

Responses for Jessyn Farrell, Interim Director, Office of Sustainability and Environment

1. Why do you think leaders, including local and national elected officials, have failed to take meaningful action to address the climate crisis, despite the most dire warnings from scientists?

In spite of the overwhelming scientific consensus about the climate emergency and the broad public support for urgent action, we, as a society, have failed to take meaningful action in large part because of the systemic power of the fossil fuel industry. As a former legislator, I saw firsthand how the fossil fuel industry is coddled with tax preferences, lax regulation and even constitutional requirements that limit gas tax dollars to car-centric highway projects.

In addition, the fossil fuel industry has leveraged 50 years of trickle-down economic policy (which is based on tax cuts for the wealthy, deregulation for the powerful and wage suppression for workers) to claim that job losses and business closures will accompany any responsible carbon legislation, using an avalanche of money for well-paid lobbyists and political dollars to stifle initiatives to combat climate change.

Fortunately, in Seattle we have found the keys to unlocking progress on climate – by taking the economic fight head-on with the Green New Deal and flipping the trickle-down narrative upside down. Instead of the tired argument that environmental regulations kill jobs, the Green New Deal focuses on investing in workers and the green economy. Rather than promoting sacrifice and austerity (as the fossil fuel industry would claim environmental regulations will bring), the Green New Deal fosters broad-based economic security through investments that create a diverse, equitable green economy that works to benefit those who have been historically and currently most harmed by racial, social, and environmental injustice.

By investing in workers and low-carbon fields of employment, we protect the environment and strengthen the economy at the same time. I am looking forward to working with the great team at OSE and the Green New Deal Oversight board to support citywide, regional and state partnerships to advance clean energy career pathways, training, economic development, and WMBE growth in the clean energy sector to accelerate meaningful action to equitably address the climate crisis.

2. What role do you see for the Office of Sustainability and Environment towards reducing Seattle's greenhouse gas emissions?

Seattle has long been a leader and pioneer on the environment – from passing landmark policies to reduce carbon pollution and innovative programs that prioritize environmental justice to ensure healthy and resilient communities -- and OSE has been key to that effort. I see OSE as playing a lead role in reducing climate emissions and more specifically, leading with climate justice to ensure those most harmed by racial, economic, and environmental injustice have access to investments, economic opportunity, and decision-making.

As interim Director of OSE I have been working across departments and with OSE staff to create a coherent climate agenda that rests on three foundational pillars: building a clean energy economy, reducing climate pollution, and building healthy communities. My hope is that these pillars will guide our work on climate change by considering root causes, current impacts, and future planning for a healthy and resilient city. In the near term, we can make progress on all of these pillars through work that is happening right now across the city.

For example, OSE is leading the efforts to reduce carbon pollution and support a just transition away from fossil fuels by decarbonizing our buildings and transportation sectors. We are working to ensure every new building is all-electric, and existing buildings get retrofitted to replace dirty fossil fuels with cleaner electricity. Seattle has led the way by passing one of the strongest energy codes in nation, we support building owners with low and no cost “Tune-ups” that increase efficiency, and we will launch a new policy for commercial and multi-family buildings and municipal decarbonization strategy soon.

On the transportation side, we have committed to reducing transportation emissions so that 100% of shared mobility, 90% of personal trips, and 30% of goods and delivery are zero emissions by 2030. To meet these goals, OSE is working with SDOT to ensure we are investing in walking, biking, transit, and electrifying everything that moves people, goods and services.

The bottom line is that we have many of the right tools in place and now the challenge is to rapidly scale up our investments to achieve our climate justice goals.

The good news is that we know how to make major investments in our city and region. We can use the investments in regional transit as a guide, which I worked on firsthand, as the Executive Director of Transportation Choices Coalition helping pass ST2 and as a legislator helping write and pass the legislation that authorized ST3 with an aspirational vision that was scaled to the size of the crisis.

As the Director of OSE, I will be committed to making the same case for transformational climate investments in our city and region based on the three pillars of a clean energy economy, reducing climate pollution and building healthy communities.

3. The Office of Sustainability and Environment has many areas of work from administering food programs to analyzing building energy standards. What changes would you make to the work of the department, if any?

I would like to build on OSE’s strong track record of centering Race and Social Justice in our climate, environmental, and food access work. This means leading with environmental and climate justice to ensure those most harmed by racial, economic, and environmental injustice aren’t left behind and are part of the solution.

For example, OSE this year is focusing on advancing Seattle’s Equity & Environment Agenda by investing in community-led climate and environmental actions through Environmental Justice Committee and Environmental Justice Fund and King Conservation District Seattle Community Partnership grants (~\$1M in grants). We are aligning and coordinating emerging, existing, and planned projects, programs, and investments to implement community priorities outline in the Duwamish Valley Action Plan to advance racial justice, resilience, economic opportunity, and equitable development. We are also working with

an interdepartmental and multi-stakeholder effort to release Seattle's Food Action Plan, a bold roadmap for a just, sustainable, and resilient food system.

While there is comprehensive and robust work happening at OSE to center race and social justice there are additional goals I would like to pursue as Director such as increasing the diversity of OSE's staff to further Seattle's Workforce Equity (WFE) Initiative which is the "City's commitment to eliminate racial disparities and achieve equity for the City's employees." This initiative contextualizes the race and social justice problems for workforce issues that are of interest to OSE including targeted recruitment, minimizing bias in employment decisions, employment pathways, and leadership development programs.

Since the initiative's launch, yearly updates are provided to ensure accountability to City employees and the community about the implementation of the WFE Strategic Plan. The latest report, [2021 Work Force Equity Update Report](#), highlights representation of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) as the "lowest bar" of WFE. While BIPOC populations collectively made up 42% of the City's workforce in 2020, OSE's BIPOC representation has remained around 25% since 2020. To address this disparity in representation, I would like to implement one of the recommendations of OSE's Change Team to hire a consultant to assist us with recruitment so that we have a diverse hiring pool in all of our hiring processes. Additionally, we will assess any organizational culture changes we should make to assist with retention of all staff, especially BIPOC staff members.

Overall, our work streams are furthering our goals of achieving climate justice and health, resilient communities. The challenge now, as outlined in question 2, is that we need to scale our work to address the climate crisis and meet community needs whether it is around healthy food access, green economy pathways, investments to reduce carbon emissions, or community resilience in the face of a changing climate. This will take more resources put into our programs as well as the necessary staff and administrative capacity necessary to support expanded programming. Fortunately, we are in a moment of expanded state and federal resources and my job, as Director of OSE, will be to grow the office strategically in keeping with our goals and in a way that fosters a thriving and impactful staff. In the near term this means taking several actions to leverage more resources: developing clear funding priorities that include phased funding amounts so that we can tailor our funding requests to the amount of funding available, creating staff capacity to apply for state, federal and philanthropic grants, coordinating funding requests across departments and other jurisdictions, and continuing to innovate policy concepts and develop strategic partnerships so that we are well-positioned to take advantage of emerging opportunities.