



**BUSINESS OF THE CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF MERCER ISLAND**

**AB 6601
January 21, 2025
Study Session**

AGENDA BILL INFORMATION

TITLE:	AB 6601: Sustainability Work Program Update	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Discussion Only <input type="checkbox"/> Action Needed: <input type="checkbox"/> Motion <input type="checkbox"/> Ordinance <input type="checkbox"/> Resolution
RECOMMENDED ACTION:	Receive report. No action necessary	

DEPARTMENT:	Public Works
STAFF:	Jason Kintner, Chief of Operations Alaine Sommargren, Deputy Public Works Director Kellye Hilde, Deputy Public Works Director Alanna DeRogatis, Sustainability Program Manager
COUNCIL LIAISON:	n/a
EXHIBITS:	1. Q1 2025 Climate Action Plan Implementation Status 2. 2023 GHG Report Executive Summary 3. Electric Leaf Blower Pilot Program
CITY COUNCIL PRIORITY:	4. Focus efforts and actions to be an environmentally and fiscally sustainable, connected, and diverse community.

AMOUNT OF EXPENDITURE	\$ n/a
AMOUNT BUDGETED	\$ n/a
APPROPRIATION REQUIRED	\$ n/a

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this agenda bill is to provide an update on the status of the Sustainability Program Work Plan, highlighting key actions that were implemented last biennium and planned work plan items for the 2025-2026 biennium.

- The Mercer Island Climate Action Plan (CAP) was adopted by City Council in April 2023 ([AB 6246](#)).
- At their May 2023 mid-year planning session, City Council identified specific CAP actions as Early Actions. These actions were prioritized and implemented in the 2023-2024 biennium.
- Staff have implemented programs which support the plan’s six Focus Areas and move municipal operations and the community toward reaching CAP targets.
- The City continues to participate in partnerships and programs that enhance and supplement its sustainability efforts.
- Results of the 2023 Greenhouse Gas Emissions assessment indicate that both community and municipal operations emissions must decrease in order to achieve 2030 reduction goals.

Sustainability work in the 2025-2026 biennium will focus on programs that are likely to have significant impacts on emissions reductions, in addition to ongoing projects.

BACKGROUND

In 2007, the City adopted greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction targets of 25% by 2020, 50% by 2030, and 80% by 2050 (compared to a 2007 baseline). In 2011, Mercer Island became a founding member of the King County-Cities Climate Collaboration (K4C). In June 2021, King County's Growth Management Planning Council (GMPC) updated the County 2050 emissions target to a 95% reduction, which the Mercer Island City Council ratified in [Resolution No. 1620](#) in March 2022.

This work toward establishing City sustainability goals and actions culminated in April 2023 with the adoption of the City's Climate Action Plan (CAP), which outlines a roadmap for the City to meet its GHG reduction commitments and other climate resiliency goals. The CAP identifies 59 actions, grouped into six Focus Areas, for the City to implement as it works toward achieving emissions reduction targets. Fifteen of these actions were already being enacted prior to the adoption of the CAP, and 26 were identified as Near Term actions to be started as soon as possible. Of these Near Term actions, five were identified as Early Actions in May 2023 at the City Council's mid-year planning session as well as an additional, non-CAP action.

The Sustainability Program Manager role, established as part of the 2021-2022 Budget, supports the implementation of the CAP which includes actions at both the municipal and community level. This work includes capital project support and coordination with the maintenance and operations teams on sustainability initiatives, while also maintaining the City's long-running involvement in regional intergovernmental sustainability initiatives, such as K4C. The Sustainability Program Manager also provides the City Council with an annual report and recommended work plan.

ISSUE/DISCUSSION

Nearly two years after the adoption of the CAP, significant progress has been made in the implementation of defined actions. Of the 59 actions in the plan, 54% are currently either ongoing or in progress, with three completed. During the 2023-2024 biennium, progress was made on all of the Council-identified Early Actions, except for the Green Power Program (BE1.7), which will kick off in 2025. Progress on some key CAP and related sustainability initiatives are described below and work on all in progress CAP actions is outlined in Exhibit 1. CAP actions, below, are identifiable by their Action ID in parenthesis, denoting the Focus Area and Action Number.

