CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

YASSAMIN FOR PHOENIX
Friends,

As I write this, the Western states of California, Oregon, and Washington face unprecedented wildfires exacerbated by the impacts of the climate crisis. Meanwhile, Hurricane Sally has caused flooding across Alabama and Florida, forcing residents out of their homes. In Arizona, we are finally closing out what has been the hottest summer on record — with the most days over 110 degrees ever recorded.¹ In 2020, we’ve seen climate change wreak havoc on every coast. The scientific community is weighing in on this year’s elections more than ever before, and their message is clear: our time for dismissing the climate crisis is up.

I began my career in climate policy at the age of 22, when I joined the climate team of the United Nations Secretary-General. Through my extensive work on this issue over the last 6 years, I came to realize that although the climate crisis impacts us on a global scale, immediate and lasting change is often achieved at home. Our campaign’s Climate Action Plan proposes clear and actionable policies to clean up Phoenix’s air and water, expand our recycling and composting infrastructure, create more accessible public transit options, and more.

As a member of C40, a global network of cities committed to sustainability, adaptation, and mitigation, Phoenix is in a unique position to harness the power of collective action in its response to the climate crisis—and I’m excited to build our relationship with this international community as City Councilwoman. I’ve said time and again: it’s up to us to decide what kind of city we want to live in. The decisions that are made at the local level will shape the future of America’s cities — and as America’s fifth largest and fastest-growing city, Phoenix has the opportunity to lead the rest of the nation in developing ambitious, sustainable, and equitable policies to protect us from climate disaster and ensure our prosperity for generations to come.

All my best,

Yassamin Ansari, Candidate for Phoenix City Council in District 7
AIR QUALITY

Poor air quality has plagued Phoenix for decades. In 2019, the American Lung Association ranked Phoenix #7 for worst air quality in the country, with devastating impacts on community health: nearly 11% of Arizona children suffer from asthma, and in 2017, asthma hospitalizations in Maricopa County exceeded $134 million.

Moreover, racial segregation, discriminatory land use policies, and unequal regulatory enforcement disproportionately impact the respiratory health of communities of color, especially in District 7. Working on air quality issues around the world has prepared me to implement key air quality solutions and to champion forward-thinking policies that benefit us all.

Expanding Phoenix’s Electric Vehicle Infrastructure

Most of Arizona’s high ozone levels are caused when nitrogen oxide and volatile organic compounds from vehicles combine with sunlight. This means that improving air quality and respiratory health in Phoenix will require addressing the high number of vehicles that burn fossil fuels in our city. In addition to improving public transportation across, we must dramatically expand our city’s electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure by installing more EV charging stations in existing parking structures. I also recommend that 20% of spaces in all future structures be EV ready, as was mandated successfully by the City of Atlanta in 2017. In addition, all future City vehicle purchases should be of electric vehicles. Local electric vehicle manufacturer Nikola is working with Republic Services to produce electric trash collection vehicles—the City should be exploring similar opportunities for its entire vehicle fleet.
Supporting Our Cycling Community

To encourage sustainable modes of transportation and support our thriving cycling community, I will work with Phoenix’s Street Transportation Department to ensure the implementation of its Five Year Bicycle Program. Since the beginning, my campaign has advocated for several initiatives to make cycling safer and more convenient in Phoenix. We will continue to advocate for these measures, including the development of bike lanes that connect existing bike paths to decrease the distance cyclists must travel on unprotected streets; erecting pillars or painting chevron lines to further separate bikes and auto vehicles; and the expansion of bikeshare programs.

Penalizing Air Pollution Violations

District 7 and south Phoenix more generally have long been home to loosely regulated industrial sites and frequent toxic spills and hazardous material fires. Corporations and private entities that fail to comply with the U.S. Clean Air Act of 1970 must be held accountable for their roles in endangering the health and livelihoods of Phoenix residents. As councilmember, I will ensure that corporate polluters clean up their toxic waste sites or face stiff fines and penalties, including loss of city contracts.

Maricopa County penalizes residents who burn wood on ‘No Burn Days,’ but penalties aren’t stiff and enforcement has proven to be difficult within such a large geographic area. I plan to work with Maricopa County to systematically enforce No Burn Days in Phoenix, especially during the dry winter months.

