

Climate Change Task Force

Town of Stonington

152 Elm Street

Stonington, Connecticut 06378



December 4, 2020

Board of Selectmen

Town of Stonington

152 Elm Street

Stonington, Connecticut 06378

cc:

Jeffrey Callahan, Warden – Borough of Stonington

Dr. Van W. Riley, Ph.D. – Stonington Superintendent of Schools

RE: Climate Emergency Declaration

Dear Selectmen Chesebrough, Strunk and Downie:

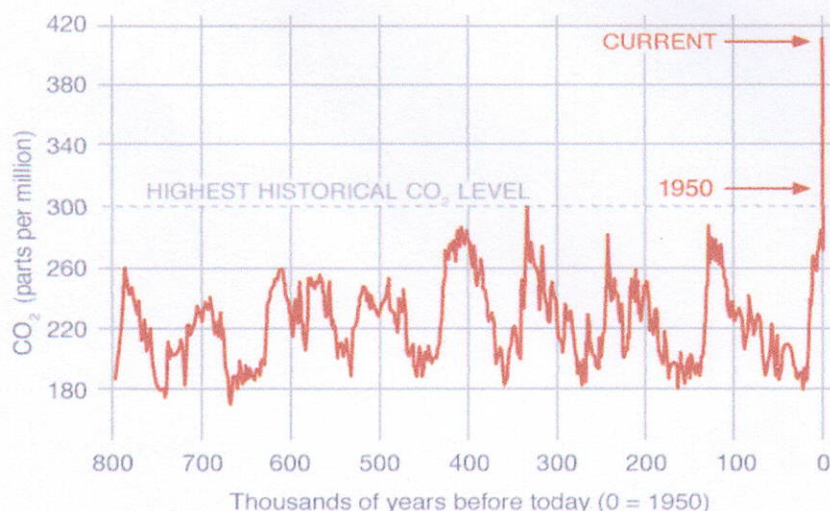
Attached is suggested text for a Climate Emergency Declaration for the Town of Stonington. The initial impetus for this declaration originated with two students of Stonington High School (Helen Gross and Sarah Berger) who are concerned with the future of our town and planet.

The time for action on the climate crisis is long overdue. Many towns, cities, states and the federal government are very good at planning, but are weak on implementation.

Every month, the data of five major climate indicators continues to get worse:

