

New Haven Climate Debt and Budget Primer

Climate Disaster and New Haven 2025-26 Budget Considerations

As New Haven creates its 2025-26 budget, the growing costs and risks of the global climate disaster should be prioritized.

Below, NHCM reviews the community's growing climate debt; rising climate adaptation, food and insurance costs; resources brought to New Haven through recent investments in climate staff; and opportunities for climate & energy investments to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, reduce energy costs and improve public health.

As underscored by the recent L.A. fires, North Carolina hurricane destruction, and Oxford, CT flooding - we have failed to create an emergency response to limit this growing climate disaster.

Recommendations for 2025-26 Budget:

- Fund staff or consultants to develop clear plans to reduce GHG emissions by 50% by 2030, with a focus on the transportation and building energy sectors.
- Identify gaps in resources to reach this goal.
- Adopt policies to reduce GHG pollution and to hold polluters accountable or make polluters pay.
- Recognize that climate debt is real and long term well-being of the New Haven community depends on acting now.



New Haven Whole Community Debt Estimate : \$4 Billion

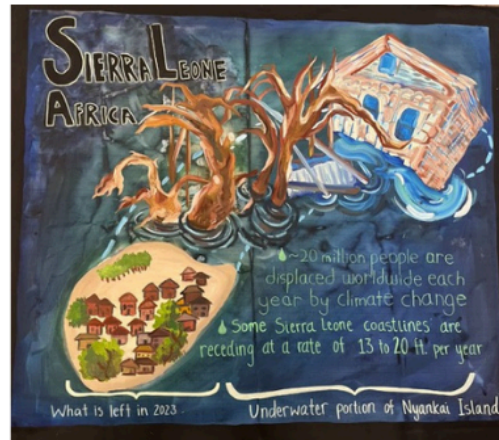
New Haven's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are estimated at one million tons/year. At \$200/ton (social cost of carbon - SCC) x 20 years (since City's first GHG Inventory in 2004) the New Haven community is responsible for \$4 billion of climate debt. These funds are owed to future generations and to low income communities to pay for climate adaptation and climate damage. The 2021 New Haven Greenhouse Gas Inventory estimated GHG emissions that year at 1.4 million tons, or \$280,000,000 in climate debt.

Climate debt is basically the idea that those who pollute need to pay to clean up the pollution or help those suffering from pollution adapt to the new climate realities (more rain, droughts, etc). In New Haven, for example, the City is holding United Illuminating responsible for paying over \$30M to clean up past English Station pollution.

Based on this growing climate debt, upcoming budget discussions should consider:

- What is New Haven's plan to address this growing debt. Do we have an obligation similar to pay reparations for past theft of labor from enslaved peoples, and theft of indigenous lands in Connecticut?
- Are we "cleaning up after ourselves"? The City is supporting forcing United Illuminating to pay over \$30M to clean up English Station pollution, so there should be a plan to clean up climate pollution, and to greatly reduce it ASAP to reduce the harm to others?
- Given the \$200/ton SCC, are there high carbon activities that the City should avoid even though in the short term they seem beneficial.?
- Will the New Haven community at large be forced to pay for climate damage created by a few large polluters (Yale, businesses, UI, YNHH, etc)?

While New Haven so far has not been paying down that debt, the City's annual funding for climate and environmental work has depended almost entirely on Federal and State funds. Historically, our economic model has accepted institutions/businesses internalizing profits/benefits while externalizing cost, which is why we face this massive climate disaster. The City budget - which reflects our community priorities - seems to continue this pattern.



With over \$4 billion in climate debt generated by the New Haven community since 2004, what is our present day responsibility for cleaning up that mess?

New Haven Municipal Climate Adaptation & Community Protection Costs to Date: \$200 million

New Haven has already started to see damage and costs from past excessive GHG emissions that were not addressed. Below are some of them in the news.

- \$2 million for construction of bioswales to address increasing street flooding. (background see New Haven [flooding prep](#) article)
- \$200 million: “The three projects will be funded by a new [\\$200 million investment](#) in resiliency infrastructure ... The bulk of funding comes from an Army Corp of Engineers grant that will build a seawall, living shore and pump system to better protect Long Wharf. Combined, these projects will almost double the amount of water the city can drain into the harbor. The city also received \$25 million from a climate change mitigation fund created by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA, supplemented by \$10 million in state funds, to construct a reinforced drainage system with the assistance of companies such as [Blocked Drain Brisbane](#).” YDN
- New Haven [Climate impacts hearing](#) documented a range of increasing climate impacts - not specifically enumerated yet - on local wellbeing, including increasing heat, air pollution, displacement, and flooding.



