



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

**AB 6434
March 19, 2024
Regular Business**

AGENDA BILL INFORMATION

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| TITLE: | AB 6434: Sustainability Work Plan 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. | |

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| DEPARTMENT: | Public Works | | |
| STAFF: | Jason Kintner, Chief of Operations Alaine Sommargren, Deputy Public Works Director Alanna DeRogatis, Sustainability Program Analyst | | |
| COUNCIL LIAISON: | Jake Jacobson | Craig Reynolds | Ted Weinberg |
| EXHIBITS: | 1. Sustainability Workplan 2. 2022 GHG Report Executive Summary | | |
| CITY COUNCIL PRIORITY: | 4. Focus efforts and actions to be an environmentally and fiscally sustainable, connected, and diverse community. | | |

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| 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 are being implemented this biennium and planned work plan items for the 2025-2026 biennium.

- The Mercer Island Climate Action Plan was adopted by City Council in April 2023 ([AB 6246](#)).
- Over the last seven months, staff have implemented programs which support the plan’s six Focus Areas and serve to 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.
- Community and municipal operations greenhouse gas emissions must decrease significantly 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.

The Sustainability Program Analyst role, established as part of the 2021-2022 Budget, supports the implementation of the CAP, as well as the implementation of municipal sustainability programs, including improving energy efficiency and reducing the City’s own carbon footprint and waste generation. 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 the K4C. The Sustainability Program Analyst also provides the City Council with an annual report and recommended work plan.

ISSUE/DISCUSSION

In August 2023, the City hired a new Sustainability Program Analyst, who immediately began the implementation of CAP priorities, starting with items identified as early- and near-term actions. In addition, work has continued on programs established prior to the adoption of the CAP and other sustainability initiatives that align with CAP-identified goals. Key actions taken over the last seven months have been described below, and a full list of accomplishments and work items underway are available in Exhibit 1. Those specifically identified in the CAP are denoted with their Action ID.

FOCUS AREA: CROSS-CUTTING & MUNICIPAL

The goal for the Cross-Cutting and Municipal Focus Area is to reduce overall community and municipal GHG emissions, integrate climate considerations into City reporting and decision-making, and encourage community members to participate in local climate action. There are a total of 12 actions identified for this focus area. Some of the current work is directly tied to identified actions, while some directly supports the broader Focus Area goals.

2022 GHG Emissions Analysis & Interactive GHG Dashboard

In late 2023, staff worked with Cascadia Consulting Group to complete reporting on 2022 GHG emissions and recently published an interactive dashboard on the [City website](#) (CC3.1). Cascadia’s work is part of a joint contract with the other cities in the [Eastside Climate Partnership](#), which allows the cities to pool resources and align reporting methodology across the region. A 2023 inventory and an update to the dashboard will be completed in 2024.

Puget Sound Energy Strategic Energy Management (SEM) Program

Last fall, the City joined PSE's Strategic Energy Management (SEM) Program, which provides cities with incentives for making low- and no-cost changes to reduce energy use in municipal buildings. These changes primarily include operations, maintenance, and behavior changes rather than large-scale retrofits. Participation in this 3-year program aligns with the CAP goal of achieving carbon-neutral municipal operations by 2030. The City's baseline year for usage was set at 2023 levels, to represent the "new-normal" of usage, post-COVID. The City's Performance Target is a 3% reduction in electricity and gas usage for each calendar year. The Sustainability Program Analyst will work with staff to standardize energy conservation behaviors, such as limiting unnecessary plug-load in City buildings, turning off lights, and adjusting temperature setpoints.

2025-2026 Capital Improvement Program Planning

As budget development for the 2025-2026 gets underway, the Sustainability Program Analyst is participating in planning for 2025-2026 capital projects to apply a sustainability-lens. Action CC3.2 specifically calls for the City to "apply a climate lens to City decision-making around major activities, capital projects, and initiatives." To incorporate a sustainability-lens to upcoming CIP projects, the Sustainability Program Analyst has been involved in early project development, offering suggestions for more sustainable project elements.

FOCUS AREA: BUILDINGS & ENERGY

The Buildings and Energy Focus Area includes actions aimed at reducing GHG emissions from buildings, reducing energy use, electrifying buildings, and transitioning to clean and reliable renewable energy sources.