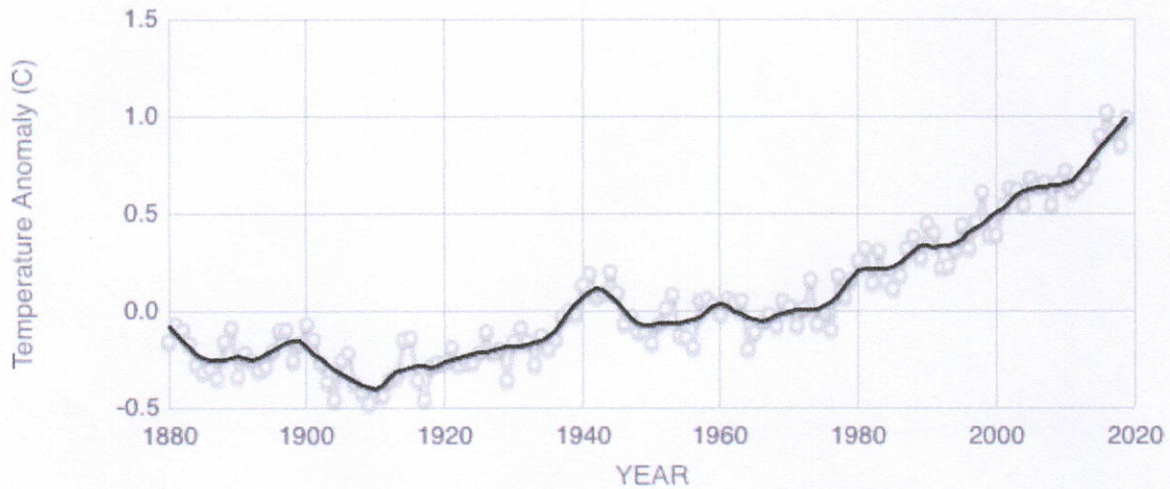
PROXY (INDIRECT) MEASUREMENTS

Data source: Reconstruction from ice cores.
Credit: NOAA



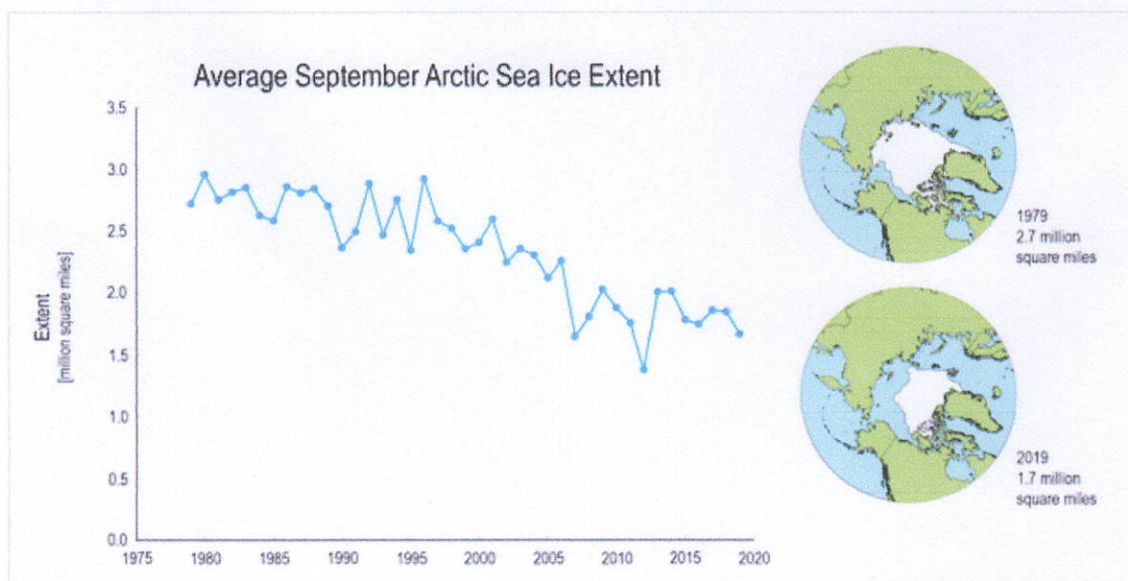
- World-wide carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions have reached 415 ppm – the highest ever recorded (NOAA – October 2020 data)

- Global average temperature is already 0.99°C (1.78°F) above the baseline. Nineteen of the 20 warmest years have occurred since 2001. (NOAA 2019 data)

