

Elizabeth Burton
for People for Climate Action - Seattle

February 3, 2020

Mayor Jenny A. Durkan
Office of the Mayor
City of Seattle

Dear Mayor Durkan:

I am writing on behalf of People for Climate Action - Seattle regarding your Executive Order 2020-01, Advancing a Green New Deal for Seattle. The goal of People for Climate Action - Seattle and its partner PCA chapters (<https://peopleforclimateaction.org>) is to help King County and all its cities develop and implement action plans sufficient to address the global climate emergency. There are now PCA chapters in 15 King County cities, with a combined membership well over 500 citizens.

We want to thank you for taking action to advance solutions to the climate emergency and make the Green New Deal for Seattle a success. Among the positive policies included in your Executive Order are the directive to departments to work with key stakeholder groups, creation of a Green New Deal City Team, the focus on high-impact and “top 10” climate actions, and decarbonizing the buildings and transportation sectors that account for most of Seattle’s core greenhouse gas emissions. We especially appreciate your intention to move toward fossil-free municipal buildings, as an important first step toward citywide decarbonization of all buildings.

However, we are concerned that installation of natural-gas heating in the remodeled Seattle Center Arena will lock in additional greenhouse gas emissions for years or decades to come. According to Daniel Beekman’s January 9, 2020 article in *The Seattle Times*, the arena is not subject to the Executive Order’s ban on fossil fuel heating and cooking sources in new or substantially altered municipal buildings. Heating the arena for the projected 130 annual sports events and concerts per year is projected to emit 1,207 metric tons of greenhouse gases (DEIS, April 2018, p. 10-12).

We ask that an investigation be ordered to determine if ground-source heat pump technology is a real alternative to natural-gas heat. The large arena floor could be an ideal location for a well field. Because the flooring will have to be changed for different sports, it should be straightforward to design a floor that would provide easy access to service a ground source well field, although please note that this service is seldom needed. But it is necessary to know the characteristics of the ground beneath to properly design a ground-source heat pump system. Therefore we urge that as soon as the arena is excavated to its final level, that a drill rig be brought in to make test well drilling. This is close to an ideal situation for the use of this technology. If it proves to be inappropriate (rather unusual for Seattle), an air source system would still be better than natural-gas heat and should be pursued.

We are aware that demolition and excavation are taking place and that this is not an ideal time to negotiate change orders with the City's arena partners and contractors. But given the climate emergency we are in, we ask that you and your staff work with the City Council and the Oak View Group to find a negotiated path -- and funding -- that will lead to installation of a carbon-neutral heating system at the Seattle Center Arena. Although this could carry a significant price tag outside of the budgeting season, it would avoid the cost of installing separate heating and cooling systems, as well as conversion of the heat source in a future year. We know this is not an easy task, but it is one that, once accomplished, will demonstrate that Seattle is serious and aggressive about reducing carbon emissions.

Installation of a natural-gas heating system at the arena is contrary to Seattle's long-standing goal of reducing carbon emissions 50 percent below 2008 levels by 2030, and to net zero emissions by 2050. As you are aware, the City Council-adopted Green New Deal Resolution calls for zero carbon emissions in Seattle by 2030, and Executive Order 2020-01 calls for emissions reductions consistent with no more than a 1.5-degree Celsius worldwide increase above pre-industrial temperatures (a goal that requires 45 percent emissions reduction by 2030, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change). *To accomplish any of these ambitious but necessary goals, every action by the City of Seattle must reduce, not increase, carbon emissions.*

Thank you for your attention, and we hope you will take this urgent step to slow the pace of climate devastation. We look forward to working with you in the future and supporting other emissions-reducing actions your administration will propose.

Sincerely,

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