

A Path Forward

Action Steps for Harrisonburg to reach
50% solar & wind energy,
25% increased energy efficiency by 2025



Clean Energy for All
Harrisonburg

We are in the midst of a climate crisis. Scientists throughout the world agree that we must move from fossil fuels to clean energy sources within 10 years (2030), to avoid catastrophic effects on our communities, our food security, and our economy. The electric grid accounts for 30% of the total US greenhouse gas emissions (GHG). Success in reducing GHGs will depend on dramatically expanding renewable energy and energy efficiency. 25% of Americans now live in cities and states committed (1) to achieving 100% clean, renewable energy (RE).

A few cities have already reached (2) this goal. We too can join this movement, and as outlined below, there are numerous benefits. The time to act is now.

Action Steps to 50% Renewable Energy by 2025

It's not as hard as it sounds. Our public electric utility, Harrisonburg Electric Commission (HEC) is owned by the City and operates pursuant to Harrisonburg City Code. Our City Council has the authority to modify this Code. Dominion Energy, which provides electricity to HEC, has already agreed to provide renewable energy to our grid if requested to do so (through the HEC contract, section 3.6). We, therefore, can make this change by supporting our City Council to do the following:

1. Collaborate with HEC to update our City Code, by establishing a mandate to include renewable electricity from wind and solar sources.
2. Establish a minimum renewable energy requirement of 50% solar and wind by 2025 and 100% by 2030.
3. Create a low-interest On-Bill Recovery Loan program for low-income households to install solar panels.
4. Support City endorsement for state-wide solar initiatives including Shared Solar and the Solar Freedom Act that benefits renters and low-income.
5. Eliminate the current 2% cap on distributed solar.
6. Create a 10 to 20% energy carve-out in the HEC - Dominion agreement for locally-owned and produced solar and wind energy. This can include residential and business rooftop solar as well as community solar.

(1) <https://www.sierraclub.org/ready-for-100>

(2) <https://www.sierraclub.org/ready-for-100/commitments>

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Action Steps to Increase Energy Efficiency 25% by 2025

Lower-income residents pay 2 to 5 times more from their income for energy than average income residents. Poorly weatherized homes mean high bills, leading to evictions and homelessness. Improving energy efficiency can make housing more affordable with reduced operational costs. Here are some things our city can do:

1. Add a Weatherization Share option with HEC. We currently have an "Energy Share" option on our HEC bill to help others pay for unaffordable energy bills. We can add or change this to a "Weatherization Share" option, for low-income household weatherization and energy efficiency upgrades that save energy and reduce energy costs by as much as 50%.
2. Support City Council to create and authorize a City Ordinance for C-PACE, a federal program that provides financial capital for energy-saving improvements for commercial and rental properties where renters benefit with cost savings and increase comfort.
3. Create an "Inclusive Financing" program with bill neutrality and At-Meter Financing to benefit renters.
4. Create a low-interest On-Bill Recovery Loan program for low-income households to fund weatherization and energy efficiency upgrades.
5. Redirect a portion of HEC's surcharge to support weatherization and energy efficiency programs for Low to Middle Income and ALICE residents.
6. Explore "Green leasing" programs for win-win incentives for both renters and property owners that increase weatherization and energy efficiency and reduce costs.
7. Create a Harrisonburg one-stop hub and website for local energy assistance that includes diverse language access and outreach to all low-income including seniors, and people with disabilities.
8. Actively promote and provide free energy audits through HEC for all residents.

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Benefits to Residents, Local Businesses, Churches, and Nonprofits

Helping residents, and especially vulnerable populations.

- Weatherizing lowers energy bills, making housing more affordable.

- Lower risk of eviction and homelessness.

- Cost savings frees money up for other uses and needs.

- Enhanced dignity and self-sufficiency.

- Reduced dependency on federal assistance programs.

Better health and productivity.

- Lower pollution means better air quality.

- Healthy homes, better comfort, and well-being

- Healthy workplaces, less absenteeism.

Local employment opportunities:

- Solar energy sector

- Energy efficiency sector

- Community weatherization - Youth Conservation Corps

Psychological health:

- Creation care, stewardship of the Earth

- Community action protects against climate anxiety/depression.

The window of opportunity for limiting our climate crisis is closing fast. The benefits of action are many. Effective local action requires the involvement of our City Council and our municipal utility, HEC. The City Code around HEC has not been modified since 1956. Times have changed, and time is very short. We need to show our leaders some workable solutions and show them our support. **Will you join us?**