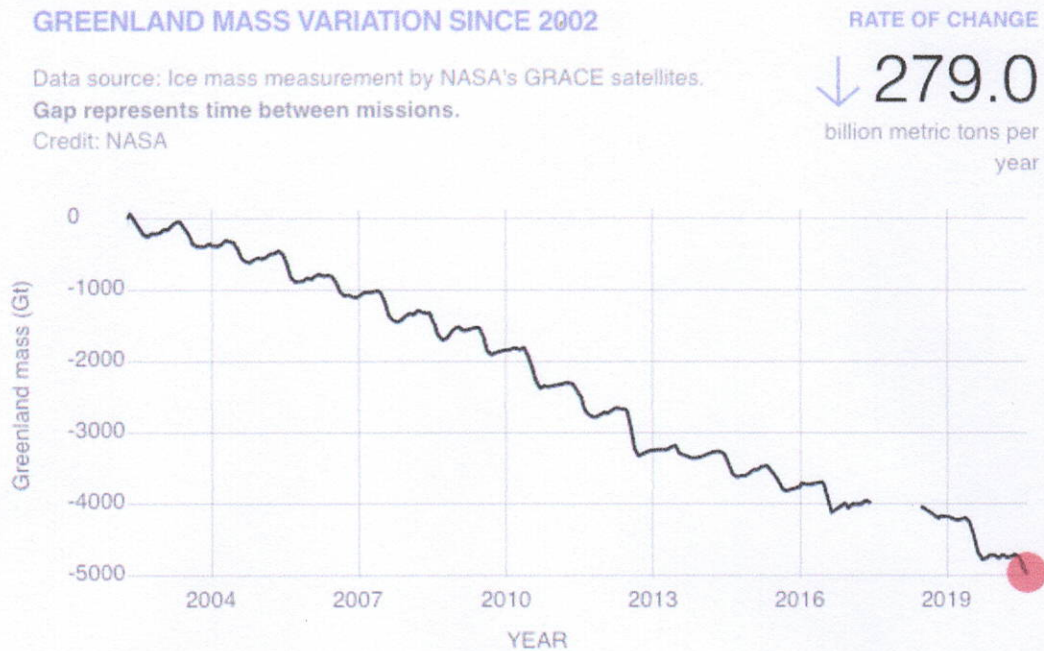


Source: climate.nasa.gov

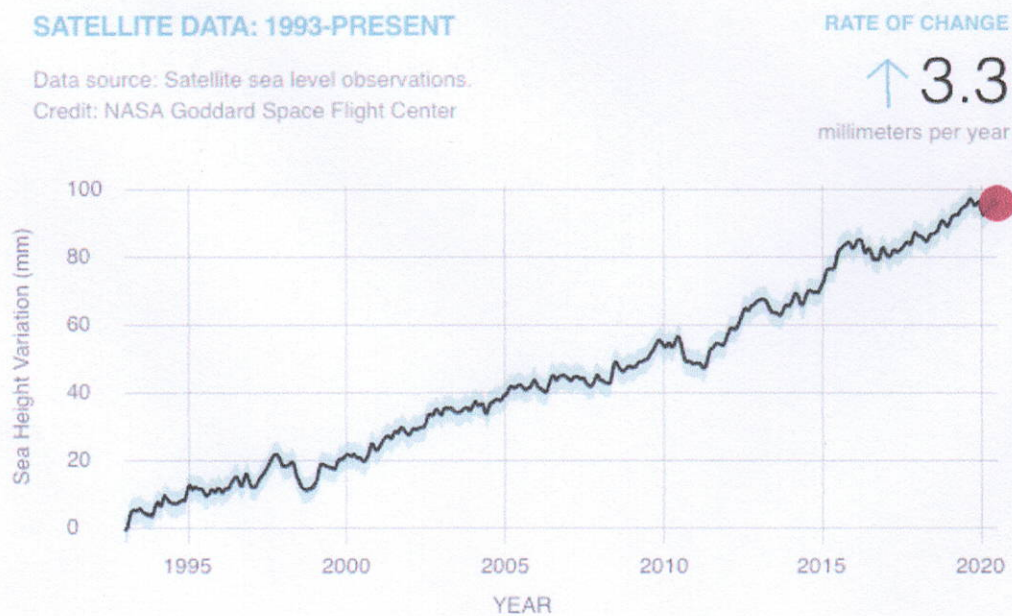
- Arctic sea ice has continued to decline over the past four decades. Some projections suggest the Arctic will be completely ice-free during summers by the middle of this century. (NASA and NOAA data – September 2019 data)



- Ice sheet data shows continued loss in both Antarctica and Greenland (NASA – September 16, 2020 data)



- Sea level rise has increased 95mm since 1993. Sea level rise is caused by water melting from ice sheets and expansion of seawater as it warms. (NOAA – July 6, 2020 data)



Locally, flooding events impacting programs at Mystic Seaport caused by higher tides, sea level rise and increased severe precipitation events are becoming more and more frequent numbering 1 to 2 events in recent years to an estimated 60 events by 2050.

Tuesday, June 25, 2019



MYSTIC
SEAPORT
MUSEUM

By supporting a climate emergency declaration, the Town of Stonington will join other towns and cities across Connecticut to urge the state to declare a climate emergency. This will unify climate action approaches and will help in gaining access to needed state and federal funds should enough towns join Stonington's action. It could also open the door for partnerships with adjacent communities to enact solutions that benefit from cooperation and economies of scale.

