



THE PRESIDENT

October 7, 2021

RE: Response to October 1 SDSU Climate Strike Letter

Dear Gener Abdon and the SDSU Climate Strike Organizers,

First and foremost, I sincerely appreciate the leadership and advocacy each of you are providing to advance sustainability at SDSU. As you know, this is an important priority for the university, so much so that it was one of the major focus areas for the strategic plan. While there is broad agreement among leadership and students on many of the demands put forth, our constraints in implementing them—and in what time period—are largely resource based. That said, we will continue to move forward with plans and advocacy for additional resources, apply for grants and other external funding which can kick-start our capital projects, and seek out areas where savings of energy and waste management costs might create more resources to invest. Below are status updates or responses for the eight requests highlighted in your October 1 letter:

Point #1:

Allocate more money towards the Department of Energy and Sustainability so that a sustainability coordinator, sustainability center coordinator, and sustainable contract and procurement manager be hired.

Response #1

The new Office of Energy and Sustainability is currently being established, as recommended by the representative Strategic Activity 15 committee, and the search for the new director is already underway. The Director will also help work with the university to identify expanded funding for the additional positions recommended by the committee, including by leveraging energy and cost savings into one resource pool, pursuing external grants, and through partnerships: all of which provide a more diverse and more sustainable set of funding sources to elevate the work of the new Office, in collaboration with its student employees.

Point #2

Obtain 4 MW of solar panels on-campus & install heat recovery chillers on-campus in replacement of the co-generation plant.

Response #2

In 2020, SDSU solicited bids for installation and management of solar panels on parking structures, parking lots, and a number of buildings via a CSU Solar License and Power Purchase Agreement (SLPPA) on our San Diego campus. With the competitive bid process, the costs from all vendors were significantly higher than our most expensive energy procured by the grid. However, SDSU has signed a SLPPA for SDSU Mission Valley to add 0.6 MW of solar photovoltaics (PV) that will generate 1,237,995 kWh per year with the intention to add another 0.3 MW system in the Riverpark that will generate another 520,522 kWh per year.

In addition, the campus is already actively working on a solicitation for consultants to assist in mapping the plan and associated costs to become carbon neutral by 2030. The decommissioning of the cogeneration plant, alternatives to existing energy and campus heating, and energy reduction measures will be part of the scope of this study as part of our plans to reduce dependency on greenhouse gas emitting sources.

Finally, we used one-time dollars recently to fund a pilot installation of a heat-recovery chiller in the first of the phased conversions from steam to heating hot water across campus. This is a major sustainable energy project for our campus, and will continue to expand as we move away from our dependency on our gas-powered steam system and comply with direction from the State and CSU system to electrify our buildings.

Point #3

Obtain a MTS Universal Transit pass paid for by my administration for all students, faculty and staff

Response #3

SDSU currently works with MTS to offer lower pass costs to our students than for the public, using parking funds to subsidize the cost. The Parking funding source itself has actually reduced over time due to declining parking permit sales, and our university's resistance to raise parking fees for students. For context, the Education Code Section 89721(i) requires campus parking operations to be fully self-supporting, and no other university resources can be used to cover any of the costs of parking or transportation infrastructure. The university is currently paying bond debt on a yearly basis in excess of 2.5 million for existing parking structures, and as such the declining parking permit sales diminishes our ability to subsidize the MTS pass at a higher level. However, the University is committed to further negotiating with MTS, and is already in conversation with them, to both discuss routes and costs of the MTS Universal Transit pass.

Point #4

Stop investing in fossil fuel companies.

Response #4

Announced yesterday by the CSU Chancellor's Office, California State University will no longer make future fossil fuel investments in any university investments portfolios and funds. <https://www.calstate.edu/csu-system/news/Pages/California-State-University-Will-Not-Make-Fossil-Fuel-Investments-in-University-Investment-Portfolios-and-Funds.aspx>

Most of the 23 university investments are managed at the CSU system level, and so this announcement is directly impactful for SDSU as well. However, SDSU does have several auxiliaries which themselves have investment portfolios. The Campanile Foundation is the primary one, and is a nonprofit, 501c3 that receives and manages the philanthropic assets of the university, such as the endowment.

The Campanile Foundation uses the Investment Advisor, Meketa, to advise us in selecting investment managers, who make individual security decisions. Accordingly, we do not invest directly in any fossil fuels. However, We do generate an analysis annually of any indirect exposure in the Carbon Underground 200. (<https://fossilfreefunds.org/carbon-underground-200>). As of June 30, 2021, we held only 2.4% of Foundation assets with any relationship to the Carbon Underground 200.

Additionally, recently Meketa and other investment advisors responsible for advising a total of 10 trillion in global assets have launched an initiative to support the goal of net zero greenhouse gas emission. Here is a copy of their direct [press release](#).

