



Cornell University
University Assembly

U.A. Resolution #21

[04/06/2021]

Resolution Demanding Greenhouse Gas Emissions Accountability

Sponsors: Dr. Robert Howarth, Faculty Representative; Dr. Caroline Levine, Faculty Representative; Jacob Feit, Campus Infrastructure Committee Chair

Abstract: This resolution calls for an independent audit of Cornell University's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and demands the University immediately adopt CLCPA-mandated greenhouse gas accounting in order to establish transparency and maintain prolonged accountability as it relates to University GHG emissions.

Whereas, Cornell has not publicly disclosed data on natural gas used to heat and electrify the campus from the central combined heat and power station, and

Whereas, the burning of natural gas in the central combined heat and power station is the largest single source of greenhouse gas emissions at Cornell by far, and

Whereas, independent data from the US Department of Energy suggests natural gas use by the Cornell central combined heat and power station actually increased substantially since 2015 and did not decrease as would be indicated by Cornell's reporting on CO₂ emissions, and

Whereas, the Senior Leaders Climate Action Group (SLCAG) at Cornell appointed by Provost Michael Kotlikoff recommended in their 2016 report that the University use a consumption-based approach with a 20-year time frame to fully account for methane emissions at Cornell associated with the use of natural gas, and

Whereas, the aforementioned recommendation was accepted by Provost Kotlikoff in 2016, and

Whereas, this recommended approach was subsequently adopted by Tompkins County in 2016 for their greenhouse gas accounting, and is in use for the 2021 update in emissions by the County, and



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Whereas, the aforementioned recommendation was subsequently enacted into law by the State of New York in 2019 in the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), and

Whereas, the 2019 Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act legally binds any relevant Cornell University action that involves the borrowing or expenditure of funds from the State of New York, and

Whereas, Cornell has in fact not used the aforementioned approach for greenhouse gas accounting in any of its public reporting since at least 2017, and

Whereas, Cornell University should take pride in this progressive approach to greenhouse gas accounting that grew out of research at Cornell and out of the activities of Cornell's SLCAG,

Be it therefore resolved, an independent audit by an expert or agency selected by the Provost with the approval of the University Assembly undertake an independent audit of the trends in greenhouse gas emissions over time from Cornell's central combined heat and power station, with a particular focus on the period from 2012 through 2020

Be it further resolved, such audit shall be reported in a preliminary fashion to the Provost and to the University Assembly by December 2021. A final report shall be publicly released by May 2022, and

Be it further resolved, Cornell University shall immediately implement the CLCPA-mandated greenhouse gas accounting for methane emissions as the default and primary means to report to the Cornell community and the public on emissions from the campus.

Be it finally resolved, Cornell should only be allowed to continue to use alternative greenhouse gas accounting rules to the extent required by contract or federal law, but these should be subservient to the CLCPA requirements in all public presentation of data and trends.