Recommendations for Building Climate Resilience at Dickinson College

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The severe thunderstorm that struck Carlisle without warning the afternoon of June 30, 2025, demonstrated some of the risks posed by extreme weather to Dickinson College, its students and employees, and to communities in the region. High winds, heavy rainfall, flash flooding, and hail caused extensive damage to trees and buildings on campus and in Carlisle, downed power lines, flooded and closed streets, and created life-threatening conditions. In the aftermath of the storm, students, employees, and youth participants in the CPYB and CTY programs walked through debris and under damaged trees on campus. Emergency vehicles responding to calls in Carlisle struggled to find safe routes to their destinations, as did commuters, other motorists, and cyclists.

The Lower Quad filled with over a foot of storm water, muddy water flowed from Britton Plaza to flood the lower level of the library, and building materials stored outdoors for summer projects were damaged. The college closed for two days while facilities and groundskeeping staff worked to make the campus safe by removing fallen trees, tree limbs, and debris and roping off dangerous areas. Over 5000 Carlisle households lost power, as did parts of Dickinson’s campus. Several hundred households continued to be without power for one and two days after the storm.

The damaging storm is emblematic of the complex, multifaceted and continually evolving climate risks faced by Dickinson – risks that are being amplified by human-caused climate change. Recognizing the seriousness of the risks, President John Jones signed the Resilience Commitment of Second Nature in December 2022, pledging Dickinson to develop and adopt a climate resilience plan to mitigate climate risks to our campus and community.

To help inform development of a plan, we assessed climate risks to the college, evaluated resilience building strategies, and developed recommendations for action. Our work was performed as part of the 2024 Baird Sustainability Fellows program and included focus group discussions, a workshop, and interviews with Dickinson employees, review and synthesis of relevant publications, and multicriteria analyses of potential response strategies.[1] We built on prior work of the 2023 Baird Sustainability Fellows Kristen Beach ’24, Heidi Beardsley ’25, Kathryn Hickey ‘24, Isabella Moes ‘24, and Christian Polk ‘24, the 2022 Baird Sustainability Fellows Claudia Bonaccorsi ‘22, Jackie Greger ‘22, Julie Korgen ‘22, Sam Lavine ‘22, Grace Messimer ‘23, Emily Pikturna ‘22, Ashley Russo ‘22, and Franklin Saeteros ‘22, and Climate

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In this document we briefly summarize the climate risks that we judge to be most salient for Dickinson College and present our recommendations for action. Our recommendations are organized around four categories of risk: human health and wellbeing, infrastructure and grounds, continuity of operations, and college finances. Additionally, we offer two cross-cutting recommendations.

We recommend the following actions:

1. Convene a working group to develop a comprehensive climate resilience framework.
2. Continue to engage students, staff, faculty, and community partners in climate resilience work.
3. Design and implement a climate health resilience plan.
4. Climate-proof and decarbonize physical infrastructure.
5. Maintain, adapt, and expand the campus tree canopy.
6. Develop an academic continuity plan.
7. Reinstate continuity planning for other essential functions.
8. Improve electric power reliability and resilience.
9. Set targets and initiate steps to increase reserve funds.
10. Assess and manage endowment exposure to climate risk.

The recommendations, which are elaborated below, are focused on climate-related risks but many would simultaneously increase resilience with respect to other risks faced by the college. We direct our recommendations to the Sustainability Subcommittee of the Planning & Budget Committee while also sharing them with others at Dickinson to catalyze conversations, encourage creative responses, and invite feedback.

Crosscutting Recommendations

Climate hazards and climate change pose multiple, intersecting risks to Dickinson College, the Dickinson community, and communities in the region. Effective action to limit the risks and build resilience requires a coordinated, holistic framework and process that cuts across the different divisions and functions of the college.

1. Convene a Working Group to Develop a Comprehensive Climate Resilience Framework

We recommend that Dickinson’s Sustainability Subcommittee convene a working group and charge it with developing a framework for building climate resilience and presenting the framework to the Planning & Budget Committee for its consideration and action. The process for developing the framework should be transparent and participatory, seeking input from members of the Dickinson community, off-campus partners, and external experts.