Sarah Bernstein, Managing Principal at Meketa Investment Group and Chair of the Investment Consultants Sustainability Working Group – U.S. stated:

“Given the urgency with which climate change must be tackled, investment consultants such as ourselves want to provide investment advisory services to support asset owners as they seek to implement investment strategies to help limit global warming to a maximum of 1.5 °C in accordance with the Paris Climate Agreement, and work to reduce our own corporate carbon footprint. We are very pleased to be a founding member of the Net Zero Investment Consultants Initiative. We expect our commitment to drive the development of consulting practices that will ensure an informed assessment of risks and opportunities related to transitions to net zero in the real economy are provided to Meketa clients.”

We have an ongoing goal to identify public and private investment opportunities to generate specific quantifiable energy impacts, such as energy transition or resiliency from physical climate risk, for inclusion in the endowment portfolio. We expect to be able to accomplish the goal fully by 2025.

Divesting from fossil fuels, even indirectly, will be included as an agenda item in the next Finance & Investment Committee meeting.

Point #5

Procure only environmentally friendly products such as electronics and office paper.

Response #5

Currently, all CSU campuses participate in the California State University Buy Recycled Program. This is a joint effort in support of the State Agency Buy Recycled Campaign which is between CalRecycle and the Department of General Services (DGS). Along with the other CSU campuses, SDSU is required by policy to pursue sustainable procurement practices as well as pursue small business. Both have annual reporting requirements to the Chancellor's Office for a coordinated submission to the State. The reportable recycled purchased items can be found in Public Contract Code Sections 12153-12217 and 12300-12320. As positive news, prior to January 1, 2020 the percentage of reportable recycled purchases to the State was *expected* to be at least 50%. However, after January 1, 2020, recycled-purchased items reporting was increased to 75%.

With the past submitted reports to the Chancellor's Office, specific to SDSU's participation, there are a number of areas where we can further improve against this goal. We will make it a top priority of the new Director of Energy and Sustainability to work with Contracts and Procurement Management to increase our percentage of recycled-purchased items all across campus.

In addition, in our evaluation of best value with our competitive contracts, CPM plans to add commitments to utilization of sustainable materials as one of our explicit selection criteria. CPM will also improve methods of tracking and reporting where items may have been overlooked such as those SDSU Projects which are already required to follow CalGreen requirements for sustainable development. (For example, SDSU has successfully met the LEED requirements for numerous silver, gold and platinum facilities that may have not been completely captured in our reporting.)

Point #6

Conduct business with small businesses and businesses that utilize sustainable materials.

Response #6

As mentioned in the above response, all CSU campuses participate in the California State University Buy Recycled Program. This is a joint effort in support of the State Agency Buy Recycled Campaign which is between CalRecycle and the Department of General Services (DGS). Along with the other CSU campuses, SDSU is required by policy to pursue sustainable procurement practices as well as pursue small business in particular. Both have annual reporting requirements to the Chancellor's Office for a coordinated submission to the State. The Small Business reporting requirement is at least 25% of all contracts.

Effective as of this letter, Contracts and Procurement Management will certainly pursue greater efforts in increasing our percentage through a variety of initiatives.

For example, as part of the SDSU BFA Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan, we are committed to reaching out to more small businesses to increase their numbers as potential vendors. In addition to our outreach, we will work to train and guide them through the CSU Public Contract Code requirements for consideration as a vendor.

Incentives for small businesses are currently built into CPM's competitive solicitations, but CPM will pursue greater efforts in seeking small business participation as well as improve tracking and document methods which are shown to have the greatest impact.

Point #7

Obtain only locally and sustainably sourced food in addition to more Fair Trade products at the Aztec Markets.

Response #7

I am proud to share that this has long been a priority of the University. A large percentage of our produce used in preparation of the Market Fresh line of products are already grown in California.

Specific exceptions exist, such as pineapple, mangos, and bananas which are not grown locally. SDSU Dining has sourced fair trade coffee and chocolates for the Markets for many years. The new Director of Energy and Sustainability will work with Aztec Shops to increase the percentage of locally sourced, sustainable and Fair trade products used and sold by Aztec Shops.

Point #8

Ensure that we effectively compost post-consumer waste.

Response #8

As you know, there have been no waste providers in San Diego County that compost true post-consumer waste. This was incredibly surprising to me when I first arrived in San Diego in 2018, and we have been pushing for a true compost option and partner ever since. I am pleased to share that our waste and recycling hauler, EDCO, will be providing hauling of post consumer food and about 85% of other post consumer organic products starting on November 1, 2021. EDCO will haul these to Escondido to be composted in their new anaerobic digester. SDSU is also currently exploring what would be required to expand the composting program directly on campus. The Associated Students will be starting a composting program for the Student Union on November 1, and the University and Aztec Shops will be partnering to learn about the resource requirements and waste contractor support needs for a bio-digester right on campus. The University intends to implement a pilot composting program in partnership with the Associated Students in the next few weeks.

As we continue to work towards meeting these shared goals, one of our critical priorities is to identify additional savings or resources which can be dedicated to sustainability efforts. We also look forward to welcoming our inaugural Director of the SDSU Office of Energy and Sustainability soon, who will be a critical partner. Please know it is always a pleasure to hear from you and work with you, and I look forward to our collaboration.

Sincerely,



President
San Diego State University