Heat Pump Programs

Action BE1.1 calls for the City to form regional partnerships to expand local heat pump adoption in residential and commercial properties. One of the existing programs of the Eastside Climate Partnership is the [Energy Smart Eastside campaign](#). 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](#)). Through this program, the City has fully funded the installation of heat pumps for two income-qualified households and is also offering a \$1,500 "Fuel Switch Incentive" for moderate-income households. This incentive is funded through grants received through the Energy Smart Eastside program. In addition to these incentives, all participants in the Energy Smart Eastside program are also eligible for an additional \$500 discount offered by our equipment distribution partner, which has additionally benefited 4 Mercer Islanders. The program is also working on general outreach and promotion to educate all Eastside residents on available rebates and tax incentives.

FOCUS AREA: TRANSPORTATION

The primary goal of the Transportation Focus Area is to reduce GHG emissions associated with transportation through actions such as transitioning to electric vehicles (EVs), expanding transportation options, improving cycling and pedestrian networks on Mercer Island, and decarbonizing off-road equipment.

Electric Lawn Equipment

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 Maintenance team utilized ARPA funds to purchase three backpacks and three handheld electric leaf blowers to evaluate their performance and the feasibility of a ban on gas powered equipment. This pilot program is ongoing. Staff are planning to host an

open house in November 2024 to provide an opportunity for elected officials to try the equipment and provide feedback.

Electric Vehicle Charging Stations

To accelerate the installation of EV charging infrastructure on the Island, staff applied for two grants at the end of 2023: The Charge Where You Are grant from the WA Department of Ecology, as well as the Washington Electric Vehicle Charging Program through the WA Department of Commerce. Both applications aimed to fund the installation of EV chargers at the forthcoming commuter parking lot at the former Tully's site. Unfortunately, the City was not awarded funding through either application. Staff will continue to monitor funding opportunities for the expansion of charging infrastructure.

FOCUS AREA: CONSUMPTION & DISPOSAL

The Consumption and Disposal Focus Area seeks to reduce overall community waste, as well as the GHG emissions associated with the consumption and disposal of goods and materials. Although there are only six Actions identified with this Focus Area, it also contains several ambitious Targets, including an 11% reduction in tons of landfilled waste. The following projects highlighted support the goal and targets set out in this Focus Area:

On-Island Battery Recycling

Spurred by a local student's suggestion to City Council, the Sustainability Program Analyst collaborated with the Mercer Island Thrift Shop to host a battery recycling box, to both recycle batteries and bring in more shoppers. Through this program, the City has made it easier for Islanders to recycle household batteries and limit the risks posed by batteries in the standard waste stream. Originally deployed in September 2023, the battery recycling boxes have collected over 1,200 lbs. of batteries from residents and diverted them from the landfill (CD2.2). This program will continue for the foreseeable future to provide an on-Island solution for battery recycling.

King County Re+ Pledge

In September 2023, the City Council adopted [Resolution No. 1648](#) to express support for the King County Re+ Program. The pledge is a non-binding agreement from the King County Solid Waste Division that acknowledges the challenges and opportunities associated with reducing regional GHG and extending the life of the Cedar Hills Landfill, which serves as the county's only active landfill. This program aligns with the waste diversion goals in the CAP, and the Re+ Pledge is a mechanism that allows cities to signal commitment to the goals of the Re+ Strategic Plan and gives the City access to funding opportunities for zero-waste sustainability initiatives.

Municipal Waste Audit

According to the 2022 GHG report, solid waste accounts for nearly 16% of municipal emissions. To identify areas to reduce landfilled waste and better track municipal waste generation, the Sustainability Program Analyst completed a waste audit for all City buildings and parks in February and March 2024. Several opportunities to improve operations were identified through this effort, including the purchase of an electric composter for the Public Works Building. These audits will continue through 2024 to monitor progress and ensure an accurate account of annual waste generation for future GHG emissions reports.

I-90 Ramp Litter Clean-Up Grant

To address the ongoing accumulation of litter on highway ramps on and off Mercer Island, staff applied for a grant through the Ramp Litter Cleanup Program from the WA Department of Ecology. This grant will enable the City to hire a contractor to supplement WSDOT's ramp cleanup efforts through June 2025. The City will require the contractor to sort all collected waste so that recyclable materials and hazardous materials are kept separate and disposed of appropriately.

FOCUS AREA: NATURAL SYSTEMS

The goal of the Natural Systems Focus Area is to foster climate resilient natural landscapes by protecting vital habitats and ecosystems and conserving water resources.

Open Space Restoration Monitoring

Action NS2.5 calls for the assessment of all City Open Space areas to establish a baseline for future monitoring and maintenance goals. The CAP sets a target of transitioning 10% of public open space from active restoration to a monitoring and maintenance phase by 2030. Natural Resources staff have hired a consultant who will perform an assessment this summer and conclude their work by the end of 2024.

