



**PLANNING COMMISSION
CITY OF MERCER ISLAND**

**PCB 24-03
February 28, 2024
Regular Business**

AGENDA BILL INFORMATION

TITLE:	PCB 24-03: Comprehensive Plan Update: Climate Action Plan-Related Amendments	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Discussion Only <input type="checkbox"/> Action Needed: <input type="checkbox"/> Motion <input type="checkbox"/> Recommendation
RECOMMENDED ACTION:	Discuss options for amending the Land Use Element and provide initial direction to staff.	

STAFF:	Alison Van Gorp, CPD Deputy Director	
EXHIBITS:	1. Excerpts from Draft Element 2 - Land Use Element 2. CAP-Land Use Element Comparison Chart	

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this Planning Commission bill is to provide an overview of the goals and policies in the draft Comprehensive Plan Land Use Element related to climate and the Climate Action Plan (CAP), and to seek the commission’s initial direction on how to address climate in the 2024 periodic update of the Comprehensive Plan.

- Initial updates to the Land Use Element were reviewed by the Planning Commission in 2022.
- The CAP was adopted in 2023.
- The Growth Management Act now requires the City to create a Climate Element with greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction and resilience subelements by 2029.
- The Land Use Element needs further amendments to reflect and remain consistent with the CAP.

BACKGROUND

Land Use Element

The Planning Commission initially reviewed and revised the Land Use Element in Q3-Q4 2022, finalizing a public review draft in November 2022 ([PCB 22-19](#)). At the time the draft was finalized, it was noted in the draft that additional changes would likely be needed to align with the CAP, which was due to be adopted in 2023. Excerpts of the draft Land Use Element are included as Exhibit 1, which includes just the sections of the element that pertain to sustainability and climate.

Climate Action Plan

The CAP was subsequently adopted in April 2023 ([AB 6246](#)). The process to draft and review the CAP was lengthy, spanning approximately 18 months, and involved substantial public outreach and involvement, including two community workshops and a statistically valid survey. The CAP process is well documented on [Let’s Talk](#), including summaries of the public input that was received. The adopted [Climate Action Plan](#) identifies goals, targets, strategies and actions for reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and adapting to the likely impacts of climate change across six focus areas:

1. Cross-Cutting and Municipal
2. Buildings and Energy
3. Transportation
4. Consumption and Disposal

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5. Natural Systems
 6. Community Resilience

The Comprehensive Plan will adopt the CAP by a dynamic reference in (e.g. “The most recent version of the Mercer Island Climate Action Plan is hereby adopted”). This means that when the CAP is updated in the future, the Comprehensive Plan will not need to be updated as well.

Future Climate Element

State legislation passed in 2023 ([HB 1181](#)) requires the City to adopt a Climate Element in the Comprehensive Plan by 2029. HB 1181 amended the Growth Management Act (GMA) to establish the required components of the Climate Element, which is designed to result in reductions in overall greenhouse gas emissions and enhance resilience to and avoid the adverse impacts of climate change. The Climate Element must contain two sub-elements:

1. Greenhouse gas emissions sub-element: goals and policies to reduce emissions and vehicle miles traveled, and
2. Resilience sub-element: goals and policies to improve climate preparedness, response and recovery efforts.

Adoption of a Climate Element was not included in the scope of work for the 2024 periodic update adopted by the City Council in March 2022 ([AB 6040](#)). City staff anticipate the work required to comply with HB 1181 will be undertaken in the future as a part of an annual update to the Comprehensive Plan, in advance of the legislative deadline (likely beginning in 2028).

ISSUE/DISCUSSION

The CAP represents the City’s most up to date and comprehensive aspirations and planning for addressing climate impacts. The existing climate-related sections in the Land Use Element (Exhibit 1) predate the extensive work that went into drafting the CAP. Existing goals and policies in the Land Use Element relate to and overlap with goals, targets, strategies, and actions identified in the CAP with varying levels of detail. In addition, the CAP also includes many issues/actions that are not currently discussed in the Comprehensive Plan or are only very briefly or tangentially covered. Exhibit 2 includes a table with existing Comprehensive Plan goals and policies (with draft amendments included) compared with corresponding focus areas, goals, and strategies from the CAP.

