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Five ways Atlanta can fight climate change



Credit: Sam Baskin

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By [Sam Baskin](#), The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

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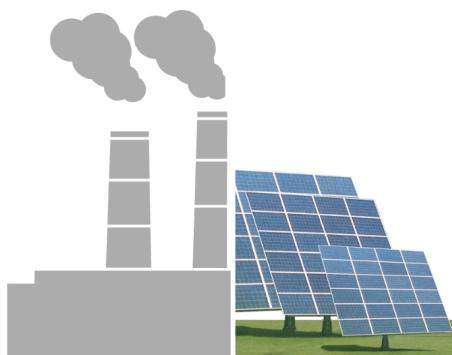
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Climate action is often discussed in terms of individual action, but experts say governments can have a larger impact on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Two-thirds of Americans think that the federal government should do more to fight climate change, according to research from the Pew Research Center, but local efforts can also help significantly.

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“Ultimately, local action is needed to reduce the City of Atlanta’s contribution to the problem of climate change and adapt to its current and future effects,” the Atlanta Climate Action Plan, a framework made by the city in 2015 to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions, states.

Here are five of the top solutions that experts say the city of Atlanta can implement to mitigate climate change:



Renewables

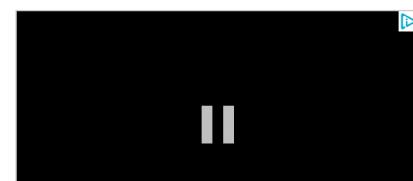
Energy use is one of the top sources of greenhouse gas emissions in the city, according to Drawdown Georgia. While most of the electricity Atlanta uses is produced outside of the city, local government can still have an impact on curbing emissions at the source.

Atlanta purchases its electricity from Georgia Power and as of late 2020, **solar comprised roughly 3% of the company's energy mix.** Climate experts recommend the city request Georgia Power invest more resources in solar farms and renewables. While the city doesn't have direct control over Georgia Power, the city can take action to push for more clean energy during the company's integrated resource planning (IRP) process, which takes place every three years.

The city of Atlanta, in a coalition with several other Georgia cities and counties, intervened in these meetings for the first time in 2022. The coalition pushed for Georgia Power to transition away from fossil fuels and towards renewable energy. Continued participation in future IRP hearings would follow expert recommendations to make an impact on the emissions from Atlanta's energy use.

Additionally, Marilyn Brown, Ph.D., a Georgia Tech professor whose research focuses on sustainable energy policies, said that the city can foster purchase power agreements, or pacts in which cities and other entities specify the power source from which they purchase.

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"These agreements can be signed with facilities that offer solar," Brown said.

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Electric Vehicles

Transportation is the second largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Atlanta. To reduce carbon emissions, Jairo Garcia, Ph.D., a professor in sustainable urban development at Georgia Tech, recommends subsidizing charging stations. A city of Atlanta spokesman said the city already has 71 EVs and 42 hybrid vehicles, but Garcia says the city should continue to electrify city vehicles, work with MARTA to electrify buses and extend Atlanta's bike lane network. Atlanta can access federal funds for these projects from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.



Efficient Buildings

In addition to reducing carbon from its energy mix, the city can also make the application of that energy more efficient by increasing energy efficiency in buildings.

For new buildings, the state has many energy efficient codes in law, but Atlanta's compliance laws don't always enforce them.

"Every new building is supposed to comply with the new construction codes, but because the codes are not well enforced, you can have buildings built today that are still inefficient," said Brown. The city can reduce energy consumption in buildings by increasing compliance and having new compliance training when Georgia building codes are updated every three years.

The city can promote the retrofitting of existing buildings by educating residents and businesses on incentives from the Inflation Reduction Act. The law extends tax credits for rooftop solar in homes and businesses and offers a credit for battery systems. Additionally, the law creates new ways for government entities and non-profits to pay for solar.

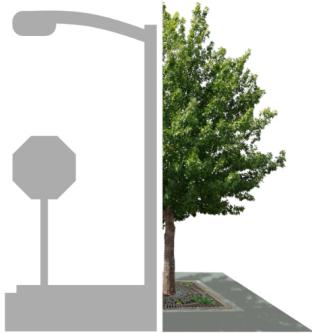


Compost

Compostable materials in waste contribute approximately 4% of Atlanta's greenhouse gas emissions, according to the Atlanta Climate Action Plan, published in 2015. Garcia recommends that the city establish a fleet of trucks to collect composting and then only after that, implement a pay-as-you-throw policy. Pay-as-you-throw would mean that companies and individuals would have to pay more as they send more trash to the landfill. The policy assumes that most of that trash could instead be sent to composting or recycling centers.

"There are companies in Atlanta that want to compost, but they need help from the city in order to collect the composting materials," said Garcia.

Currently the city implements the Aglanta program to tackle the issue of food waste, but Atlanta does not have any plans to implement a city composting collection service.



Trees

Atlanta already struggles with both heat and floods, both of which are expected to increase due to climate change. One easy way to cool down neighborhoods and reduce flooding is to plant trees and other green infrastructure. According to the EPA, trees cool surrounding air and surfaces, capture carbon emissions, help manage stormwater and lower AC costs of nearby buildings. **According to a report by CAPA Strategies, the warmest and coolest parts of Atlanta can vary by 14.5°F.** Garcia recommends that the city work to identify vulnerable areas and deploy green infrastructure in those neighborhoods.

About the Author



Sam Baskin



Sam Baskin is a data visualization intern working with the Digital Storytelling team. He creates graphics, maps and data visualizations for the AJC.

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