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Mayor Elorza Joins City Council and Community Partners to Announce Package of New Policies to Advance Climate Justice Goals

PROVIDENCE, RI – Mayor Jorge O. Elorza today joined Councilwoman Helen Anthony, Councilman Pedro Espinal, and community partners to announce a suite of initiatives aimed at addressing the climate crisis and institutionalizing the Climate Justice Plan.

“The looming threat of the climate crisis needs everyone at the table to define the legacy left for future generations,” said Mayor Jorge Elorza. “I’d like to thank the leaders on the City Council and in the community, who have helped champion this legislation and new policies, which are important steps to making Providence a more equitable, healthy, and climate resilient city.”

The [Building Energy Reporting Ordinance](#) (BERO), which requires that large buildings in the City report their annual energy use to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, will be introduced during the City Council meeting on Thursday, January 21. A separate ordinance will be introduced that will codify the goals and targets of the [Climate Justice Plan](#) in the City’s code of ordinances. This ordinance will also make important changes to the Environmental Sustainability Task Force to uplift youth voices and the environmental justice community.

“Our future depends on addressing climate change now. I have been an advocate for energy benchmarking long before I was elected to the City Council,” said Councilwoman Helen Anthony. “Cities across the country are benchmarking energy usage because it results in real cost savings and helps us measure progress toward sustainability. If Providence is to become carbon neutral by 2050, we must engage every part of our economy and use every tool we have. Real sustainability will take effort by every single one of us, and I am thrilled that our city is taking this important step today. I want to thank

the team at our Office of Sustainability as well as the members of the Environment Sustainability Task Force for their hard work for a sustainable future for the City of Providence.”

Buildings account for over 70% of Providence’s greenhouse gas emissions and BERO is critical to reducing emissions from this sector. Over thirty other cities across the U.S. such as Boston, Portland (ME and OR), Pittsburg, Saint Louis, Kansas City, and Orlando have successfully adopted similar policies that help conserve energy. In the year 2030 alone, this policy is expected to save 535,538 MMBtus, \$14,814,601, and 57,080 tons of CO₂e. These savings are equivalent to powering almost 6,000 homes for a year.

“We use Portfolio Manager for all our multi-family projects, and we are building ‘net zero ready’ for new construction,” said Peter Gill Case, Principal of Truth Box, Inc. “Benchmarking with Portfolio Manager helps us make improvements to our existing projects and make sure we are doing what we can to conserve energy. We applaud the city for taking this important step towards saving us all money, and the environment as well.”

BERO will require large commercial, institutional, and multifamily buildings over 10,000 square feet to use [ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager](#) to assess their buildings’ energy performance and report energy use information to the City, which then verifies and discloses that data to the public. After accumulating five years of data, poor-performing buildings would be required to take energy savings action to save money and help the City achieve its emissions reductions goals.

“The Environmental Sustainability Task Force commends the Mayor, Councilwoman Anthony, and Councilman Espinal for championing these ordinances,” said Sue AnderBois, Providence Resident and Chair of the Environmental Sustainability Task Force. “Codifying the Office of Sustainability and the goals of the Climate Justice Plan demonstrates that the city takes seriously two of the largest issues in our city – racial injustice and climate change. We also support the changes to the Task Force, which will make us more reflective of the City's population.”

The ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager tool is simple to use and is free of charge. It provides standardized and easily understood data by which building performance can be compared. The City has been using this tool to benchmark its buildings since 2010. It has also been used by building owners in the [RePowerPVD Energy Challenge Program](#) as well as by the state and other utility energy programs. There is strong evidence that ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager helps drive energy improvements. For the 35,000 buildings that used the tool to benchmark energy performance from 2008 to 2011, average energy use declined by 7%.

“After many years of hard work and wholehearted dedication, the REJC is excited to have the City Council codify the goals and targets of the Climate Justice Plan,” said Monica Huertas, member of the Racial and environmental Justice Committee. “We hope this is one step in many to achieve racial and environmental justice for all residents of Providence.”

The second ordinance will update the 2011 ordinance that created the Director of Sustainability position to also establish the Office of Sustainability. It will also overhaul the Environmental

Sustainability Task Force, which, under the new policy, will be called the Sustainability Commission, by adding four new seats. These seats will include two new environmental justice seats and two new youth seats. The policy also solidifies the Office of Sustainability's role in the City's [Capital Improvement Plan](#) processes in helping to ensure that the City's investments are in line with Providence's climate and sustainability goals.

On January 19th, the [City Plan Commission](#) will also review an update to the sustainability section of the Comprehensive Plan, a guiding document for development in the city. This update, if approved by the City Council, will help ensure future development is in line with the Climate Justice Plan and work to alleviate environmental justice issues by acknowledging past harms and current environmental injustices.

Two resolutions were also passed at the January 7th City Council meeting in alignment with the Climate Justice Plan. The first requests that the Office of Sustainability collaborate with the Purchasing Department to develop an Environmentally Preferable Purchasing (EPP) policy. An EPP policy will guide City staff in making purchasing choices that minimize negative impacts on human health and the environment. The second resolution calls on the City's Office of Sustainability, the Department of Public Works, and the Environmental Sustainability Task Force to produce a residential composting plan to explore current composting practices in Providence and identify short and long-term steps to eliminate food waste from the City's residential waste stream.

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