The longer we wait to take action, the more it will cost the residents of the town economically and health-wise. There is overwhelming consensus that climate change is mainly caused by human activity, especially the burning of fossil fuel. We must move from a carbon-based economy to one of sustainability through renewable energy sources. The capacity to do this already exists, but is blocked by complacency and fossil fuel lobbies. The youth of Stonington, their children and grandchildren deserve a planet at least as good as that enjoyed by the current generation of decision makers had when they were young.

We hope that the Borough of Stonington and Stonington school system will join support this effort and join other CT towns (New Haven, New Britain & Middletown) that have already adopted similar declarations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Newton'.

Richard Newton
Chairperson
for the Town of Stonington Climate Change Task Force

TOWN OF STONINGTON



SELECTMAN'S OFFICE DANIELLE CHESEBROUGH, FIRST SELECTMAN

152 Elm Street • Stonington, Connecticut 06378
(860) 535-5050 • Fax (860) 535-1046

CLIMATE EMERGENCY DECLARATION

The Board of Selectmen and residents of the Town of Stonington recognize the science and acknowledge the serious risks of climate change to our community, economy and ecosystems and make a commitment to urgently act. We publicly recognize climate change as a global emergency because of impacts to current and future residents of the Town of Stonington, the environment and all humankind.

We base this emergency declaration on:

- On April 22, 2016, world leaders from 175 countries recognized the threat of climate change and the urgent need to combat it by signing the Paris Agreement, agreeing to keep warming below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C (2.7°F)
- On October 8, 2018 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report: "Global Warming of 1.5°C" projected that limiting warming to 1.5°C (2.7°F) above pre-industrial levels will require deep emissions reductions and rapid, unprecedented transitions in all aspects of society; found that there are clear benefits to keeping warming to 1.5°C rather than 2°C or higher; and asserted that "Every bit of warming matters. Every year matters. Every choice matters."
- The State of Connecticut has established goals through a series of executive orders to achieve a 45% greenhouse gas reduction by 2030 and 100% zero carbon target for the electric sector by 2040.
- The 2018 Act Concerning Climate Change Planning and Resiliency requires that towns and the state use forecasts for sea level rise provided by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and Connecticut Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation (CIRCA) that show sea level in Long Island Sound will rise up to 20 inches (50cm) by 2050 and 4 feet or more by 2100.
- The Town of Stonington's 2015 Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) requires that the town prepare and plan for climate change.

- The Town of Stonington's 2017 Coastal Resiliency Report states that Stonington is vulnerable to a coastal flood event: "On a community-wide scale, 27% of the total land area is anticipated to be impacted by the 1000- year coastal flood event in 2050; this accounts for approximately 5,800 acres of land. The parcels in the impact area account for 53% of Stonington's total tax base, which represents approximately \$2 billion worth of property value."
- The Town of Stonington's 2017 Hazardous Mitigation Plan calls out many recommendations from the coastal resilience plan as action items to "reduce the loss of or damage to life, property, infrastructure and natural, cultural and economic resources".
- Current trends and projections show that Stonington has already exceeded the 1.5°C target and we can expect more frequent extreme precipitation and flooding events caused by sea level rise, coastal storms, heavy rain, hurricanes and tropical storms – as well as increased months of drought.
- The Town of Stonington can act in a leadership role by both converting to an ecologically, socially and economically regenerative economy at emergency speed, and by helping to catalyze a unified and just regional transition and climate emergency mobilization effort.