Finally, as a City Councilwoman, I will push forward our city’s involvement with C40’s Air Quality Network, so that we can learn more from other cities about best practices for eliminating dangerous air pollutants from our air and skies.
LIGHT RAIL

Improving air quality in Phoenix demands an expansion of public transit options across the city. Phoenix residents enjoy a robust light rail system that is 100% electric, which helps divert traffic away from our roads and pollution out of our air. The numbers speak for themselves: by 2018, a decade after the light rail first opened, the corridor helped reduce 27,000 car trips daily—and kept more than 19,000 tons of pollutants out of our skies. The light rail has also been central to growing Phoenix’s economy. By 2018, the 26-mile corridor helped generate 35,000 new jobs and more than $11 million in public and private investment. Light rail ridership included 5,318,767 boardings during the month of January 2020 alone.

In 2015, Phoenix voters approved Transportation 2050, an ambitious plan to improve transit options by introducing Bus Rapid Transit; investing in 42 light rail miles; and improving existing streets and roads. In 2016, the Phoenix City Council also approved advancing the South Central/Downtown Hub extension’s opening date from 2034 to 2023. I will continue to spearhead the expansion of public transportation at City Hall while prioritizing equity, accessibility, and sustainability.

Making Transportation 2050 A Reality

I plan to work closely with the Street Transportation Department to ensure that timelines for transportation projects are being met, and to prevent delays that may impact Phoenix residents and businesses. As a Councilwoman, I plan to lead the establishment of employer commuter benefits, including tax-free subsidies for employees that use light rail transit. Finally, I will continue to advocate for the Federal Transit Administration to release the full amount of funding requested by the City of Phoenix to complete the South Central extension—$500 million.

I will continue to spearhead the expansion of public transportation at City Hall while prioritizing equity, accessibility, and sustainability.
An Equitable Future for the South Central Expansion Project

The South Central Expansion project, which is currently under construction, will help make metro Phoenix more accessible for South Central businesses, families, and students. But the measure of the light rail’s success is not only how many riders it attracts—but whether its expansion is achieved equitably and sustainably.

I will continue to support initiatives to provide financial assistance to businesses impacted by light rail construction, including loans and grants to offset the potential impact of lost customers. I will also continue to advocate for the expansion and protection of affordable housing for working families and individuals in South Central, particularly along the light rail corridor, including by providing loans and subsidies to affordable housing projects. Finally, I believe that the City government should help facilitate Community Benefits Agreements between residents and potential developers in the area.

Reviving the West Camelback Light Rail Project

As a firm supporter of the Valley Metro Rail, I also plan to help revive the West Camelback light rail project, which the City Council voted to delay in 2019. A West Camelback light rail extension would be the ideal way to connect the city’s major higher education institutions with businesses, employers, and residential areas across metro Phoenix. For example, although Grand Canyon University (located at 35th Avenue and Camelback) is characterized by a large number of commuter students, the student body does not currently have access to light rail transit past 19th avenue and Camelback — meaning that students, faculty, and staff commuting from downtown must own personal vehicles or commute using a combination of light rail and bus transit.

Expanding the light rail from 19th Avenue to at least 35th Avenue will connect GCU, ASU Downtown, and ASU Main while also providing West Phoenix with greater access to the downtown core.
As the City of Phoenix strives to meet its Zero Waste goal by 2050, we must continue making ambitious decisions to improve our recycling efforts. Today, Americans are the biggest trash producers in the world, creating 6.5 pounds of trash per person, per day.

Phoenix has a unique opportunity to lead a new path forward in waste reduction and recycling.

As the fastest-growing city in the country, Phoenix has a unique opportunity to lead a new path forward in waste reduction and recycling. In an effort to improve these practices, the Public Works Department launched its waste diversion initiative, Reimagine Phoenix, in 2013, announcing a citywide goal to divert 40% of trash from the landfill by the year 2020. The program’s main focus is on the ways Phoenicians can reduce, reuse, recycle, reconsider, and reimagine healthy consumption habits to minimize waste in their daily lives.11

Repealing Ordinance 27-23

While brainstorming how we can optimize Phoenix’s recycling system, it is important to take into consideration the unique needs of our city, such as: the considerable number of multi-family complexes (17,000),12 the high levels of recycling contamination,13 and a disproportionate exposure to the impacts of climate change.14

In order to introduce the best recycling solutions for Phoenix specifically, we must first repeal an existing city ordinance (27-23 Residential collection) that prohibits offering municipal recycling services to apartment complexes with more than 30 units.

The Phoenix Environmental Quality Commission, Phoenix residents, and climate activists15 have been fighting this ordinance for years. This ordinance severely limits the City’s ability to successfully accomplish its Zero Waste goal. Property managers can hire private recycling collectors—yet many choose not to, in large part because of financial and logistical barriers. This outdated mandate places the onus on Phoenix residents to unfairly persuade their complexes to pay for private recycling, and must be repealed.

