

RESOLUTION TO APPROVE THE VIRGINIA TECH 2020 CLIMATE ACTION COMMITMENT

WHEREAS, Virginia Tech recognizes that sustainability is an integral part of the fabric of the university as it pursues enhanced economic stability and affordability, diversity and inclusion, environmental stewardship, expansion of knowledge, and education of future leaders; and

WHEREAS, Virginia Tech has long been recognized as a leader in campus sustainability, with the highest scores for the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System (STARS) for institutions in the Commonwealth of Virginia and the Atlantic Coast Conference, numerous Governor’s Environmental Excellence Awards, prominent standing in Princeton Review’s top 50 Green Colleges, and many other accolades; and

WHEREAS, the 2009 Virginia Tech Climate Action Commitment and Sustainability Plan, as revised in 2013, was a cutting-edge effort for its time, but now fails to prescribe what climate scientists recognize as necessary actions and also falls short of many peer universities’ recent initiatives; and

WHEREAS, the campus community has pushed for more aggressive climate action as represented by demands of student environmental organizations and resolutions by the Faculty Senate and Staff Senate, the Student Government Association, and the Graduate Student Assembly; and

WHEREAS, Virginia Tech President Timothy D. Sands stated in November 2019 that “climate change presents one of the world’s most pressing problems...and Virginia Tech has a duty to respond,” and called for a new working group to evaluate the university’s progress in climate action and to update its climate action commitment; and

WHEREAS, a 26-member Virginia Tech Climate Action Commitment Working Group met weekly for six months from January through June 2020; led 12 subcommittees involving 125 faculty, staff, student, and community participants; and engaged hundreds of university community members in online surveys and virtual convening sessions, to produce a comprehensive evaluation of progress and develop a new Virginia Tech 2020 Climate Action Commitment; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Tech 2020 Climate Action Commitment contains an aggressive yet pragmatic set of 15 goals – and pathways to achieve those goals – that involve necessary upgrades to the campus physical infrastructure and operations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), integrate these improvements into the university’s educational and research mission, engage everyone to enhance the campus culture of sustainability, and consider these

actions' financial, environmental, reputational, and social equity impacts and benefits; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Tech 2020 Climate Action Commitment sets the stage for Virginia Tech to shine as an exemplar and leader in higher education climate action by not only aiming to become a carbon neutral and zero-waste campus by 2030, but also utilizing the university's unique Virginia Tech Electric Service to partner and develop a way to 100 percent renewable electricity by 2030; using considerable land resources to manage agricultural impacts, sequester carbon, and develop renewable energy; accounting for behavior-related GHG emissions from waste and transport; integrating climate action into education; and specifically addressing community engagement, sustainable behaviors, and social equity; and

WHEREAS, in developing innovative budgeting and financing mechanisms to achieve the Virginia Tech 2020 Climate Action Commitment goals, the university shall recognize that all financial needs compete for resources, consider the impact on tuition and fee constraints as well as university debt capacity, and incorporate funding requests into established annual operating and/or capital budgeting processes as appropriate;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors approve the Virginia Tech 2020 Climate Action Commitment, including the following vision and mission statements, and 15 goals:

Vision of the Virginia Tech 2020 Climate Action Commitment:

In the spirit of Ut Prosim, Virginia Tech will be a leader in climate action in service to our community, the Commonwealth, and the world.

Mission of the Virginia Tech 2020 Climate Action Commitment:

The mission of the Virginia Tech 2020 Climate Action Commitment is to achieve carbon neutrality by changing our physical infrastructure, collective and individual behaviors, and educational mission; to engage everyone in creating a culture of sustainability; and to achieve these objectives through just and equitable means.

The Virginia Tech 2020 Climate Action Commitment Goals

1. Carbon neutral Virginia Tech campus by 2030
2. 100 percent renewable electricity by 2030
3. Complete the total conversion of steam plant fuel to natural gas by 2025, plan for a full transition to renewable steam plant fuel after 2025, and continue to improve the efficiency of campus energy systems
4. Reduce building energy consumption to enable carbon neutrality by 2030
5. Operations of new buildings initiated by 2030 will be carbon neutral

6. Agricultural, forestry, and land use operations will be carbon neutral by 2030
7. Virginia Tech to become a Zero-Waste Campus by 2030
8. Establish sustainable procurement policy and procedures by 2022
9. Reduce single-occupancy-vehicle commuting to campus by 20 percent by 2025 and reduce transportation-related GHG emissions by 40 percent by 2030
10. Integrate the Virginia Tech 2020 Climate Action Commitment into the university's educational mission through a new Climate Action Living Laboratory beginning in 2021
11. Establish climate justice as a core value of the Virginia Tech 2020 Climate Action Commitment
12. Diminish barriers to sustainable behaviors through institutional change, education and social marketing
13. Implement the Virginia Tech 2020 Climate Action Commitment at a high level of university administration and governance; by integrating goals for facilities, education, and campus culture; and with stakeholder engagement in the ongoing evaluation of goals and progress
14. Develop innovative budgeting and financing mechanisms to generate funding and staffing to achieve the Virginia Tech 2020 Climate Action Commitment goals
15. Develop pathways after 2030 to eliminate fossil fuels and carbon offsets by 2050

Recommendation:

That the Virginia Tech 2020 Climate Action Commitment be approved.

March 22, 2021