We submit this initial Climate Action Plan under the Vermont Global Warming Solutions Act with a feeling of urgency for the steps necessary to mitigate climate change through transformation of how we use and source energy; to adapt our communities and built environment to the warming planet; and to protect our natural and working lands from the damage created by climate change. [Add sentence re: imperative of action now.]

We also have a strong desire to engage Vermonters deeply and equitably in this transition, recognizing the harm and systemic injustices at work here in Vermont and elsewhere. Our collective sense of accomplishment for this substantial undertaking a short time frame – conducted remotely due to the pandemic – is muted by the knowledge that we did not achieve all that we had hoped we would at the outset. This initial Climate Action Plan represents the first public process in the State of Vermont to acknowledge and actively try to incorporate equity and the principles of a just transition in both its development and outcome – but we know we fell short. During our meetings and outreach, too few Vermonters had their voices lifted up; instead, many of those we heard from were the same voices who have participated in similar endeavors in the past. In our development of pathways, strategies, and actions, we struggled to create programs and policies organically in partnership with marginalized communities and individuals and to envision new ways to ensure a just transition for all Vermonters.

But there is much in this initial Climate Action Plan to embrace now, and from which to build going forward. The recommendations set forth are based upon achieving the significant greenhouse gas emissions reductions called for in the GWSA and strengthening Vermont’s ability to adapt to a changed environment. Many very important, detailed ancillary reports represent new analyses that underpin our work and point the way forward. We adopted several concrete recommendations with wide consensus, designed to promote mitigation, adaptation, and resilience, and we look forward to implementation by the Legislature, state agencies, and their partners. We also identified many areas that will require more conversation and will be the focus of further development at the council in the year ahead.

The council’s work continues and is ongoing, as contemplated by the GWSA and demanded by the imperatives of climate change. The measure of our efforts will be in the ways our energy sources change, our natural and built environments adapt, and Vermonters engage in a just transition away from climate pollution and toward a cleaner and sustainable future.