The framework should be understood to be a broad umbrella under which more specific strategies and actions are to be developed and implemented in an iterative process of learning and action for building climate resilience at Dickinson. It should identify priority risks and opportunities for action for the next 5 years, describe strategies for addressing the prioritized risks and opportunities, and assign responsibilities for mobilizing resources and implementation. The framework should also establish measurable objectives and provide for monitoring and assessing progress, learning from experience, and

updating the framework periodically as knowledge and experience are gained. Our other recommendations, presented below, offer targeted actions for implementation under the framework.

2. *Continue to Engage Students, Staff, Faculty, and Community Partners in Climate Resilience Work*

We recommend that students, staff, faculty, and community partners continue to be engaged in climate resilience work at Dickinson. Each of these constituencies have participated in and contributed important knowledge and perspectives to the initiative *Building Climate Resilience at Dickinson and in Central Pennsylvania*. Their continued participation should be encouraged and supported. On-campus and off-campus audiences should be kept engaged and informed through periodic open meetings, workshops, public presentations, online publication of progress and other reports, and distribution of newsletters. While Dickinson's resilience planning work should focus on the college campus and its' members, Dickinson should continue to work with community partners in mutually beneficial ways that help reduce climate risks in Carlisle and other communities across Cumberland County and Central Pennsylvania.

Climate resilience work offers rich opportunities for students to gain important skills and experience by using the campus as a living lab for learning about climate risks, resilience strategies, and problem solving. The Center for Sustainability Education, faculty members, Facilities Management, Student Life, the risk management office, and other entities should collaborate in creating learning opportunities for students. Student participation in resilience work can include course projects, independent student research, student-faculty research, and service on relevant committees and task forces.

Human Health and Wellbeing

Climate change and extreme weather events pose significant risks to the health and wellbeing of Dickinson students, employees, and employees' families. Health risks that are most salient for Dickinson College are described briefly below, followed by recommended actions.

Extreme heat events are very likely to increase in frequency, severity, and duration in our region, exposing students, employees, employees' families, children at the Dickinson College Children's Center, summer residents of the CBYB and CTY programs, contracted workers, and campus visitors to growing risks of heat-related illnesses. Extreme heat is a significant health risk, killing more people on average per year in the United States than any other weather hazard, aggravating chronic illnesses of hundreds of thousands of people each year, and resulting in more than 100,000 emergency room visits and hospitalizations annually. At particular risk from extreme heat are children, the elderly, people with pre-existing health conditions, and those who work outdoors, work in hot and poorly ventilated indoor environments, or engage in athletics and other strenuous outdoor activities.

Outdoor air quality will likely be degraded in Central Pennsylvania by climate change unless emissions of air pollutants are reduced significantly. Degraded air quality would increase risks to students, employees, and employees' families from heart disease, asthma, other respiratory diseases, and other adverse health effects that are associated with air pollution. Nationally, air pollution causes an estimated 60,000 to 260,000 premature deaths each year. Central Pennsylvania, including the Harrisburg-Carlisle area where Dickinson is located, is one of ten areas recently reported to have the worst air pollution in the United States from fine particulate matter. Dickinsonians at high risk from degraded air quality are many of the same groups who are at risk from extreme heat exposure.

Mental health of students and employees can be negatively impacted by extreme weather events, which are likely to become more frequent and severe with climate change. Studies have demonstrated that

people whose homes, families, and communities are harmed by extreme weather can suffer anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal ideation, and suicide. These mental health effects can impact students' and employees' mental wellbeing, students' academic performance, and employees' work performance.

Additional health effects of climate change that could impact the Dickinson community include degraded indoor air quality from mold, bacteria, and other biological contaminants that thrive in warm, moist environments, increased incidences of infectious diseases such as Lyme disease, injuries from severe weather, disruptions to the ability of healthcare facilities in the Carlisle area to provide services during emergencies, and impacts of extreme weather on transportation systems that impede people's access to healthcare services. The wellbeing of the Dickinson community can also be impacted by the effects of climate change on food costs and food security, housing costs and housing security, and people's finances and livelihoods.

