

# = MARK = GUDGE

FOR MAYOR

SERVING  
ALL OF  
OMAHA



## **Mark Gudgel for Mayor's Plan for Sustainability**

There are a lot of things that are up for debate in politics, and there is plenty that is open for discussion. No other policy matters, however, if we do not do our part to ensure that Omaha is still livable 30 years from now. Sustainability, that is, ensuring that Omaha and the planet is habitable and thriving for generations to come, is a non-negotiable cornerstone of our campaign. No policy will ever come out of a Gudgel City Hall that in any way interferes with a sustainable Omaha. Running a sustainable city is not easy, obvious, or inexpensive, but it is crucial that we take steps immediately to make this investment of time, money, and resources for the future of Omaha. We will take concrete steps to make sure Omaha has a viable path towards reducing carbon emissions to net zero by 2045, with goals and benchmarks to reach within our term in office, as well as goals and regulations for future mayors to meet. Here is our plan.

### **Department of Sustainability**

When forming a cabinet we will create a cabinet level Director of Sustainability and a Department of Sustainability. The Director of Sustainability will have the sole job of ensuring that Omaha develops a plan for sustainability and that the city adheres to this plan and does not do anything that contradicts it. Sustainability is a full-time job, and our cabinet will reflect that truth. The Director will oversee any development projects and review all benchmarks to make sure that Omaha is leading the charge in innovation against climate change, rather than haphazardly being a part of the problem. The Director of Sustainability will have regular and direct contact with the Mayor to advise on future projects and update progress on reaching current goals.

The Department of Sustainability will also be staffed with a team of grant writers who will be pursuing any and all federal and private grants that will benefit Omaha in achieving our sustainability goals. Especially with the incoming Biden administration, there will inevitably be grants and money available for helping us reach net-zero emissions, we just need the will and manpower to go out and find it.

The Department of Sustainability will also be responsible for ensuring that any new building project that uses public funds meets the LEED Silver Standard of green building standards, in order to make sure that all new buildings are doing their part for reducing emissions. Likewise, each public project will have a Life Cycle Cost Analysis (LCCA) to determine costs and impacts throughout the lifecycle. LCCA requires project planners to consider costs beyond upfront costs. For example, if a new school is being built, LCCA would require project planners to prioritize designs that are most cost-effective throughout the entire life cycle of a building. This allows for more sustainable innovation because projects are not primarily evaluated through upfront costs.

## **Develop a Meaningful and Achievable Plan**

Once in office, we will immediately contract a sustainability firm to develop a meaningful and achievable plan with the goal of reducing our carbon footprint to net zero carbon emissions by 2045. While we may have a lot of interesting ideas, we will defer to climate and sustainability experts to make sure our goals are reasonable and possible. We will use grant funds and private fundraisers to develop this plan which will not only serve as a roadmap for our administration, it will be a lodestar for future mayors to follow to make sure that Omaha's healthiest and brightest days are ahead of us, not behind us. As long as the goals are possible, there will be no policy we deem too ambitious or not worth the investment. Sustainability is not easy, but the cost of failure is too calamitous, so we will do everything in our power to lay the groundwork to achieve net neutrality.

In addition to working with an outside firm, we will commit to working with OPPD and MUD to ensure that our public utility partners are empowered to reach their own sustainability goals. We can take lessons from our OPPD and MUD and encourage them to make even more ambitious benchmarks in order to make sure all parties in Omaha are striving for the same goals. There is an opportunity for us to invest more in solar energy, and we hope to be able to lead the charge in solar power in the years to come. By investing in solar energy, Omaha can become less dependent on coal and other destructive energy sources while also creating new jobs for marginalized communities. We plan on providing OPPD the support and resources for transitioning toward solar.

## **Climate Justice is Key to Social Justice**

The effects of climate change affect all of us, but it tends to be especially devastating for the most disadvantaged. Our goal will be to not only battle climate change to help improve the lives of low-income communities, we plan to include our less advantaged communities in the fight. We will give priority to low-income communities in Omaha for developing solar power programs, to ensure our marginalized communities have access to clean, consistent and inexpensive energy.

We will also engage with the students of Omaha to help fight climate change. Our children are not simply the "future of Omaha," they are active stakeholders who have very real interests in making sure their home is habitable for their own eventual children. We will partner with our public schools, universities, community colleges, and trade schools to delegate experimental and practical projects for the betterment of the city. The Department of Sustainability will work with students to ensure our existing buildings and projects are meeting our sustainability standards, and will encourage our future leaders, developers, engineers, and workers to be aware of what it takes to build a business, project, and city which will make a lasting impact.