GHG Tracking and Reporting (CC1.3)

As with the 2022 GHG reporting, staff worked with Cascadia Consulting Group to complete reporting on 2023 GHG emissions and updated the interactive dashboard on the [City website](#) (CC3.1).

The City's 2023 GHG report found that community emissions decreased slightly (<1%) compared to 2022. Though small, this turnaround is positive after the increase in emissions that was seen in 2022 compared to 2020. In 2023 community emissions totaled 307,889 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (MTCO_{2e}), which represents a 7% decrease from 2007 emissions (332,035 MTCO_{2e}), meaning the City needs to see a further 43% reduction in emissions over the next 5 years in order to achieve the target of a 50% emissions reduction compared to 2007 by 2030.

Municipal operations emissions have continued to decrease and have fallen 18% compared to 2022. Most of this reduction was due to a change towards more accurate waste tonnage accounting, as well as the closure of City Hall. While on the right track, the City must continue to pursue additional reduction efforts to achieve the CAP goal of carbon neutral municipal operations by 2030. As noted in the CAP, existing and future federal, state, and regional climate policies are expected to significantly help reduce emissions, but strong local action will be vital in achieving the City's goals both at the municipal and community levels (see Exhibit 2).

Electric Lawn & Construction Equipment (TR1.6)

Action TR1.6 encourages the use of electric gardening equipment and ultimately seeks to implement a ban on gas-powered leaf blowers. At Council's direction, the City's Park Operations team utilized American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to purchase five backpack and three handheld electric leaf blowers from multiple brands to evaluate their performance and the feasibility of a ban on gas powered equipment. Over the course of this pilot, Parks staff have noted that while the equipment is quieter and is more convenient for some tasks, the batteries do not last as long as advertised. Compared to their gas counterparts, electric backpack blowers are about three times as expensive, nearly twice as heavy, and 27% less powerful in their blowing force. After approximately one year, two backpack blowers made by the same manufacturer failed and needed to be disposed of. Since the equipment is predominantly made of plastic, and the manufacturer did not request the return of the defective equipment, staff removed the battery for recycling and disposed of the backpacks.

Several other cities regionally, including Seattle and Kirkland, have passed resolutions banning equipment by 2027 and 2025, respectively, though they each include a caveat that the timeline may be lengthened. With the limitations of current equipment, and the significant disparity in cost, staff support allowing more time for the industry to design and develop better alternatives, and to observe the rollout of other regional bans, prior to proceeding with a ban on gas equipment on Mercer Island. Additional information on the pilot program is included in Exhibit 3.

Mandatory Composting/Recycling (CD1.2)

Action CD1.2 calls for the City to phase in new state mandates for residential and commercial recycling and composting, and enforce waste sorting as required by implementation year, especially for multi-family buildings and commercial properties where contamination is high. To help support this work, the City hired a consultant, Resource Synergy, in July 2024 to conduct outreach and education efforts with commercial and multifamily properties. The purpose of this project is to encourage compliance with the state Organics Management Law and to improve the diversion rate among commercial and multifamily properties. Under the law, any business generating at least 8 cubic yards of organic waste per week was required to establish compost service by January 2024. By January 2026, any business generating at least 96 gallons (approximately 0.5 cubic yards) of organics per week must have compost service.

The current City-wide diversion rate is 61%, and the current average diversion rate for commercial and multifamily customers is 31%, making commercial and multifamily customers the biggest target for driving improvements. Over the course of the project, Resource Synergy identified a total of 49 properties for targeted outreach. Of the commercial properties they contacted, nearly half already had compost service in place. Resource Synergy successfully implemented compost service for all businesses at South Mercer Village and is currently wrapping up implementation at two more businesses and one multifamily property. Staff will continue to focus on increasing the diversion rate for commercial and multifamily, as well as residential, properties through a variety of outreach and education efforts, in addition to continuing work in improving the diversion rate in municipal operations.

