ENVIRONMENT ROADMAP
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ProGov21 is a shared resource for progressive local policy makers and advocates alike. Operated and maintained by COWS, a national think-and-do tank based at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, ProGov21 offers a fully searchable digital library of progressive policies, practices, and other resources for 21st century local government.
The climate crisis now unfolding across the globe has highlighted the need for cities to make drastic, time-sensitive changes in their environmental sustainability efforts and adaptation strategies. The impacts of climate change will continue to intensify: greenhouse gas emissions are up 1.8 percent since 1990, and the industrialized world remains dependent on fossil fuels. The impacts of utilizing these polluting energy sources can be seen in rising atmospheric temperatures, rising sea levels, shrinking sea ice, and the increased frequency of devastating superstorms and floods. Making matters worse, much of our infrastructure relies on unsustainable energy sources and is highly susceptible to the impacts of climate change. Cities can mitigate climate change by promoting sustainable energy sources and reducing emissions at a local level even as we adapt to the current climate crisis by remaking our cities, infrastructure, and power grids more resilient. We must build infrastructure that keeps our cities standing tall, but uses sustainable energy sources and building materials to mitigate climate change.

The effects of climate change and other pollutants disproportionately fall on low-income communities and communities of color. Zoning and land use policies favor placing industrial facilities near underserved communities, exposing them to the negative externalities associated with increased pollution.

To address this issue, local governments must enact environmental justice policies that work to ban certain polluting facilities, enact environmental review processes, address current zoning practices that contribute to environmental racism, and enact improved public health codes that address this type of pollution.
Available Local Levers & Targets for Reform

The first step to mitigating climate change is reducing emissions and limiting consumption of fossil fuels. One way to accomplish this is through divesting from fossil fuels and re-investing those funds into climate-positive projects. This has the benefit of reducing GHG emissions while investing in adaptation strategies that help prepare us for the future. Another way in which we can reduce emissions at a local level is through carbon pricing. By taxing commercial activities based on the volume of emissions they release, we can simultaneously reduce pollution and fund adaptation. Outside of carbon pricing campaigns, the American Sustainable Business Council proposes a rethinking on our current fracking policies. They call for local governments to set standards and rules that determine the conditions and locations in which hydraulic fracturing can occur. Additionally, improved waste management can reduce a municipality’s environmental impact: Eco-Cycle Solutions Hub’s Zero Waste Roadmap shows the steps communities can take towards net-zero waste production through recycling and repurposing initiatives. Cities can also reduce GHG emissions and other pollutants by investing in sustainable public transportation. A report by Smart Growth America outlines how cities can promote equitable and efficient transportation services by building safer, more walkable streets and making transit a priority, and planning compact neighborhoods with access to public transit.

Even as we work to mitigate climate change, we must ensure that our current infrastructure can withstand the deepening climate crises. Local governments should address their water infrastructure needs by investing in drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater management that is resilient and adaptable. Additionally, green infrastructure saves municipalities money that can be reinvested back into greening initiatives at the local level. The Georgetown Climate Center offers a helpful toolkit of strategies that local governments can use to manage stormwater systems, reduce urban heat island effects, improve air quality, and promote economic development through green infrastructure initiatives. Sustainable and resilient infrastructure can also have profound impacts on green job growth and economic development within local communities.

Current Reforms & Tools to Fight for Them

In order to prevent and reduce the impacts of climate change, minimizing greenhouse gas emissions has become a policy priority for city-level policymakers. A strategy employed by more than 400 cities and municipalities is moratoriums or bans on fracking; these local resolutions help prevent soil and water contamination, reduce methane emissions (a particularly insidious GHG) and limit our dependence on fossil fuels.
Policymakers can also reduce emissions by implementing carbon taxes and divestment campaigns. The Bay Area Air Quality Management District, which covers nine counties in California, passed a 4.4 cent per carbon ton fee that applies to 500 businesses. Similarly, Boulder, Colorado enacted the Climate Action Plan tax, which charges residents and businesses a fee based on their electric usage while exempting consumption of renewable energy. The Ann Arbor City Council took a different strategy in their fight against climate change: they asked the City of Ann Arbor Employees’ Retirement Board to divest any investment in fossil fuel companies, and cease making new investments in fossil fuels. This divestment discourages public companies from utilizing carbon-intensive energy sources, and pushes them towards sustainable energy. This switch to more sustainable energy usage was also seen in the California energy crisis of 2000-01: when electricity rates jumped nearly 41 percent, the City of Oroville, California installed a 520 kW solar energy system in its Wastewater Treatment Plant that cut power costs by 80 percent. Clean Energy Works Portland (CEWP) has also addressed the challenge of minimizing carbon-intensive energy usage, by financially aiding homeowners looking to improve their homes’ energy efficiency.

Local policymakers can reduce the impacts of climate change by making infrastructure more sustainable and environmentally friendly.

The Climate Ready Missoula plan features green infrastructure strategies that can be taken to adapt to Missoula County’s frequent flooding and longer wildfires. California’s Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities program (AHSC) provides funding to affordable housing, expanded public transit, improved walking and biking opportunities, and green landscaping; overall, the program has prevented 2.2 million metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions. Similarly, an ordinance related to Seattle’s Complete Streets policy outlines improvements to encourage walking, bicycling, and public transit use, in order to reduce emissions from transportation. Arlington, Virginia and Missoula, Montana have made significant improvements in recycling and waste services through making recycling more accessible, setting ambitious goals to achieve zero waste, regulating the use of municipal funds to purchase unsustainable products, and implementing year-round yard debris collection. This not only reduces these cities’ costs but also reduces their environmental footprint. The City of Fort Collins has also released a report outlining their plan to pursue Zero Waste. These improvements to infrastructure, the housing, transportation, and waste industries have the additional benefit of creating green jobs.