## **Transportation**

We will also work to bring our public transportation in this city into the 21st century. Public transportation, especially busing, is an indispensable tool to combat climate change. If we can get more cars off the road and get people to work in a vehicle that is not hurting the environment, we can make huge strides in doing our part to save the planet. The biggest obstacle in achieving a sustainable transportation system for our city is a lack of investment and will on the behalf of the city. Our transportation partners have the will and knowledge to make a meaningful difference, we just need to provide the necessary resources. We commit to providing the funding necessary to help slowly convert our bus fleets to an all electric fleet. Converting 120 busses from diesel to electric will not come quickly or cheaply, but we will lay the groundwork to make sure it happens. We will set the goal to replace each decommissioned bus with a new electric bus. Moreover, we will assist our Metro transportation partners in developing the means to charge a fleet of electric busses. This transition will likely take 10-15 years, which will help spread the cost of the conversion over time. The time delay will also give the technology the chance to improve which will ensure that we will have a state-of-the-art electric bus fleet by the end of the transition.

## **Infrastructure**

Another crucial aspect of leading a sustainable city is having an infrastructure that both lasts for generations and also is accessible for as many people as possible. A sustainable infrastructure involves investing in repairing and rebuilding roads and streets in low-income areas so that the roads are wide and durable enough to last more than a few months. Every person deserves to be able to drive to work on roads that they know will not total their car. The areas of town with the worst roads tend to be the areas of town where a totaled car will likely be financially detrimental, and this is unacceptable.

When we rebuild roads, we will also make sure that the crosswalks and curbs are accessible to people who have different abilities, both to serve everyone in our communities as well as assuring the city is compliant with the ADA. Our goal is to transition each crosswalk to have tactile paving and audible cross signals, both of which are invaluable and lifesaving to people with visual impairments. By ensuring that each road project leaves an intersection with these improvements will take us a huge step toward achieving this goal, while also spreading the cost of these improvements over several years.

We are also committed to adding hundreds of miles of protected bike lanes to our city in the years ahead under the leadership and guidance of the reinstated Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator, making it easier for Omahans to get around the city without being dependent upon fossil fuels.

## **Plastic Bag Ban**

In May 2019, the Omaha City Council passed a ban on single-use plastic bags which had broad support due to the positive impact such a ban would have on the environment. Despite the broad support, the motion received a veto from the Mayor. We would recommend the City Council pass the ordinance once again, and it will not receive a veto from Mayor Gudgel. A plastic bag ban is an easy and popular way to make a meaningful impact on the environment at large as well as simply helping make our city a more beautiful place.

## **Recycling and Composting**

We will work with private sector partners to provide more opportunities for Omahans to more easily recycle more of their garbage. We will specifically provide the ability for public buildings and schools to recycle glass and provide resources to homes for how to easily recycle glass. We will also provide resources to help people start their own composting programs in order to more constructively dispose of food waste. Many people in Omaha have the desire to make a difference in the world by the way they consume responsibly and dispose of waste in a constructive way, they just lack the resources for doing so. We commit to providing those resources in an way that is easy to access.

## **Setting the Example: Beautiful Omaha**

We will modify the Rwandan tradition of Umuganda to provide monthly opportunities for service to beautify the city. In Rwanda, all citizens participate in service projects once a month to help clean and beautify the city. While Umuganda is a compulsory program in Rwanda, our program, Beautiful Omaha, will be entirely voluntary. On the last Saturday of Omaha, each City Council District will choose a project (e.g. collecting litter from city parks, cleaning graffiti off underpasses, painting murals) where volunteers can come and receive a free lunch in exchange for helping make their city a little more beautiful. This will provide an opportunity for students who need service hours for school to earn their hours and help their city at the same time. This program can also give direction to non-profits who may have similar goals of beautifying the city. Beautiful Omaha will give the city the chance to show leadership in service and encourage the people of Omaha to have a sense of ownership of their city.

## **Conclusion**

Sustainability is possible and indispensable. Sustainability is how we will make sure we will be leaving Omaha better than how we received it. Climate change is no longer a problem of the future, but an urgent problem that demands immediate action. Our administration will not be the administration that sees the fruit of all of these projects and goals, but our administration will be the one that sets the city on the right track to make sure the goals are achieved before it is too late. All of these policies are possible, we only need the will to make the investment.