NEXT STEPS

The City's 2022 GHG report found that community emissions have increased 9% since 2020, which is primarily due to an increase in transportation emissions. Though Community emissions are still below 2019 levels, this is a concerning trend that puts the City off-target for a 50% emissions reduction. Community Emissions in 2022 totaled 325,983 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (MTCO_{2e}), which represents only a 2% decrease from 2007 emissions (332,035 MTCO_{2e}).

Conversely, municipal operations emissions have decreased 8% since 2020. While this trend is promising, 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.

While pursuing a diversity of CAP actions is vital for reaching the plan's established targets, much of the work in the coming biennium will focus on reducing emissions in both the community and municipal operations. Staff will continue the ongoing actions outlined above and pursue the following actions in an effort to achieve the City's 2030 goals:

COMMUNITY EMISSIONS REDUCTION EFFORTS

Annual GHG Emissions Analysis & GHG Dashboard

The City has committed to maintaining a publicly available [online dashboard](#) that provides annual updates on GHG reduction progress (CC3.1). Staff intends to continue work with Cascadia Consulting to report on 2023 emissions, as well as backfilling 2021 emissions data that has not yet been analyzed.

Residential Energy-Efficiency Programs

Residential energy use currently accounts for 27% of the Island's GHG total emissions and 69% of the Island's total energy emissions. According to data from [Rewiring America](#), Mercer Island would need to install

approximately 270 more heat pumps to hit 2050 emissions goals. Though many Islanders are likely making the switch outside of the Energy Smart Eastside program, achieving this goal will require significant outreach and education, and likely substantial financial support for Island households unable to make this investment on their own. Increasing participation in the Energy Smart Eastside program will help bring the City closer to hitting this goal.

Community Solar Energy

Solar panel expansion and storage is related to multiple actions in the CAP (BE1.2, BE1.5), and not only serve an important role in emissions reductions, but would also support Mercer Island's energy grid resiliency. Staff will seek opportunities for installation incentives and help promote existing funding options for residents and community organizations to install solar panels and battery storage.

EV Charging Infrastructure Plan

The expansion of Mercer Island's EV charging capacity is necessary to accelerate EV adoption by residents, and to support further electrification of the City's vehicle fleet. Staff will select a consultant to support the development of a plan that guides this expansion of charging infrastructure (TR1.1). The CAP established a 20% target that all registered passenger vehicles on Mercer Island be electric by 2030, and it will be crucial to provide sufficient charging infrastructure to support this transition.

Waste Diversion Options

As of December 2023, 57% of waste produced by Mercer Island is diverted away from the landfill. The CAP outlines a goal of 70% waste diversion, in addition to a goal of no edible food waste entering the landfill. Community education on best recycling and composting practices is central to achieving these goals, as well as providing alternative residential recycling options including expanded curbside and drop-off services. Increasing commercial diversion through outreach and education is a top priority, as the commercial diversion rate is around 36%. Implementation of the WA Organics Legislation (CD1.2) will also be a high priority action.

Tree Planting Program

Staff are currently researching the feasibility of hosting a tree giveaway program to incentivize tree planting on private land (NS1.1). The 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 plantable space on Mercer Island is located in Single-Family Residential areas.

MUNICIPAL EMISSIONS REDUCTION EFFORTS

Grant Funding for Municipal Operations Improvements

A variety of state and federal funds are available to help support climate-related projects, which staff monitor closely as they are announced. Replacing end-of-life building systems with energy-efficient, electric alternatives will help reduce emissions associated with natural gas, which currently accounts for 14% of municipal emissions. Expanding municipal solar energy generation and storage is crucial to the City achieving carbon neutrality (CC2.7). The City's vehicle fleet, which is the largest contributor to municipal emissions (27%), makes fleet electrification a top priority in the coming years (CC2.4).

Operational Change Efforts

In addition to efforts that require significant financial investments, efforts that require no funding are a priority to maintain. Continued participation in PSE's SEM program will supplement select City equipment retrofits. Improvements to staff recycling and compost practices, as well as the promotion of alternative commute options (CC2.1), will help maintain and drive future reductions in municipal emissions.

Carbon Sequestration of Public Lands

Action NS2.9 calls for an assessment of the carbon sequestration of existing public land on Mercer Island. To assess opportunities to increase carbon sequestration to help offset Island emissions, the City must understand how the public lands are currently performing. Staff will research current assessment methodology and regional efforts in preparation for this work. Increasing the carbon sequestration of City land will help the City offset emissions related to municipal operations.

Staff will continue to report to the City Council annually on the Sustainability Work Plan, including the status of Climate Action Plan. In addition, staff will provide Council with the City's progress toward reaching/approaching Climate Action Plan targets.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Receive report. No action necessary.