Property managers can hire private recycling collectors—yet many choose not to, in large part because of financial and logistical barriers.
Strengthening Recycling Education

In addition to making recycling more accessible, we should ramp up our education efforts in collaboration with Recycling+\(^\text{16}\), a local zero waste team that provides recycling and waste diversion education to Phoenix neighborhoods, multi-family households, businesses and schools; as well as the Oops Shine On Pilot Program\(^\text{17}\), a team of solid waste workers inspecting residents’ recycling bins for contamination and leaving report cards to encourage better recycling behavior at the household level. Educating our residents on how to properly recycle and bringing awareness to the positive impacts of recycling are imperative for diverting our city’s waste away from landfills and achieving a Zero Waste future.
Growing Our Composting Infrastructure

Despite many setbacks, Reimagine Phoenix is currently on track to successfully divert 40% of the city’s waste by 2020, with a 36% diversion rate as of 2019. As part of this initiative, the City introduced its Green Organics program, granting some neighborhoods the opportunity to compost gardening organics; and opened the $13.3 million Turned Aerated Pile (TAP) composting facility in April 2017.

Diverting 40% of waste from landfills and composting 55,000 tons of gardening waste per year is a great first step toward becoming a more sustainable city. But for Phoenix to achieve a Zero Waste future, we must ensure that these systems are accessible to all districts through new policy demands, and are held accountable through proper metrics tracking.

First, I recommend an expansion of the existing Green Organics program to more neighborhoods across the City of Phoenix. Households are currently required to pay a surcharge to participate in the residential composting project, and marketing is lackluster. We need to make the program available to all households and improve marketing and education in order to increase residential participation.

I also recommend that the city develop food waste-specific composting infrastructure by partnering with a third-party food waste composting facility such as Recycled City. Doing this could diminish the stress and cost for Phoenix municipal waste facilities and decrease costs for city residents, as we’ve observed in cities like San Francisco, which has implemented similar policies. In the long-term, I envision the development of a robust city-wide composting system that allows everyone, from residents to businesses to tourists, to properly separate trash into one of three bins: recycling, landfill, and compost.

Strengthening Composting Education

By composting organic waste rather than infusing it into our landfills, we can significantly reduce emissions of methane, an enormously potent greenhouse gas that negatively impacts Phoenix’s air quality and exacerbates the Urban Heat Island Effect. To ensure successful program expansion, I will also advocate for the implementation of widespread composting education initiatives in schools, apartment complexes, and local businesses.

Making Phoenix a true Zero Waste city is possible, but only with high-reaching goals that do more than the bare minimum — because that’s what we’re capable of and that’s what Phoenix deserves.
**TREE AND SHADE**

Tree and shade coverage is essential for building healthy and sustainable communities. Its benefits are manifold: proper coverage improves residents’ mental and respiratory health, provides protection from the sun, improves air quality, retains stormwater to help build healthier soil, lowers energy usage in nearby buildings, and raises property values. Most pressing for our desert city, tree coverage has the potential to bring temperatures down by several degrees—up to 10 degrees when tree cover is 40% or more.

**Creating a Tree and Shade Committee**

Unfortunately, District 7 has notably less tree and shade protection that other districts in Phoenix. We need a robust operation that will plant thousands of trees in order to protect the health of residents.

In 2010, the City of Phoenix released its Tree and Shade Master Plan, which proposed a 25% city canopy by 2030 and cited sufficient tree canopy as the #1 solution to the urban heat island effect. However, in the 10 years since, the city has failed to create a Tree and Shade Committee as it originally proposed, instead granting oversight powers to a subcommittee of the existing Environmental Quality and Sustainability Commission.

*I will prioritize the creation of an independent Tree and Shade Committee that would implement the planting of thousands of trees on city-owned property in line with the 2030 timeline. This committee must also have the regulatory power to ensure that commercial and residential projects continue to maintain the trees outlined in their city-approved site plans.*

**Transforming Abandoned Lots and Alleys Into Public Green Spaces**

Phoenix’s abandoned lots and alleys present a fantastic opportunity to create green spaces with public seating and ample shade. Not only can these green spaces improve the city’s shade canopy, but they can also enhance community, provide pedestrians with rest areas, and encourage outdoor recreation. Above all, as a Councilwoman, I will ensure that racial and economic equity are central to our tree and shade plan, so all Phoenicians are protected from the sun, regardless of race, income, or neighborhood.
As a City Councilwoman, I will continue to advocate for the full implementation of the 2025 Food Action Plan. Adopted by the city on March 4th, 2020, the 2025 Food Action Plan seeks to promote the growth of a healthy, affordable, secure, and sustainable food system that makes healthy food available to all Phoenix residents. In collaboration with the City of Phoenix Interdepartmental Food Action Team, composed of 11 different departments and five local partners, I will work to ensure that families and residents have sustainable and long-term access to a nutritional food supply.