Recommendations for Protecting Health and Wellbeing

3. *Design and Implement a Climate Health Resilience Plan*

Dickinson should design and implement a plan for protecting students and employees from heat-related illness, physical and mental health risks from storm events, degraded outdoor and indoor air quality, and infectious diseases. The plan should also include contingencies for accessing healthcare during periods when local and regional healthcare facilities and services may be impacted by extreme weather, electric power and telecommunications outages, or disruptions to transportation systems.

The climate-health plan should adopt a near-term focus on extreme heat and heat-related illnesses by including the elements noted below. Extension of the plan to address additional climate-related health risks should be considered in future years.

- *Heat Risk Education and Training*: Dickinson should develop a program to educate students, employees, and communities in Cumberland County about health risks associated with extreme heat events, how to recognize symptoms, and measures to prevent and treat heat-related illnesses. Additionally, selected employees should receive periodic training for preventing and responding to heat-related illness, either in a stand-alone unit or integrated into a more comprehensive first aid training program. Public Safety officers, athletics coaches, Wellness Center staff, Resident Assistants, and other Student Life staff are among those who should participate in the training. The University of Pennsylvania's Heat Illness Prevention Program and the University of Washington's Heat Education & Awareness Tools are models of effective programs that should be consulted when developing a plan for Dickinson.

- *Heat Protocols for Dickinson Athletics*: Dickinson Athletics has robust protocols and practices for addressing heat-related risks for varsity athletes. However, because average temperatures and extreme heat events are projected to increase, the protocols and practices should be reviewed to assess their continued adequacy and evaluate if and how they could be updated to be more protective of athletes' health. Consideration also should be given to strategies for protecting the health of students who engage in non-varsity recreational activities from heat-related illness. The Centers for Disease Control's webpage for Heat and Athletes provides links to numerous relevant resources. Also useful are the University of Texas at Austin's 2025-2026 recommended heat protocols,

- *Employee Heat Illness Prevention Program*: Dickinson should implement a program to prevent heat-related illness for its employees. The program should go beyond education to include guidelines and implementation of workplace practices and rules that protect employees from heat exposure and heat-related illness. Dickinson should look to guidance from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) for creating a heat illness prevention program and heat exposure standards.

Infrastructure and Grounds

Climate change and extreme weather events pose significant risks to Dickinson's infrastructure and grounds. Assets at risk include campus buildings, mechanical equipment, the central energy plant, electric power and telecommunication lines and equipment, water, stormwater and sewage lines and structures, hardscapes such as sidewalks, paths, drives, and parking lots, green infrastructure including campus trees, shrubs, lawns, rain gardens, and athletic fields, and the college farm.

Risks of physical damage to infrastructure from severe weather are likely to grow as the climate continues to get increasingly warm, wet, and extreme. More frequent and severe heavy rains, flash floods, stormwater floods, and windstorms can damage building exteriors and interiors, exacerbate mold and other indoor air quality problems, shift foundations, erode soils, and damage hardscape and landscape features. Damage to infrastructure can result in costly repairs and the loss of use of the affected assets, causing disruptions to academic programs, student housing, dining, communications, and other college functions. In extreme cases, severe weather can cause infrastructure failures that endanger lives.

Aging and deteriorating materials can be accelerated by a hotter, wetter, and more variable and extreme climate. Accelerated deterioration can increase operation and maintenance costs, reduce useful lifetimes of infrastructure, and increase the frequency of needed replacements. These effects can add to the backlog of deferred maintenance needs, an issue that the National Association of College and University Business Officers and Moody's Ratings have identified as a growing concern in higher education that can impact college finances, student enrollment, credit ratings, and costs for borrowing funds.