The town and its residents have taken strides to mitigate climate change and increase sustainability:

- The creation of a carefully researched 354 page report of August 2017 entitled "Town of Stonington Coastal Resilience Plan", acknowledging that the Town faces a climate emergency with potentially catastrophic implications for the town and its residents
- In contrast to many other towns, already has in place a Climate Change Task Force
- Recertification in 2018 to the FEMA Community Rating System
- Bronze Certification in 2020 in the SustainableCT Program
- Over 325 residents and several businesses have elected to install roof-top solar
- Signed on as a participating town to the Connecticut Coalition for Sustainable Materials Management
- Completed a Brownfield Inventory
- Support local agriculture with three farmer's markets and several farm stands
- Participates in C-PACE Program with at least two completed projects
- Implemented Pollinator Pathway Program and expanded Community Garden Program
- Uses Save Money and Reduce Trash (SMART) pay-by-the-bag program
- Implemented plastic bag and straws ban

While the above steps are substantial, they are insufficient for the current crisis. Through this emergency declaration the town and its residents recognize the urgency to act:

- We declare that we are in a state of emergency at a critical stage and acknowledge that all levels of government, civic groups, businesses and residents must commit to working together to restore a safe climate if extreme negative impacts on our community and globally are to be avoided.

- We note that it is still possible to restore a safe climate and prevent most of the anticipated long-term catastrophic climate impacts of unchecked emissions – but only if all levels of government around the globe adopt an emergency mode of action at the necessary scale and speed.
- This declaration provides the foundation upon which the Town of Stonington shall develop future priorities, legislation, policies, plans, budgets, and actions. The town will allocate additional resources, funding and staffing to:
 - Develop mitigation and adaptation initiatives (energy reduction; reduction of fossil fuel use, carbon sequestration etc.) to end town-generated greenhouse gas emissions by or before December 31, 2030.
 - Review existing policies and regulations making substantive changes to meet this goal including updating the Planning and Zoning Regulations to require green infrastructure, renewable energy systems and microgrids, and avoid the use of fossil fuel energy systems in all new and restored buildings.
 - The Town of Stonington will establish a relationship with the Connecticut Green Bank to help fund solar panel installation and will join the SolSmart Program and achieve GOLD rating by installing solar panels on buildings and over parking lots on ground-mounted canopies.
 - Create a public education campaign to achieve broad community support for the move into climate emergency actions.
 - Provide adequate funding to support matching requirements of federal and state climate mitigation grants.
 - The Board of Selectmen will encourage the Board of Education create a student advisory committee at Stonington High School to bring the young people's perspective to climate action, and to encourage student members to participate in the bi-monthly Climate Change Task Force meetings.
- In order to reach the zero emissions 2030 goal, the Board of Selectmen shall direct all town departments, boards and commissions to establish plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by both the town and wider community placing the highest priority on providing the benefits of a clean energy economy to all community members on an equitable basis. These plans are to be completed and submitted to the Board of Selectmen and the Climate Change Task Force no later than six months after the effective date of this order and shall contain an itemized timetable showing reductions in greenhouse gas emissions from their operations by calendar year (2022 through 2030). The town shall complete a Climate Emergency Plan no later than four months after the receipt of these timetables.
- The Town of Stonington and its Climate Change Task Force underscore the need for full community participation involving inclusion of all members of the community. This is a social justice issue that especially affects people of color and/or people who have low incomes; the town commits to an equitable transition to a fossil-fuel-free economy that requires full community participation. This includes support in the future for a carbon

fee (carbon pricing) and dividend (collected funds dispersed to community members) policy on the town and state level.

- The Town of Stonington's climate mobilization should: (1) accelerate adaptation and resilience strategies in preparation for intensifying local and global climate impacts with benchmark dates to monitor success; (2) protect trees, forests, and other open spaces because of their ability to draw carbon out of the atmosphere, and store it, and to help maintain the quality of our water supply by reducing runoff and erosion; and (3) ensure that the costs of such mobilization efforts do not unfairly burden those who are economically disadvantaged, and that the benefits of a realized, sustainable future accrue to all.

The Town of Stonington calls on state and federal elected officials to initiate a Climate Emergency mobilization and provide appropriate legislative, regulatory, and financial support to municipalities to implement local Climate Emergency initiatives.

Adopted by the BOARD OF SELECTMEN OF THE TOWN OF STONINGTON

At its meeting held on: _____

Danielle Chesebrough – First Selectman

June Strunk – Selectwoman

Deborah Downie – Selectwoman