FOOD SECURITY

13.7% of Maricopa County residents currently experience food insecurity, with more than 75% of County food deserts located in Phoenix. Meanwhile, the effects of climate change continue to sweep through the Valley, exacerbating the impacts of food insecurity in Phoenix, particularly in the context of the City’s 43 food deserts.

Equitable access to nutritious foods is central to building a sustainable, just, and resilient community. However, according to the USDA, substantial tracts of District 7 land constitute food deserts, with only 10 grocery stores—many of them smaller markets—in the entire District. District 7 trails only neighboring District 8 with respect to the number of food deserts.

As a City Councilwoman, I will continue to advocate for the full implementation of the 2025 Food Action Plan. I will work to ensure that families and residents have sustainable and long-term access to a nutritional food supply.
WATER

Droughts and water scarcity have always posed a threat to desert life—but their negative impacts have been exacerbated even further in the context of climate change, endangering the future of our city and our ability to live in it. Higher temperatures and decreased precipitation continue to threaten our water supply; by some estimates, runoff into the Salt and Verde watersheds—from which Phoenix obtains much of its water—could decline by as much as 23 percent.26

Implementing a Rebate Program to Incentivize Water Conservation

One potential response to decreased water supply in the Valley is to provide rebates for residential and business use of efficient water appliances. The City of Tucson currently offers one such rebate program for use of these appliances, including high efficiency toilets, washing machines, and gray water systems. In the context of Phoenix, use of water, measured by residential gallons per capita per day (GPCD), has fallen 30% over the last twenty years, even with the addition of 360,000 residents—but this decline isn’t enough to offset the negative impacts of higher temperatures on our water supply, nor to meet the city’s goal of providing a clean and reliable 100-year supply of water by 2050. Offering this initiative is one immediate way to reduce water waste and incentivize more efficient water use.

Ensuring the Addition of the West Van Buren Site to Adjacent Federal Superfund Site

The West Van Buren groundwater plume in Phoenix is part of one of the biggest zones of polluted groundwater in the country27 and has been on Arizona’s priority list of toxic cleanup sites since 1987. The plume of contaminated groundwater contains measurable amounts of known carcinogens, including trichloroethylene (TCE), tetrachloroethylene (PCE), and volatile organic compounds (VOCs), which quickly become airborne once the water flows through canals. Progress on site cleanup has been delayed following several disputes over financial responsibility and water rights.
In response to this ongoing issue, I plan to work with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) to ensure the West Van Buren site is part of an adjacent federal Superfund site or to establish a new Superfund site. A federal Superfund program, administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, is designed to investigate and clean up sites contaminated with hazardous substances. The EPA doesn’t offer estimates on how long a review will take; in the meantime, we must reallocate funding to operate remediation systems that will prevent additional VOCs from polluting Phoenix’s air. Without funding for treatment, more harmful chemicals will pollute our air, with wide-spread impacts on our community’s health and safety.
SOLAR ENERGY & SUSTAINABLE CONSTRUCTION

Phoenix currently ranks 8th in Solar Power Systems Per Capita and 4th in Total Solar Power Systems installed when compared to other American cities. In a city that enjoys more than 300 sunny days a year, the potential for clean, cheap, and renewable energy is essentially boundless. There is no reason why Arizona could not be the #1 producer of solar power in the country and even the world.

As a Councilwoman, I will spearhead the expansion of solar energy infrastructure in Phoenix, which can reduce our city’s emissions while also creating reliable, high-wage jobs for residents. Currently, the city has installed 32MW of solar energy on its properties, adopted the 2012 International Energy Construction Code (IECC 2012), and requires LEED Silver certification for all of its own new buildings. To supplement these efforts, I will advocate for the implementation of more rigorous energy standards for incoming developers, the expansion of solar infrastructure on city-owned property, and infrastructure support and expedited permitting for large-scale solar developments in Phoenix. I will also lead our city’s involvement in C40’s Clean Construction Forum, so that we can learn from and collaborate with other cities that have implemented effective practices in sustainable construction and energy consumption.

I will advocate for the implementation of more rigorous energy standards for incoming developers, the expansion of solar infrastructure on city-owned property, and infrastructure support and expedited permitting for large-scale solar developments in Phoenix.
AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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