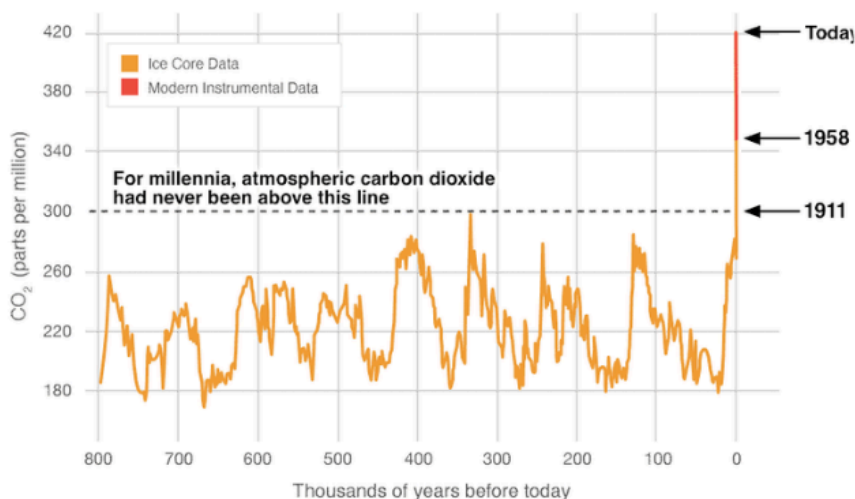
Climate Change, Intergenerational Equity, and International Law: “Climate change is an inherently intergenerational problem with extremely serious implications for equity between ourselves and future generations and among communities in the present and the future. The impacts from warming are predicted to be long-term, widespread, and severe. Even if a few countries may experience more favorable local climate in the near term, they are likely to suffer in the long term because of potentially devastating consequences elsewhere that will affect their own economic and social conditions. Developing countries will very likely suffer the worst effects from climate change because they have the least resilience and capacity to adapt. No longer can we ignore the fact that climate change is an intergenerational problem and that the well-being of future generations depends upon actions that we take today. ([Article](#))

City Climate Investment Pays Off, But Much More to Do.

New Haven created the Climate and Sustainability Office in late 2022, hiring two staff. As is clear below, the small team has been instrumental in bringing many resources to New Haven. But the scale of the climate emergency, the late start on cutting GHG emissions (even though New Haven did its first GHG inventory in 2004), and with deadly climate disasters striking each month, all call for much greater investment.

Climate change funds generated \$75M: Funds received include:

- \$20 million Community Change Grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).
- \$9.5 million for a networked geothermal system for Union Station.
- \$1 million in a Three-year grant from the federal government, towards researching and implementing home electrification.
- A Diesel Emissions Reduction Act (DERA) grant paid for up to 45% of the electric garbage truck, which cost about \$553,000.
- “The solar canopies are projected to generate enough electricity to power 20% of Hill Central’s electricity consumption and 33% of Beecher’s electricity consumption. With the conservative assumption that the historic rate of electricity bill increases continue at 3% annually, the solar canopies are forecast to save ~\$275,000 over the term of the power purchase agreement.”
- \$3 million federal grant that the city and URI to plant an additional 2,500 trees across New Haven over the next five years.
- New Haven applied for \$3.1 million to run a two-year “micro-transit” pilot program from November 2023 to October 2025. The pilot service would run seven days a week, from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m.
- \$2 million from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to hire three temporary employees over the next three years to track recycling habits and teach residents how to dispose of their trash.
- \$34 million New Haven grant, to come from the \$3 billion Clean Ports Program, will fund Enstructure work to install two new electric cranes and replace other diesel-powered cargo-handling equipment with zero-emission infrastructure. They’ll also install rooftop solar panels and battery storage systems to supplement the power supply for the mobile equipment.
- \$184,070 Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) from the U.S. Department of Energy. NHI



Carbon dioxide in the atmosphere warms the planet, causing climate change. Human activities have raised the atmosphere's carbon dioxide content by 50% in less than 200 years.

Source: NASA

