

Matthew Ragsdale
Statement of Purpose
The Evergreen State College, MPA

Growing up, I often visited my father's side of the family in the rural community of Ratliff City, Oklahoma, where only about 70 people resided full-time and the nearest hospital was over 30 miles away. Pharmacies, grocery stores, and veterinarians as well were only accessible by vehicle and over 20 miles away. As I continue to visit my family there, I develop a deeper concern for them with a changing climate and lack of transportation resources.

I took an interest in planning and transportation when I transferred to the University of Oregon my sophomore year. Working in government was the end goal as I felt that was the most direct way for me to make meaningful change in my communities. I landed on the Planning, Public Policy, and Management major. It was broad enough to cover many aspects of working in government, and I appreciated the flexibility as I was still trying to focus on how my passions for rural communities, transportation, and the environment could coalesce into a career.

I participated in multiple hands-on experiences in various courses focused on working with community partners, from transit agencies to local planning departments. One close to home included developing Climate Action Recommendations for the City of Silverton, home to just over 10,000 people. While not the same sort of rural area as I journeyed to growing up, I nonetheless felt a sense of nostalgia seeing a small community needing help preparing for oncoming climate change impacts. I provided thoughtful and material recommendations concerning transportation and land-use, including strategies to increase active transportation options and diversify land-use mix.

It was in that course specifically that the future I wanted became clear: I wanted to influence and shape communities, mainly smaller and rural areas, to better increase equity in movement and adaptation to climate change impacts.

A few months after graduating from the University of Oregon I landed in a bustling community in Eastern Washington which was seeking a Travel Demand Reduction Specialist at the local transit agency, Ben Franklin Transit. I would be working in the planning department at a public transit agency and encourage folks to get out of their cars and into alternate modes to better the environment and improve access to transportation options. The role allowed me the opportunity to lead a \$100,000 grant funded project to reduce ground level ozone in the Tri-Cities area. I was able to devise a Commute Trip Reduction program to encourage alternate mode trips, and developed a comprehensive communications ad campaign and outreach plan to the community. I was also able to draft the agency's first Climate Action Plan in response to a call to action from the Federal Transit Administration.

After two years with Ben Franklin Transit, I couldn't pass up the opportunity to work as an environmental planner for the Washington State Department of Ecology implementing the statewide cap-and-invest program. As an advantageous program and only second of its kind in the US, I assist in facilitating a reduction in emissions at the source, and help smaller communities navigate the program. What is most exciting is seeing how the money generated is invested. Millions of dollars generated under the program go to multiple projects, with transportation receiving a hefty amount. It is a pleasure to work for a unique and innovative program that has allowed me to exercise my outreach and project management skills, and hone new ones; namely policy

interpretation and implementation. This experience has set me up to be a leader in government, and I see a future where I am a planner focused on resilience and transportation access at the core of addressing equity and climate change together.

My education and varied career experiences in government and environmental and transportation planning have made me an excellent candidate for the Master of Public Administration at The Evergreen State College. I am drawn to Evergreen's program as I seek to be a public servant that highly values equity and resilience, which Evergreen's MPA program will provide. Pursuing this program will allow me the opportunity to research the intersections of climate change and resiliency to better prepare urban and rural communities for climate change impacts through an equitable and transformative policy-making process.

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