

# CLIMATE CHANGE & EQUITY

Climate change will exacerbate issues of equity in housing and beyond.

**We need solutions that provide for equitable outcomes.**

Solar panels and electric cars won't usher in equitable outcomes or a successful just transition by themselves. Climate justice means providing pathways to opportunity and cultural preservation for vulnerable members of communities facing the worst impacts of climate change.

Everybody has needs for daily life that could be met within walking distance of their home, if only they lived in a walkable area. We must re-make our metropolitan regions to provide access to 15-minute neighborhoods for all.

## Housing

Access to housing in a 15-minute neighborhood should be seen as a universal human right. Achieving this vision will require numerous overlapping solutions, as described in more detail in the PLACE Initiative [Housing Resource Sheet](#). Zoning codes will need to change to allow for human-scale urbanism to grow incrementally without being overly constrained by density limitations, instead regulating elements of building form, such as height, to deliver neighborhoods of character, appropriate for their place in the metropolitan urban-to-rural transect.

Where high-capacity transit lines have stations, they should form the nodes for walkable centers, full of equitable Transit Oriented Developments (TODs), including a range of housing types from affordable single family homes clustered to make efficient use of land, to townhomes, other middle housing types, and larger apartment and mixed use buildings.

A significant portion of all these buildings need to be held by a combination of cooperatives and community land trusts (CLTs) in order to provide for resident-controlled permanently affordable housing, alongside market-rate and other types of homes.

## Transportation

Our automobile-oriented metropolitan areas need to be re-made to also include complete, connected networks for walking, bicycling, and transit. Nearly every region now includes freeways that are good candidates for a highways

to boulevard conversion, to create a walkable surface street network to replace grade-separated highways, replacing barriers with connectivity to knit together the urban fabric.

These conversion projects will free up land that can be placed in CLTs for the benefit of underserved communities impacted by the construction of the highways. Combining housing and economic development cooperatives with these CLTs can stabilize the housing market and provide pathways to economic opportunity, acting as a reparations strategy for communities that have suffered decades of harm.

Surface streets must be re-built according to the principles of equitable traffic calming, which provide physical separation between heavy motor vehicle traffic and humans walking or rolling, sufficient lighting to provide for safe night-time street crossing by people walking with darker skin colors, as well as tree canopy and greenery to protect from urban heat events, pollution, and vehicles.

Transit is used to extend pedestrian trip distance potential, to connect neighborhoods with one another, as well as with metropolitan centers, and to nature, parks, and recreation opportunities outside of the city. Transit must be trusted and comfortable to use for anyone; it needs to be frequent, safe, and high-quality, with fares affordable to all.



Figure 1.

## Economic Opportunity

Walkable neighborhoods can bring origins and destinations closer together, reducing the need for automobile commuting, by increasing local economic opportunities. Strategies to



# CLIMATE CHANGE & EQUITY

achieve this include those that: increase access to business ownership opportunities; increase access to financing & capital for both business growth and for housing ownership; and by increasing access to business space affordability. Commercial real estate can include more affordable options by: subdividing larger spaces to provide smaller space size increments; including fewer amenities; through less-permanent options, such as tents, domes, carts, etc; and by allowing accessory commercial space to be added to properties, such as in residential zones, with different primary uses.

## Resilience / Climate Migration

In the face of a rapidly changing climate, some communities will no longer remain viable, such as those submerged by frequent flooding; marginalized people of color will bear the disproportionate burden of being tied to the homes and businesses of such places.

The [Climate Receiver Places Project](#) is creating a guide of policy and practice for communities to follow, detailing strategies for equitable, climate-resilient urban growth in response to climate change migration. This includes fair compensation for managed retreat and for post-disaster migration, especially paired with programs, such as those involving community land trusts and cooperatives, that promote access to home and business ownership affordability in receiver places.

Such programs may be equally effective for both short-distance migration from one part of a town/metropolitan region to another, as well as for long-distance migration across state or national lines. Such solutions for climate justice can benefit local communities, providing opportunities to improve the future of the community by welcoming people in, helping to increase the range of local economic niches and actors.

Increasing resilience also means urban greening, especially including increasing the urban forest tree canopy to levels, such as 40% coverage. Increased greening will reduce the urban heat island effect, increasing walkability and bike-ability and decreasing the need for cooling on hot days. While many wealthier neighborhoods already have healthy tree canopy coverage, marginalized communities provide opportunities to focus tree-planting efforts as a part of climate action initiatives.

## Ways to Execute & Manifest an Equitable Climate Future

Working together within and across our communities, we can manifest an equitable climate future:

- Retrofit our communities to be resilient in the face of the threats of climate change, to become walkable communities that allow for life without automobile or fossil fuel dependency, and provide for pathways to equitable outcomes for all community members
- Ensure resources are available for folks displaced from their communities, for under-resourced residents of communities receiving migrants, and for migrants themselves
- Found and run local cooperatives for housing and economic opportunity, working with community land trusts to ensure affordability
- Work to turn our most resilient communities into receiver places who focus on building readiness to accommodate climate migrants
- Fund and provide access to public art, gathering spaces, and the creation and consumption of social capital
- Ensure systems of representation serve under-resourced communities without the corrupting influence of money and power, with subsidiary of decision-making tied to the scale and impact of what is being decided on, with a preference for decision-making at the lowest level possible
- Increase our self-help resources, including documenting best practices so they can be easily replicated, using continuous improvement processes to incorporate lessons learned into future documentation iterations, such as the Climate Toolkit for the Receiver Cities Project
- Local communities in climate-resilient areas can collaborate to implement plans

Individuals acting collectively can achieve this vision by working together, supporting one another locally and globally.

1. Principle Group. <https://www.principle.us/neighborhood-plan-union-square-somerville>