Performance of infrastructure can be reduced by changes in climate that diverge from the design parameters of the infrastructure. Maintaining desired indoor temperatures, humidity, air quality, and comfort can become more challenging, require greater energy use for space conditioning, and increase utility costs. Diminished indoor air quality and comfort can impact the health of students and employees.

Trees and other green infrastructure that provide substantial benefits to the Dickinson community are very likely to be stressed by the changing climate. Many of Dickinson's trees, shrubs, and perennials are likely to become increasingly ill-suited to Carlisle's climate, experience increased pressures from pests and disease, and suffer impaired health and higher mortality. Consequently, they may provide diminished stormwater control, cooling, aesthetic, and mental health benefits. Costs for monitoring, maintaining and replacing trees and other plants and for maintaining athletic fields are likely to increase. The Dickinson Farm faces distinct risks that were not addressed in our research.

Recommendations for Protecting Infrastructure and Grounds

4. *Climate-Proof and Decarbonize Physical Infrastructure*

Dickinson should engage engineering and other experts to assess vulnerabilities of buildings and other physical infrastructure to climate hazards while simultaneously assessing opportunities to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions, identify and prioritize critical risks and emission reduction opportunities, and

advise on a multi-year plan to proactively, strategically, and cost-effectively mitigate risks and reduce emissions. The plan should give deliberate attention to the effects of weather and climate on the condition and performance of physical infrastructure, building enclosures, and building foundations as part of Dickinson's annual monitoring and inspection practices. It should also include assessment and remediation of buildings with chronic indoor air quality problems such as mold. Actions to address prioritized risks and emission reduction opportunities should be incorporated into Dickinson's budgeting process for deferred maintenance.

5. *Maintain, Adapt, and Expand the Campus Tree Canopy*

Dickinson should assess the health of campus trees with respect to changes in climate, damage from storms, and other pressures on tree health, continue to invest in the care and maintenance of campus trees, identify and select species for new plantings that can thrive in the changing climate, and strategically expand the campus tree canopy. These actions can reduce the urban heat island effect and thereby help limit health risks from extreme heat. The actions would also maintain and increase the substantial benefits produced by campus trees for managing stormwater, protecting air quality, providing quality greenspaces that contribute positively to mental health and wellbeing, and providing a visually appealing campus that helps Dickinson to recruit and retain students and employees.

Continuity of Operations

Continuity of Dickinson College's operations is highly sensitive to weather and other events that can cause outages of electric power and telecommunication services, damage campus buildings, and disrupt transportation systems, health care services, emergency services, supply chains, and pipelines for water and natural gas. The disruptions can impact the ability of the college to communicate with the campus community and beyond, offer academic instruction, advising, and student support services, provide access to library and other information sources, enable students and employees to travel safely to and from campus, and provide our students with safe and healthy food, housing, water, wellness services, and recreational opportunities.

Over the past year Dickinson has experienced weather-related events that have impacted many of these functions, some lasting a few hours and others a day and more. Yet there is always the potential for larger events to disrupt operations for many days, weeks, and even months, the likelihood of which are anticipated to grow as the climate warms.

Electric power outages are caused most often in the United States by extreme weather events. Powerlines, transmission towers, transformers, and substations are at risk from high winds, falling trees and tree limbs, floods, and land subsidence. Across Pennsylvania, including the PPL service area, the reliability and resilience of electric power distribution has declined in recent years. The Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission reports power outages have increased in frequency and duration since 2015 and identifies contributing factors to include more frequent storms, weakening of trees by the Emerald Ash Borer and other stresses, and insufficient investment by utilities in managing vegetation that overhangs or is adjacent to powerlines and other infrastructure.

Dickinson has very limited capacity to generate and store electricity for powering the campus during electric power outages. The systems we have are only sufficient for supplying power for emergency communications, emergency lighting, keycard lock systems, and a few other small electricity uses. Electric power outages that the college has experienced have been disruptive to campus operations, but we have been fortunate that the outages have been relatively short in duration. We are, however, highly

vulnerable to events that would cause long-duration power outages. Our vulnerability may increase in the near future as extreme weather events become more frequent and severe in the warming climate.