Because the impacts of climate change vary widely based on race, class, and geographic location, local policymakers must place an emphasis on equity when formulating environmental policies.
To aid this process, the Greenlining Institute released a guidebook that offers policymakers a blueprint on how to incorporate equity into climate adaptation programs and grant programs. Additionally, a report published by LAANE provides criteria to analyze the equity of existing policies and provides recommendations for how they can be improved.

**Taking it to the Next Level**

Local leaders have leverage over many policy areas that impact the environment, and should apply an environmental lens whenever possible. Environmental policy and potential impact on the environment must also be kept in focus when addressing social and racial justice issues, transportation, city planning, and municipal pension funds.

**Transportation:** Many decisions about transportation systems are made at the state and federal level, and local governments usually have to work within a policy framework they have little control over (see the ProGov21 Policy Roadmap on Home Rule and Preemption for more information). However, local governments can encourage walking, bicycling, and mass transit. Infrastructure specifically devoted to walking and biking make those carbon-neutral modes of transportation safer and more efficient, while improving first- and last-mile connections to high-capacity transit can make low-emission public transportation a more viable choice for local residents. Local governments can provide subsidized transit passes, accessible bike facilities, carpool matching, and emergency rides home to green transportation. Mass transit is inherently more environmentally friendly than single-occupancy or low-occupancy vehicles. A single 40-foot bus can seat just more than 40 passengers with additional room for standing riders, and produces far less emissions than the number of cars required to transport the same number of people. See the ProGov21 Policy Roadmap on Transportation and Mobility for more on local transportation policy.
City Planning & Building Codes:
Municipalities can use their city planning, building codes, and zoning codes to require new developments to be more environmentally friendly. By mandating a connected street network, access to transit service, and incorporating a mixture of residential, employment, and commercial uses, transit becomes a feasible and appealing alternative to single-occupancy vehicle trips, greatly reducing emissions and travel time. Requiring energy efficient building designs and environmentally friendly building materials and zoning can also lower a municipality’s emissions. See ProGov21’s Policy Roadmap on Land Use for more information on green city planning.

Environmental Racism: Environmental racism refers to the disproportionate impact of environmental hazards on BIPOC communities. Institutional rules and policies, together with government and corporate decision making, deliberately target the most disempowered communities for toxic land uses and lax enforcement of zoning and environmental laws. These communities are in turn disproportionately exposed to toxic and hazardous waste. This chronic exposure to air pollution is a primary factor contributing to higher rates of illness and death from COVID-19 within BIPOC communities. Local government officials and activists must ensure that the most oppressed members of the community are not forced to inhabit the most environmentally impacted neighborhoods.

To address the environmental inequities that place disproportionate climate change impacts on low income communities and communities of color, we must create state-based policies that look to build a more sustainable and equitable economy. The BlueGreen Alliance’s policy toolkit shows us how state’s can accomplish this through providing project labor agreements, establishing good wages, creating local hire provisions mandates and targeted hire provisions. In addition to this, through climate change grants, local governments can help address climate change within underserved communities through targeting initiatives, community partnerships, inclusive outreach, and application development.

Divestment: Municipal pensions and other locally-controlled investment vehicles should be required to sell investments in toxic, high-emission industries and place that money instead in companies and industries that are committed to a sustainable future. The ProGov21 database has resources that explain how diversified portfolios can eliminate companies with business models dominated by fossil fuels without sacrificing financial performance, as well as model laws to mandate municipal divestment from polluting industries.
Allies, Comrades, and Helpers

**Policy Matters Ohio**
A non-profit policy research organization aimed at creating a vibrant, equitable, sustainable, and inclusive Ohio through research and policy innovation.

**The Greenlining Institute**
A California-based organization dedicated to building a just economy that is cooperative, inclusive, sustainable, participatory, fair, and health. As an advocate for progressive change, The Greenlining Institute addresses the root causes of racial, economic, and environmental inequities within communities of color in California and across the country.

**LAANE**
A Los Angeles based policy organization working to build a new economy rooted in good jobs, thriving communities, and a healthy environment for all those in the region.

**National League of Cities**
An organization comprised of leaders focused on improving the quality of life for their constituents through strengthening local leadership, influencing federal policy, and driving innovative solutions.

**Georgetown Climate Center**
A non-partisan center looking to reduce carbon pollution, support clean and resilient transportation options, and help communities adapt to climate change.

**NRDC**
A non-profit membership organization dedicated to ensuring that all people have access to clean air, clean water, and healthy communities.

**Eco-Cycle Solutions Hub**
A non-profit recycling and zero waste organization aimed at reducing climate emissions, creating green jobs, promoting social justice and investing in clean water, clean air and health soils at the local level.

We continue the conversation around this Environmental Roadmap on **ProGov21's Podcast**. Our latest episode features experts from **Policy Matters Ohio**, and the **Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE)** on a panel discussion all about progressive environmental policies.

Listen to our podcast on, our website, **Spotify**, **Apple Music**, or **Amazon Music**.