

Climate Stewardship Initiative

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Prepared by Peace and Social Concerns and Earth and Spirit Committees

Introduction

Over the past decade, many members of Portland Friends Meeting have felt a growing concern about global climate change. In recent months, the Earth and Spirit Committee (E&S) and the Peace and Social Concerns Committee (PSOC) have focused their attention on climate change, seeking to discern where and how we are led to respond to this potential crisis. We see climate change as relating to the Quaker testimonies of stewardship, peace, community, and equality.

We now offer this Climate Stewardship Initiative for the Meeting's consideration. We see this Initiative as further advancing and building on the leadings felt by individuals and various committees. We feel called to rise to our own greatest active resonance with these concerns, and hope to be of service to the Meeting community and the wider world.

We intentionally use the word "Initiative" because it is important to us that members (by which we also mean attenders) of the Meeting not feel pressure to engage in any of the below actions and ideas if they do not feel led to do so. We realize that there are members who may feel called in different directions, and who fear that climate change might become too central of a focus within the spiritual life at the Meeting. Thus, it is our hope that this Climate Stewardship Initiative not be divisive or disruptive to the very special community that is our Meeting.

The following are several selected avenues that E&S and PSOC will be exploring or possibly recommending to the PFM community over the next few months. We seek meeting-wide threshing of these actions and everyone's input and discernment. Furthermore, we do not anticipate that our commitment to reducing climate change will be a short-term endeavor, and thus see this Initiative as a living document that will evolve over time. Perhaps we will complete one goal and add another. Perhaps we will lay down a goal after realizing that way is not open. Above all, we hope that our efforts will be Spirit-led, and that continuing revelation will guide our work.

Further Greening the Meetinghouse

The Buildings and Grounds Committee has taken significant strides in greening the Meetinghouse and lightening our carbon footprint. An energy audit was conducted in 2011 and various recommendations were received. However, year-by-year, the market for renewables has become increasingly attractive, and E&S and PSOC would like to explore, along with Buildings and Grounds, whether the time has come to start weaning the Meetinghouse from fossil fuels.

First, we are excited about the possibility of establishing or joining a Community Solar Farm ("CSF"). A CSF is an off-site location where one can purchase or lease solar panels for her electricity needs. It is a way to tap into the solar market for individuals and institutions for

whom direct on-site solar installation is not feasible or desirable, as is the case for the Meetinghouse due to our limited land space and lack of a south-facing aspect. The beauty of a Community Solar Farm project is that although the Meeting itself has relatively modest electricity uses, the farm would be open to other individuals and institutions, such as members of the Meeting and other churches. Thus, the Meeting would be acting as a catalyst for many others to get off fossil fuels and onto solar for their electricity needs. E&S and PSOC are still in the exploration phase of this project, and at this point we are looking for someone who has at least ¼ acre of flat or south-facing land with full sun who would consider donating or leasing it for a Community Solar Farm.

Second, we are exploring ways to replace the natural gas boiler that provides our heat and hot water. Ideally, we would love to get off fossil fuels entirely. One possibility is air-source heat pumps, a technology that within the last couple years has seen major improvements for cold climates such as Maine. We are exploring whether air-source heat pumps could make sense for the entire Meetinghouse or perhaps just for the Meeting Room. The air-source heat pump runs on electricity, which means that if we can hook up to a Community Solar Farm then our electricity, heat and hot water would both be fossil-free solar. A side benefit of air-source heat pumps is that they don't just provide heat, but in the summer can also cool a space.

Fossil Fuel Divestment

Divestment is a strategy whereby an institution (or an individual) sells any investments it has in a particular kind of industry. Over the past couple years, many academic and religious institutions have chosen to divest from fossil fuels.

The good news is that PFM is already partially divested. Our investments are held primarily in Pax World Investments, and all of Pax's funds are divested from any company whose primary business is coal mining and production, or in most electric utilities whose reliance on coal is above the average of its home country. Pax World Investments is also in the process of divesting from oil sands (also known as tar sands) companies.

There is interest among E&S and PSOC for divesting completely from fossil fuels, and Pax World does offer two funds that are fully divested. However, we recognize the Finance's Committee's central role in this process and would like to explore the concern mutually with the Finance Committee to bring the leadings of PSOC and E&S before them for a thorough sharing and discussion. We anticipate that both the Finance Committee and the Meeting as a whole, after appropriate discernment, would have to come to a Meeting-level decision to fully divest from fossil fuels. We are appreciative of the careful thought that the Finance Committee gave to the Meeting's current investment vehicle (a fund that advances women-lead businesses and other socially responsible business practices around the world), and we will not undertake a recommendation to change or diversify these investment fund choices lightly.

