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Nonprofit to Mayor: Make Sustainability Plan Process Transparent

Local groups demand return to committee plan after substitution behind closed doors

SIoux FALLS, SD (March 14, 2023) - A coalition of Sioux Falls community organizations want Mayor Paul TenHaken to explain how a draft sustainability plan freshly written by his new policy advisor came to replace the plan agreed upon by the 30-member committee TenHaken set to the task a year ago.

The coalition, led by local nonprofit SoDak 350, is also asking the mayor's office to revert to the Sustainable Sioux Falls Plan draft language approved by the Sustainability Steering Committee in December 2022. That draft represented months of work by representatives from Sioux Falls businesses, electric and gas utilities, affordable housing proponents, environmental organizations, the healthcare sector, education and the homebuilding industry.

The calls for action follow a surprise move on March 2 by the mayor's office to override the collaborative public process to draft the plan. An open letter to TenHaken, co-signed by representatives from Dakota Rural Action, League of Women Voters, Citizens' Climate Lobby, The Mindfill, and Common Grounds Indivisible, says that the new draft "sustainability framework" introduced by the Mayor's new policy advisor, who had not previously worked with the Steering Committee, removes all meaningful, concrete goals and subverts the consensus-driven effort led by the city's own Office of Sustainability.

"The decision to gut the Sustainable Sioux Falls Plan undermines the good-faith effort of a committee representing the full spectrum of stakeholders to agree on a plan that helps clear the path toward a sustainable future for all of Sioux Falls," said Dr. Michael Heisler, SoDak 350's co-founder and chair, who served on the committee. "This new 'framework' created behind closed doors allows the city to hide behind vague platitudes while delaying meaningful action."

In December, the committee achieved consensus on what Heisler calls a realistic implementation plan that would reduce climate change and air pollution emissions, as well as address local water quality, transportation access and rising energy costs.

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SoDak 350 is a nonpartisan grassroots movement working to mobilize South Dakotans to address the climate crisis. Through education and community-building, volunteers are promoting local climate solutions and advancing a just transition to a sustainable future for South Dakota. SoDak 350 is an independent affiliate of the international environmental organization [350.org](https://www.350.org). Learn more at <https://www.sodak350.org>.