Telecommunications, which encompass telephone and cellular networks, data centers, data and video transmission, the internet, and other services, are reliant on electric power and are disrupted when climate hazards cause power outages. Telecommunications infrastructure itself can also be directly impacted by severe weather, as Dickinson College learned when downed trees damaged internet fiber optic lines on two occasions last year. These events prompted the college to contract with an additional internet service provider.

Academic instruction and ancillary services that support student success can be impacted and require adaptation, relocation, or suspension due to power and telecommunications outages, damages to and closure of buildings, or closure of the campus or parts of the campus due unsafe conditions. The disruptions to academic functions can have significant negative impacts on student and employee mental and physical wellbeing, student success, persistence, and retention, and faculty scholarship and professional activities.

Student housing and *dining services* can also be impacted by climate-related hazards and require relocating students to temporary housing and limiting or closing food services. Dickinson residence halls and the Holland Union Building (HUB) are equipped with back-up power generation and storage systems. But the capacities of the systems support very limited uses. In the residence halls, the back-up systems do not provide enough power to operate heating, ventilation and cooling equipment, non-emergency lighting, or plug loads. In some buildings, automatic flush toilets cannot be operated during a power outage. Back-up power systems in the HUB do not have sufficient capacity to operate refrigerators, freezers, electric cooking equipment, non-emergency lighting, or card swipe machines.

Recommendations for Continuity of Operations

6. *Develop an Academic Continuity Plan*

The Academic Affairs division should develop and adopt a continuity plan that establishes policies and procedures for guiding Dickinson College decision-makers, faculty members, and Academic Affairs staff in supporting continued teaching and learning during and after disruptive events. The plan should be attentive to equity considerations, seek input from students, identify key individuals and teams who will make decisions, allocate resources, and communicate with different audiences, and empower faculty to implement flexible, creative solutions that serve students' needs. The campus community should be made aware of the plan and have easy access to it. Key people should be trained in executing the plan and provision should be made for periodically reviewing and updating the plan.

The plan should draw from and build on strategies that proved effective in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, using Academic Technology's webpage for Academic Continuity as a starting point. The plan should encompass other types of risks in addition to pandemics that can disrupt instruction for extended periods such as extreme weather, power outages, extensive building damage, key infrastructure failure, civil unrest, and mass violence.

Planning for Academic Continuity, a Guide for Academic Leaders from Every Learner Everywhere can serve as a key resource for developing a plan for Dickinson. The guide highlights lessons drawn from a review of over 100 academic continuity plans and identifies the University of Massachusetts – Amherst, Minnesota State Tech, and Elon University as having exemplary academic continuity plans. Some of the issues that Dickinson's plan could usefully address include identifying spaces that can be reallocated if

needed for classroom and other academic uses, providing guidance and assistance for shifting from in-person to online and hybrid modes of instruction, encouraging widespread use of the Learning Management System to better facilitate mid-semester shifts in teaching modes, identifying backup instructors for courses as feasible, and establishing policies for modifying academic workloads, assignments, exams, grading, and incompletes when a semester is disrupted. Provision also should be made for continuing student support services from Academic and Disability Services, Academic Advising, the Writing Center, and the Quantitative Reasoning Center.

7. Reinstate Continuity Planning for Other Essential Functions

Dickinson senior officers should evaluate the state of continuity planning at Dickinson for essential functions beyond academic programs, assess needs and priorities for continuity planning, and develop a strategy and process for reinstating effective continuity planning at the college. To help guide this process, advice should be sought from external professionals with expertise in continuity planning.

In March 2020, after the college closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Dickinson asked directors of administrative units to prepare business continuity plans. The purpose of the plans was to enable units to continue to perform essential functions if a significant number of staff were out of the office due to illness. Since 2020, there have been significant changes in personnel and organizational units at Dickinson. Yet directors have not been asked to review and update their continuity plans. It is important for Dickinson to reinstate continuity planning to be better prepared for climate hazards and other disruptive events.

