

MEMORANDUM

Date: June 2, 2020

To: Environmental Advisory Committee

From: Martha Larson and Alex Miller

Re: Climate Action Plan (CAP) 2.0

Since approval of the 2011 Climate Action Plan, the effects of climate change have become much more apparent. Carleton has experienced three “500-year” floods, endured periods of extreme heat and cold, and adapted our long-term tree canopy plans to thrive in a changing climate. We have made significant progress toward reducing our emissions, alongside growing effort and urgency from the world at large. Meanwhile, the public electricity grid has been getting “greener” at a much faster pace than anticipated and Xcel Energy has pledged to provide carbon-free electricity by 2050. Cities and communities around the globe, including Northfield, are creating resilient and robust climate action plans as risks become more defined and technologies emerge. As Carleton’s 2011 Climate Action Plan approaches its ten-year anniversary, many of its strategies are now complete, established and ongoing, or rejected upon further evaluation. It is timely to review our progress and update the plan for our future actions and intentions.

Sustainability author and educator Leith Sharp¹ describes both campus and corporate sustainability as a journey from “awakening” to “pioneering” to “transforming.” After more than a decade of deep, focused sustainability efforts, Carleton’s culture is poised to shift from a “pioneering” stage to a “transformation” stage when sustainability becomes woven into all campus operations, academics, and student life. In the transformation phase, sustainability is no longer a feature appended to existing systems, but rather an embedded value that shapes the systems themselves. Climate Action Plan 2.0 will distribute ownership and engagement, drive campus-wide collaboration, support individual change, foster continuous improvement and enable systemic reform.

We propose therefore that Climate Action Plan 2.0 will not only generate a new list of tasks to accomplish, but also provide a more holistic approach to campus sustainability that incorporates broader campus participation and a greater sense of urgency. In addition to addressing our operational targets, CAP 2.0 could address more deeply how we prepare Carleton students to understand the impacts of climate change and engage as global citizens tackling a common crisis. Innovation, collaboration, and futuristic thinking will be key elements of a truly transformational plan.

¹ Leith Sharp is the director and lead faculty of the Executive Education for Sustainability Leadership at Harvard's Center for Health and the Global Environment.