Monitoring and Maintenance Baseline for All City Open Spaces (NS2.5)

The CAP set a target of transitioning 10% of public open space from active restoration to a monitoring and maintenance phase by 2030. In 2024, Natural Resources staff have been working with a consultant, Haven Ecology and Research, to complete a baseline forest health assessment. A final report of findings will be delivered at the end of January 2025. As part of the data collection for this forest health assessment, the consultant surveyed 146 large overstory plots, throughout the island's open spaces and 446 smaller understory plots. Overstory plots are looking at the trees and evaluate the percent canopy cover, canopy type (deciduous, conifer, native, non-native), trees per acre, and coarse woody debris, while the understory plots include everything under the trees, including evaluation of soil stability and moisture, understory species richness and diversity, tree seedling density (regeneration), and percent cover of understory species. The data collected provides a baseline of forest stand structure, tree regeneration, understory plant abundance and diversity, among many other metrics of forest health. This data will be used to develop updated management plans and to measure future restoration success.

Expand Curbside/Doorstep Recycling Options

While not included in the CAP, the City Council requested an additional Early Action item that directs staff to work with a local recycler to offer a minimum of two focused recycling events per year. During these events, "difficult-to-recycle" materials are collected directly from residents' doorsteps (both single-family and multifamily homes). The City held two doorstep recycling pickup events in partnership with Ridwell in 2024, one in June and one in October, and successfully diverted over 3600 lbs. of plastic film and Styrofoam from the landfill. Staff will continue to work on expanding curbside recycling opportunities for residents in the 2025-2026 biennium.

Heat Pump Rebates and Education (BE1.1)

The City of Mercer Island is also a founding member of the [Eastside Climate Partnership](#) (ECP), which formed in 2023 and is made up of the cities of Bellevue, Issaquah, Kirkland, Mercer Island, Redmond, and Sammamish. The City signed the [Interlocal Agreement](#) in 2022. The flagship program of the ECP is the [Energy Smart Eastside program](#). This program launched in 2022, with a pilot program to help support low- and moderate-income qualified households to transition from natural gas furnaces to heat pumps ([AB 6060](#)). This program educates residents on the benefits of heat pumps, and provides incentives for residential households, affordable housing, and adult family homes.

By the end of 2024, Mercer Island saw six heat pump installations in low-income households, five more in moderate income households that redeemed a program rebate, and an additional ten installs in households that took advantage of the equipment discount offered through the program. The City secured the majority of the funding for this work from grants, including from the Washington State Department of Commerce's HEAR (Home Electrification and Appliance Rebates) Program. Staff will continue to work to support and expand the program beyond just heat pumps. In a home electrification survey launched in Q4 2024, 56% of MI survey respondents identified electrification of household appliances/equipment as being a priority for them. Thirty-five percent of respondents already had a heat pump, with 24% interested in converting within the next five years. Heat pump water heaters and electric stoves ranked as the appliances respondents were looking at converting to next.

Tree Planting Incentive Program (NS1.1)

In a collaboration between Natural Resources, Stormwater, and Sustainability staff, the City launched a tree giveaway program in summer 2024 and has issued 51 vouchers for planting on private property. CAP goals

call for a 5% increase in tree canopy cover on privately held land. This target is driven by findings from the [2018 Tree Canopy Assessment](#) that found that 85% of remaining space suitable for planting on Mercer Island is located in single-family residential areas. Staff will continue to support this program in the 2025-2026 biennium.

Additional Items

In addition to making significant progress on CAP Action Items, staff also undertook the following projects in 2024:

- Developed a Water Shortage Contingency Plan in response to the SPU Transmission Line Emergency
- Developed 2025-2029 Commute Trip Reduction Plan in line with state requirements. The plan impacts all worksites with 100+ full-time employees who begin their shift on weekdays between 6-9am. On Mercer Island, this impacts one employer, in addition to the City.
- Offered rain barrels to residents at a reduced cost, to encourage rainwater capture and reuse
- Collected over one ton of batteries for recycling

NEXT STEPS

In an effort to work towards the City's goal of advancing sustainable practices throughout the City organization and community, several CAP actions were identified as a priority for the 2025-2026 biennium. Some of these actions are ongoing, while several will be new efforts. Staff will continue the ongoing actions outlined above and pursue the following actions in an effort to achieve the City's 2030 goals.

