



OEC [Action Fund]

Testimony on Utility Aggregation
Miranda Leppla, Vice President of Energy Policy
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Councilmember Dorans, Councilmember Remy, and members of Columbus City Council, my name is Miranda Leppla, and I'm the Vice President of Energy Policy for the Ohio Environmental Council Action Fund. Part of the OEC Action Fund's mission is to protect and enhance the environment and the health of all Ohio communities by advancing critical policy priorities. Thank you for allowing me to provide testimony today in support of the city's goal to aggregate Columbus's electricity usage and move our city to 100% renewable energy. While we wish we could be with you today to testify in person, as a science-based organization, the OEC Action Fund appreciates the caution being taken by Council in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and your encouragement for members of the public to take part remotely, so I am pleased to join you via webcast instead this evening.

The people most impacted by climate change are often the most vulnerable in our society, and that is true here in Columbus as well. In fact, a 2015 report¹ commissioned by the City of Columbus identified the impacts, and the vulnerabilities that Columbus residents face with a warming climate. Residents can expect to experience extreme heat and dangerously hot days with an additional three to seven weeks per year of temperatures exceeding 90F degrees, deteriorated air quality leading to greater incidence of asthma attacks and other respiratory conditions, and potential for contamination of water supplies due to stronger storms, runoff, and sewer overflows.²

Fighting climate change means fighting to protect all Columbus residents, particularly those that are already disproportionately impacted by warmer, wetter conditions, and

¹ [Climate Change in Columbus Ohio: An Assessment of Columbus' Key Climate Changes, Impacts and Vulnerabilities of Concern](#), Great Lakes Integrated Sciences and Assessment (GLISA) and the University of Michigan Climate Center; Other key partners in this process included The Ohio State University, the Natural Resource Defense Council, and the University of Michigan Climate Center, March, 2016.

² *Ibid*, pgs. 11-13.

worsening air quality. For example, Columbus families and small businesses may suffer greater economic hardship due to longer, more intense heat waves because they may need to increase the usage of air conditioning over spring, summer and fall.

The OEC Action Fund applauds the leadership by this Council and the Mayor's office to move forward with community choice aggregation and move the city to 100% renewable energy. Because our state legislature recently dismantled Ohio's critically important state renewable portfolio and energy efficiency standards, bold action at the city level to address climate change is more urgent than ever. The state legislature's elimination of money- and energy-saving efficiency rebate programs will impact communities with low incomes the most. The city's effort to move to 100% renewable energy and bolster efficiency city-wide is an important step toward addressing environmental injustices in our community and is a welcome breath of fresh air.

Columbus is the largest city in Ohio that has yet to aggregate, and the City's commitment to achieve 100% renewables by 2022 will ensure a sustainable future for central Ohio. The OEC Action Fund is pleased to see that the proposal here goes beyond just a symbolic gesture of setting a renewable energy target, as the announcements, the request for a preferred supplier, comments from Mayor Ginther and the stellar City sustainability staff all indicate a preference for sourcing from clean energy projects as close to home as possible.

The primary goals identified by the City for the aggregation program are to: (1) provide competitive retail energy supply costs for Columbus citizens and small businesses; (2) support renewable energy development, ***especially local renewable energy generation***, to advance Columbus' sustainable economy; and (3) to ensure that energy supplier(s) provide quality, reliable service and first-rate customer service.³

The focus on building local clean energy projects will ensure air quality improvements directly in our community, reducing air pollution and the city's carbon footprint, and providing cleaner air to breath to the poorest air quality neighborhoods of Columbus. It will also grow demand for local renewable energy, and by focusing on workforce development opportunities in the renewable energy sector, will boost the central Ohio economy and ensure sustainable jobs in the clean energy sector moving forward. The strong focus on local renewable generation will ensure that Columbus and central

³ City of Columbus, *Request for Columbus Community Choice Aggregation Preferred Electric Supplier Qualifications* at 14.

Ohio residents and businesses reap the economic benefits that solar, wind and energy efficiency can bring to the community.

By putting community choice aggregation on the ballot, Columbus voters will have the opportunity to vote to permit the city to pool our energy and use our bulk purchasing power to invest big in clean, renewable power. But not only that, a community choice aggregation program can be used as a tool to create innovative programs that save residents money and ensure cleaner air and better energy-saving programs exist in the future. For example, a local clean energy fund can be set up as part of the program that is populated over time and can be used to fund additional clean energy projects, or, specific to Columbus, generate supplemental revenue for the energy efficiency work through the city's Sustainable Steps program. With the state legislature passage of House Bill 6 last year, Ohio will lose its important utility energy efficiency programs at the end of 2020, but the community choice aggregation plan could create a new rebate revenue program to fill the gap left behind. Creating a fund for this purpose would help ensure that the residents of the six Columbus neighborhoods who had home energy audits during 2019 and 2020 through the Sustainable Steps Community Energy Savers program are actually able to implement the recommended efficiency improvements in their homes. The creative options available to encourage and support clean energy and energy efficiency for residents and small businesses through a community choice aggregation program are yet another reason the OEC Action Fund is so excited to see Columbus move to aggregate its significant consumption -- an estimated 1,699,332 MWh.

To ensure Columbus voters clearly understand from the ballot language why they should support the aggregation program, and so future leaders of the city understand the reason why Columbus voters approved this ballot measure, **the OEC Action Fund recommends that Council ensure the ballot language clearly states that the city is committed to purchasing 100% renewable energy by 2022.** It should be clear to the voters in Columbus and to future leaders that Columbus passed the ballot measure because they support 100% renewable energy and want to see Columbus take bold action on climate change.

Columbus is a young, smart city with progressive thinkers dedicated to creating a better future for everyone who calls Columbus home. Passing an aggressive community choice aggregation plan will put Columbus on the map, yet again, as a smart, sustainable, thriving midwest city where folks want to live and are able to have clean air to breathe when they do. Going 100% renewable and investing in energy efficiency measures shows that Columbus is working to address the impacts of

climate change for all of its residents, including the most vulnerable, by ensuring the benefits of cleaner air are available to all residents.

Passing a ballot measure to aggregate electric usage across the 14th largest city in the country and moving Columbus rapidly toward 100% clean energy, specifically working to ensure as much of that energy is produced within the state and as close to Columbus as possible, is an important and much needed step in helping Columbus reduce its carbon footprint, lower costs for businesses and households, and a huge step for all of Ohio in the fight against climate change. Further, and importantly, the aggregation measure is a much needed step toward remedying environmental injustices within our community.

Thank you for holding this public hearing and hearing our testimony. The OEC Action Fund hopes City Council will pass legislation to put community choice aggregation that gets Columbus to 100% renewable energy on the ballot, creating a more sustainable future for all Columbus citizens.