At the same time, E&S and PSOC will encourage members to consider divesting themselves as individuals and families. We hope to offer resources and inspiration for such an important step. A few of us have already made this decision, and can share our experiences.

Voluntary Carbon Tax Witness

A federal carbon tax is another version of CCL's (see below) Carbon Fee and Dividend program. We believe that although a federal carbon tax should exist, we as individuals do not have to wait around for Congress to impose one on us. Mount Toby Meeting in Massachusetts has led the way in establishing a Voluntary Carbon Tax Witness whereby members can choose to periodically measure their own carbon footprint and then make a charitable contribution to a climate-related organization. E&S and PSOC plans to borrow and tweak this idea for PFM. Mount Toby tracks and celebrates their collective progress in these actions (while maintaining anonymity for individuals) and we would like to do something similar.

As we plan to implement it, an important component of the Voluntary Carbon Tax Witness will be to channel our giving towards an organization that focuses on climate justice. In other words, we aim to support an organization that is seeking to address the inequity issues of climate change. For example, it is generally acknowledged that many of the world's poorest communities face the gravest threats from rising sea levels and stronger storms. In addition, the switch from carbon-intensive energy sources to carbon-free sources will be especially difficult for those struggling simply to put food on their plates. We are still in the process of researching a suitable organization to recommend for the funds collected by the Voluntary Carbon Tax Witness. Beginning in the fall of 2015, we will roll out this program through announcements, sample materials, and perhaps one or two adult religious education or after-Meeting sessions.

Citizens Climate Lobby

The Citizens Climate Lobby (CCL, www.citizensclimatelobby.org) is a relatively new non-partisan, grassroots advocacy organization focused on national policies to address climate change. There are currently 257 chapters nationwide, including three in Maine, and a Portland Chapter is just getting underway.

E&S and PSOC believe that CCL is the most promising vehicle for effecting national legislative change. Because we have in Senator Collins one of the few Republican Senators who is open to considering meaningful debate and action on climate change, Mainers have both an opportunity and a challenge to change the political dynamic around climate change. We hope to tap into the resources of Friends Committee on National Legislation to aid our efforts with CCL.

Although we are not excluding supporting the actions of other organizations such as 350.org, for now we will focus our advocacy work on CCL's goal of creating a federal Carbon Fee and Dividend program that would internalize the costs of burning carbon-based fuels. It is a specific and achievable policy that many climate scientists and economists alike say is the best first-step to reduce the likelihood of catastrophic climate change.

Nonviolent Civil Disobedience

Some of us have been moved by the civil disobedience (CD) actions of Jay O'Hara and others in the climate change movement. At this point, E&S and PSOC are not recommending any Meeting-wide CD actions, but we are open to following the Spirit as we are led. We may form a working group of interested members to consider engaging in such an action. We may

also consider how we as committees or we as a Meeting could provide spiritual support for a CD action.

Other Meaningful Actions

The two committees also want to stand in solidarity with all of our members and friends who are acting in their personal lives, within other committees of Meeting, or with outside organizations, in all the myriad ways that helpfully impact Earth stewardship issues. Examples include activism at the State level and local levels, pollution prevention, forest protection, wildlife conservation, and clean water programs, to name just a few. Because there are so many valid issues and such a diversity and richness within the Meeting, it has been a challenge to bring the Meeting together in the past around specific concrete actions. PSOC and E&S hope to rally themselves and others in the Meeting around the particular actions in this Climate Stewardship Initiative to end the paralysis and move forward, but the committees in no way seek to diminish or detract from any and all other efforts. In fact, we would like to find a way to recognize or share the information of those efforts within the Meeting, so at least like-minded individuals can find those with whom they may have an affinity to work together outside of these two committees (in whatever other context) without limiting the committees or each other, and allowing unity to be found in ways large and small. We are looking for good ways to acknowledge and recognize such other efforts without impairing the work of the committees and are very open to suggestions in this regard. We hope to offer at least one awareness session for each topic to share more information—these may be in conjunction with Adult Religious Ed or come from the two committees as is most fitting.

Insofar as we understand the breadth of the possibilities of Climate Stewardship concerns, we are humbly choosing to narrow our initial focus to a manageable range of issues and projects. We welcome your feedback on this Initiative, and we invite anyone who would like to become more involved in any particular issue or project as well as those who are carrying environmental concerns which they would like to recommend these committees to take up at some point - to come forward and contact the clerk of either committee: Aaiyn Foster (af@fosterwellnessnow.com) or Rob Levin (rob@roblevin.net).

In conclusion, the committees are hopeful to launch this Climate Stewardship Initiative, to reach all who are willing within the Meeting community to engage, participate and move forward with these programs with every size and scale of commitment or tentativeness, and all the while, to recognize and encourage other parallel but different efforts, and to offer respect and space for those who do not feel any leadings in these areas.