

RECOMMENDATION to Chatham County, NC, Commissioners for a Climate Retreat
April 21, 2025

RESOLVED, that the Board of Commissioners authorize planning to begin for a climate change retreat—agenda and date to be determined—on impacts of climate change occurring in Chatham County, appropriate responses, and resources for the development of a climate action plan.

PARTICIPANTS: Interested Commissioners, relevant County staff, invited experts, representatives from the Climate Change Advisory Committee, and knowledgeable area individuals.

PURPOSE: To undertake a deep dive into current and likely near-future impacts of the climate crisis in Chatham County, to receive a briefing on elements of local government climate action plans, and to identify appropriate funding sources and personnel for development of a climate action plan.

Unanimously adopted March 27, 2025, by the Chatham County Climate Change Advisory Committee

Two questions:

Why *Now*? Why plan for a climate retreat now?

(1) URGENCY: *Adverse impacts from climate change are intensifying.*

Extreme weather and warming temperatures are adversely affecting more and more individuals, communities, and family farms in Chatham County. Drought and drier growing conditions for crops, dangerous heat for outdoor workers, and escalating utility bills for cooling are now intensifying.

Warmer and more humid weather have also extended the mosquito and tick seasons which expose County residents and visitors to diseases such as Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, Lyme disease, and one of the most widespread mosquito-borne diseases in the state, the West Nile Virus. More recently, the Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) virus, born by mosquitos, has been documented in eastern North Carolina.

The North Carolina State Climate Office stated that warming has accelerated in recent decades and that this increased heat, “together with increases in humidity, will present a public health risk.”ⁱ

(2) POPULATION GROWTH, *land loss, and increased GHG emissions exacerbate climate impacts.*

Scientists warn that if greenhouse gas emissions continue to grow at the current rate, “North Carolina is projected to warm an additional *six to ten degrees* by 2100.” Over the next decades, we “can expect... increasingly hot nights, and more dangerous heat and extreme rainfall unless the global increase in heat-trapping gasses is stopped.” The North Carolina Climate Office concludes that “the changes to our climate in this century will be larger than anything experienced in North Carolina’s historical past. ⁱⁱ

(3) LOCAL GOVERNMENTS *are on the front lines*

Climate change impacts are felt most acutely at the local level. While local governments benefited from programs under the Biden Administration, the abject failure of the new Administration to address the climate crisis has placed local cities and counties as “first responders.” Now, local action is even more critical for the United States to have a chance at helping the world avert the worst effects of climate change.

To respond to this moment, the Climate Change Advisory Committee strongly believes Chatham County would benefit significantly by developing a comprehensive climate action plan.

Why a *Climate* Action Plan?

Why, indeed, when Plan Chatham contains directives for “Resiliency” and other climate-related measures in various chapters? CCAC, nevertheless, believes these measures fall short of comparable local government climate plans, recent climate science, and best practices for climate mitigation and adaptation.

Specifically, the Climate Change Advisory Committee believes a climate action plan, *while incorporating elements of Plan Chatham*, would enable the County to respond more comprehensively to the climate crisis by (1) identifying gaps and important stakeholders in the County, (2) increasing specificity and accountability, and (3) integrating the latest science and best practices for emissions controls and adaptation.

(1) IDENTIFY GAPS *and broaden the climate elements of Plan Chatham*

A climate action plan would identify climate change-related gaps in Plan Chatham and update important approaches, including new opportunities for electrification and residential “smart energy homes. A climate action plan would also give attention to major challenges for the County, including the importance of (1) preserving the rural character of Chatham County, its agriculture, and forests, (2) nurturing climate-resilient communities, (3) engaging people, businesses, and communities in responding to the climate crisis, and (4) securing a livable climate for future generations.

(2) INCREASE SPECIFICITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY *with detailed, measurable objectives and timelines.*

With clearer assignment of responsibilities and tracking of progress, a dedicated climate action plan ensures important goals are not diluted or overlooked in other County planning documents. For example, Durham’s climate action plan explicitly commits the city to measurable goals, including:

Transition fleet vehicles to zero emissions by 2040, reduce energy consumption in city buildings by at least 30% by 2040, power city operations and facilities with 80% renewable energy sources by 2030 and 100% by 2050.

A smart fellow I knew, the campaign director for an environmental group that I briefly headed, always insisted, “*A plan is not a plan until it is written down.*” By that, he meant not only that a plan be aspirational, but that it have detailed, measurable objectives, timelines, and the persons or departments responsible for delivery of those objectives.

(3) INTEGRATE THE LATEST SCIENCE AND BEST PRACTICES for emissions controls and adaptation.

In the last decade, we’ve seen significant changes in the County, but we have also witnessed new sources for alternative energies and approaches for sequestering carbon as well as for community preparedness. A climate action plan, therefore, is an opportunity to incorporate not only the most recent climate science, but also technological advancements and innovative approaches for addressing the climate crisis locally.

Nearby local governments are already moving in this direction. Raleigh, Chapel Hill, Hillsborough, Carrboro, New Bern, and Asheville as well as Orange County have adopted climate, resiliency, or sustainability action plans. And last year, Central Pines Regional Council developed, as a possible funding guide, a comprehensive Priority Climate Action Plan for Raleigh-Cary and Durham-Chapel Hill Metropolitan Statistical Areas, covering eight counties.

SUMMARY:

It is for these reasons that the Climate Advisory Committee unanimously recommends that you authorize and set in motion plans for a climate retreat.

By dedicating attention to the local, specific impacts of climate change, by receiving briefings on other local governments’ plans, Chatham County can develop a

measurable, actionable climate plan that goes beyond existing measures, contributing to a more resilient and sustainable future for County residents, farmers, businesses, and generations to come.

ⁱ North Carolina Climate Office, <https://climate.ncsu.edu/learn/climate-change/>

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