program, which is funded by the Transfer Tax, is currently underutilized. We recommend that “unclaimed” Seismic Rebate funds be reviewed to determine if such funds can be shifted to carbon reduction activities. Also, we recommend that if the Council chooses to go with the UUT that it be a special tax, which is a tax imposed for a specific purpose and requires a two-thirds majority. The reason is to add transparency to the program. Consideration of increasing the UUT should also review the priority with other needs in Berkeley. For example, the study to underground overhead utility wires (for safe evacuation) is also considering the UUT as a funding option. We estimate that the City may free up available funding in the future as it reviews changes to organizational responsibilities.
- 3. Development of criteria and transparency** – the carbon reduction activities are currently not well defined. The proposal is: “climate equity action fund to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and local air pollution including increasing electric vehicle, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and other clean transportation options, increasing energy efficiency and renewable energy use in homes and businesses, investing in clean and reliable back-up power for emergency services facilities”. We recommend that criteria be developed for the program and the expected outcomes be stated. This should be well documented and available to the public. Our past experience with Berkeley funding measures is not good with respect to implementation transparency and accountability. Among the examples is Measure M.
- 4. Connection with Vision 2050** – we recommend that the program align with the approaches defined in the Vision 2050 framework. This includes reviewing Berkeley’s needs in a more comprehensive manner, for being adaptive to changes, for equity across Berkeley, and for maintaining infrastructure from inception through repair and replacement.

We recommend that these comments be incorporated into the proposal. Thank you very much.

Submitted by concerned Berkeley residents,
Ray Yep, Margo Schueler, Gordon Wozniak, and Jim McGrath