8. Improve Electric Power Reliability and Resilience

We recommend that Dickinson engage relevant experts to assess and prioritize needs for back-up electric power for periods of power outages, evaluate options for back-up power generation and storage, and identify cost-effective options for meeting the highest priority needs with zero carbon or low carbon energy. Drawing on the results of the analysis, the Planning & Budget Committee and the Division of Finance & Administration should develop and adopt a strategy for funding and implementing the highest priority options over a multi-year timeline.

College Finances

Climate hazards impact Dickinson's finances through multiple pathways. As already noted, the impacts of climate hazards can increase costs for operation, maintenance, repair, and replacement of campus infrastructure and grounds. The effects of extreme heat, degraded air quality, and severe weather on employees' health can diminish worker productivity, increase days of sick leave, and increase costs from employees' health insurance and workers' compensation claims. Outages of electric power and telecommunications cause costly disruptions of essential functions and loss of work time and employee productivity.

Large events can have regional scale impacts on electric power and natural gas transmission, oil refining and shipments, and supply chains for food and other materials purchased by the college that would impose significant costs on Dickinson. College revenues are also at risk from events that disrupt academic instruction, close buildings, or close the campus for extended periods and require student fees for tuition, room, and board and rents from summer programs to be refunded. New student recruitment and retention of current students could be impacted by damages to the campus that entail long periods of reconstruction and recovery.

Some costs of climate hazards are covered by property insurance. But insurance premiums paid by Dickinson could increase in the future and insurance availability could decrease if insurance companies judge that growing climate hazards are increasing their financial exposure. Growing climate hazards can also increase borrowing costs. In fact, there is already evidence of increased insurance costs, increased borrowing costs, and lowered property values in areas of the US with high and growing risks from flooding, tropical storms, and wildfires. Some markets in the Gulf Coast region and California have seen insurance premiums increase 50 to 90 percent since 2018 and some insurers have withdrawn coverage in high-risk locations.

Another potentially significant but difficult to assess financial risk to Dickinson is exposure of the endowment portfolio to hazards from climate change and policy changes. Businesses and assets in regions with substantial climate hazards, or in economic sectors that are particularly vulnerable to climate hazards, may be at increasing risk as the climate changes. Investment portfolios with high exposures to these at-risk assets may be riskier than portfolios with lower exposures. Also of concern are exposures to fossil energy assets that are subject to high levels of uncertainty from volatile changes in environmental and energy policies and regulations. Concerns about these types of risks is motivating research on ways to stress test investment portfolios under scenarios of high climate change impacts and major changes in regulatory and policy environments to inform the design investment strategies that can help hedge against the risks. The extent to which Dickinson's endowment is exposed to climate risks has not been assessed.

<u>Recommendations for College Finances</u>

9. Set Targets and Initiate Steps to Increase Reserve Funds

Dickinson's Division of Finance & Administration and the Planning & Budget Committee should review needs for financial reserve funds for operations, health insurance, and study abroad with respect to current and changing climate and other risks, set appropriate targets for reserve funds, and initiate steps to meet reserve targets that are feasible and consistent with Dickinson's overall financial needs and priorities. The review and any revisions to reserve targets should be informed by learning from the practices of peer institutions and guidance available from groups such as the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO).

10. Assess and Manage Endowment Exposure to Climate Risk

The Board of Trustees' Committee on Investments and Dickinson's Vice President for Finance and Administration should engage Investure's managers and members in discussions about assessing and managing exposure of members' endowments to climate risk, including risk from impacts of extreme weather and climate change on assets and risk from changes and uncertainty in environmental and energy regulations and policies. Currently, Dickinson analyzes endowment risk from six perspectives: geographic risk, currency risk, liquidity, leverage, capital structure, and net asset value of private equity investments and unfunded liabilities. Consideration should be given to adding climate risk as a seventh perspective or to integrating climate risk into one or more of the other perspectives. The Committee on Investments should be asked to report to the Dickinson community on its discussions with Investure and its members, its assessment of endowment exposures to climate risks, and viable approaches for managing the risks.