

[21-0075R](#)

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Written testimony in support of [21-0075R](#) with amendments

We thank Councilman Conway for his leadership in addressing the threat of climate change and to make robust, transformative changes to core city systems.

While we are generally supportive of goals that aim to take climate action now, we're wary of the definition of "carbon neutral." The problem with "carbon neutrality by 2050" is that 2050 is too far off and it gives local polluters a free pass to continue polluting while questionably "offsetting" those emissions elsewhere in the globe, often with problematic and sketchy offset schemes. Carbon offsets are an accounting tool deployed to avoid making meaningful emissions reductions by the corporations most responsible for the climate crisis. The logic articulated by many proponents of a carbon tax goes something like this: with a tax, the costs of using fossil fuels might someday rise high enough to cause a shift toward renewable energy, which will outcompete fossil fuels; and anyway, even if a tax cannot achieve this, it will surely be better than nothing, or at least better than other market-based mechanisms like carbon trading, and we can put off addressing (or even thinking about) the real problems until later.

Climate Justice Alliance communities state that carbon trading and carbon offsets are fraudulent climate mitigation mechanisms that, in fact, help corporations and governments keep extracting and burning fossil fuels. Offsets, then, do not reduce emissions. In fact, they do not even compensate for emissions, as they are advertised to do, merely creating an illusion that something is being done about climate change. Instead, they allow emissions to increase and thus exacerbate global warming.

A 2016 Report stated that 75% of the credits issued were unlikely to represent real reductions, and that if countries had cut pollution on-site instead of relying on offsets, global carbon dioxide emissions would have been 600 million tons lower.

Further, as research on offset projects in the global South has demonstrated, they violate human rights of local communities and Indigenous Peoples and result in land grabs. The search for a business-friendly climate solution that would avoid the catastrophes of carbon trading has brought about a resurgence in the popularity of carbon tax schemes. Yet, increasing evidence shows that carbon taxes, like emissions trading schemes, fail to reduce emissions, much less address the root causes of global warming, and in addition place disproportionate burdens on those who are already oppressed under a heavily fossil-dependent regime.

Facing the climate emergency, we are at the time when we should be reducing emissions right now, today. The procrastinating carbon neutral approach is adding 3 times the emissions, with the sketchy offset schemes described above, that take no real action until closer to the due date of 2040, 2045 or even 2050.

One real solution to cut on-site pollution, locally, would be to end incineration and the Vicinity Energy downtown district heating system that is pouring pollutants into Baltimore's air. Their steam loop provides steam heat by burning natural gas and using steam from Wheelabrator's trash incinerator. Wheelabrator and Vicinity are responsible for a combined 48% of the city's industrial GHG emissions.

Campaigns to remove subsidies from fossil fuel extraction and use are a more practical place to start in addressing climate change than campaigns to institute carbon taxes. Without public subsidies in the form of massive loans and incentives as well as, ultimately, the labor, land and livelihoods of the working class, people of color and impoverished communities, fossil fuel industries would not be viable and the question of carbon taxes would become moot.