Green Power Program (BE1.7)

The purpose of this action is to encourage sign ups to the City's utility provider, Puget Sound Energy's (PSE), Green Power Program. By signing up for the Green Power Program, participants can choose to match up to 100% of their electric use with renewable energy, thereby reducing our region's dependence on fossil fuel generated electricity and increasing the overall amount of renewable energy that is available to the entire system. Thirteen percent of Mercer Island customers already participate in this program, which is higher than PSE's overall program participation rate of 10%. The City has supported very successful campaigns in the past, and so this action was identified as an Early Action by Council for 2034-2024. The City is now launching an effort to encourage 100 new sign ups into the program by the end of 2025. If the City is able to achieve this goal, PSE is offering a \$10,000 award towards a new community solar installation on the Island, which staff intend to direct to a solar panel installation on the upcoming Public Safety and Maintenance building.

Solarize Eastside Campaign (BE1.6)

Along with partner cities in the Eastside Climate Partnership, the City will be launching a Solarize 2025 campaign with Olympia Community Solar. The campaign is planning to open for enrollment in late February.

Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Infrastructure Plan (TR1.1)

In October 2024, the City applied for and was awarded \$100,000 in funding from the Washington State Department of Commerce's Climate Planning Grant program to develop the first phase of its EV Charging Infrastructure Plan. The development of this Plan will be pivotal in positioning the City to meet its 2030 and 2050 emissions reduction goals. The CAP calls for this plan to guide the expansion of EV charging capacity throughout the City. This first phase of work will also inform the pre-design phase of new City facilities, including the planned Public Safety and Maintenance (PSM) building, to ensure the City will have adequate charging capacity for a future electrified fleet.

Due to the scale of the Plan, the project has been divided into phases. This first phase focuses on developing a plan for municipal EV infrastructure and creating a roadmap for electrifying the City fleet. The City has recently signed an agreement with a consultant, EXP U.S. Services, to develop the Municipal phase of this plan by June 2025, in alignment both with the grant deadline, and with the design of the PSM building. Upon completion of this first phase, staff will prepare for the development of the Community phase of the plan.

WA Clean Buildings Performance Standard (BE2.3)

In 2019, the Clean Buildings Performance Standard (CBPS) was signed into law, expanded in 2022, and augmented in 2023. The objective is to lower costs and pollution from fossil fuel consumption in the state's existing commercial and multifamily buildings above 20,000 square feet. Under the law, buildings are divided into two groups: buildings over 50,000 sq ft are known as Tier 1 buildings, while those between 20,000-49,999 sq ft are Tier 2. The compliance deadlines for Tier 1 buildings fall between June 2026 and June 2028, while Tier 2 buildings must comply by July 2027.

As part of their compliance, Tier 1 buildings are required to meet an Energy Use Intensity (EUI) target, while Tier 2 buildings are not. All buildings impacted by this legislation are required to benchmark their energy usage and develop and implement an Energy Management Plan (EMP), and an Operations & Maintenance (O&M) plan.

With the closure of City Hall, the Mercer Island Community and Event Center (MICEC) is the only City-owned building that is subject to CBPS. At 37,925 sq ft (or 42,748 including the Annex, which is on the same utility meters), the MICEC is a Tier 2 building with a compliance deadline of July 1, 2027. In order to comply, the City will need to complete an energy benchmark of the building, which encompasses 12 months of energy use data, as well as develop and implement an EMP and an O&M plan. Both plans need to be in place for 12 months prior to compliance, meaning they need to be completed and in place no later than June 30, 2026. Work on these plans is already well underway. Overall, approximately 30 buildings total on the Island are impacted by this legislation. In addition to working towards compliance for City buildings, staff will continue reaching out to impacted building owners on Mercer Island to ensure they are aware of the requirements and prepared to submit for compliance.

Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Policy (CC2.6)

Staff will work to develop and implement a municipal Environmental Preferable Purchasing Policy that prioritizes products with the lowest environmental impact. The policy will guide purchasing decisions within each department, including vehicle and fuel purchases, and construction materials. This work will coincide with the development of the municipal fleet electrification roadmap and will help influence how the City is able to apply a "climate-lens" to decision making (CC3.2).

Staff will continue to report to the City Council annually on the Sustainability Work Program, including the status of Climate Action Plan and the City's progress toward achieving Climate Action Plan targets.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Receive report. No action necessary.