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission review the existing climate-related goals and policies in the Land Use Element and consider removing goals/policies that are redundant or do not align with the CAP. This may be as simple as removing all climate-related goals/policies in favor of relying fully on the goals/strategies of the CAP, which will be adopted by dynamic reference as described above. Alternatively, the goals and strategies identified in the CAP could be transposed verbatim to the Comprehensive Plan, however this may necessitate a Comprehensive Plan amendment in the future if the CAP is substantially revised. Staff do not recommend including additional or different goals and policies related to climate in the Comprehensive Plan that are not included in the CAP because the Comprehensive Plan must be consistent with an adopted plan such as the CAP.

Finally, staff are seeking direction on whether to move climate-related goals and policies from the Land Use Element into a new Climate Element as a part of the 2024 periodic update. If this were pursued, the new element would not fully comply with the provisions of HB 1181 in the 2024 periodic update. However, it may make the future amendments required by this legislation more straight forward, since we would likely only need to amend the new Climate Element and the Transportation Element.

NEXT STEPS

Staff request the Commission's initial input and direction at the February 28 meeting. This will be incorporated into an updated draft of the Land Use Element and potentially a new Climate Element for review by the Commission, likely in March.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Discuss options for amending the Land Use Element and provide initial direction to staff.

2 LAND USE ELEMENT

SUSTAINABILITY

Mercer Island has a proud tradition of accomplishment toward sustainability. One of the earliest efforts was the formation of the Committee to Save the Earth by high school students in the early 1970s. Through the students' fundraising, the construction and opening of the Mercer Island Recycling Center (Center) was realized in 1975. The self-supported Center was well-patronized by Islanders and, during its many years of operation, it prevented millions of pounds of recyclable materials from ending up in the landfill while contributing to the development of a sustainability ethic on Mercer Island.

In 2006, a grassroots effort of Island citizens led the City to modify the vision statement in its Comprehensive Plan to include language embracing general sustainability, and in May 2007 the City Council committed to a sustainability work program as well as a specific climate goal of reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 80 percent from 2007 levels by 2050, which was consistent with King County and Washington State targets. Later in 2007, the City Council set an interim emissions reduction goal (often called a "milepost") for City operations of five percent by 2012.

In 2012, the City convened a Sustainability Policy Taskforce, a City/community partnership, to recommend sustainability policies to the City. The City Council adopted its recommendations including dedicated staffing, incorporation of recommendations into City planning documents, development of a Sustainability Plan, and legislative actions to foster sustainability. The City's Sustainability Manager was hired in 2013.

Numerous community groups have contributed to sustainability accomplishments in the ensuing years, and many are still active, such as IslandVision, a nonprofit organization that had encouraged and supported sustainable practices on Mercer Island and helped launch an annual Earth Day fair called Leap for Green. In 2017, Sustainable Mercer Island (SMI) emerged as an umbrella group to help coordinate various initiatives on Island and to advocate for county and state-level climate measures. It has also helped organize and publicize solarize campaigns, youth environmental education, public outreach, advocating for bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and many other activities. Some are doing research, and many are volunteering with national and local organizations working to solve the climate crisis. One volunteer leads the very successful Green Schools program for the Mercer Island School District, supported by King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks. SMI fosters waste reduction, recycling, and conservation by students and schools. IslandVision, a nonprofit organization, encourages and supports sustainable practices on Mercer Island. It provided to the City, in 2018, a technical analysis of GHG sources on Mercer Island and recommended strategies to reduce GHG emissions.

From 2010 to 2019, with the entire community's sustainability in mind, the City has implemented a wide range of outreach programs, efficiency campaigns, alternative energy initiatives, land-use guidelines, and other natural resource management measures designed to minimize the overall impacts generated by Island residents, for the benefit of future generations. Due to the 20-year horizon envisioned by this Comprehensive Plan, it is especially appropriate to include measures that address the long-term actions needed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, ideally in collaboration with other local governments. Actions that the City will take in the management of its own facilities and operations are addressed in the Capital Facilities Element of this Plan. In 2018, the City continued to promote and support sustainable

development, through the development of green building goals and policies for all residential development.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change has far-reaching and fundamental consequences for our economy, environment, public health, and safety. Cities have a vital role in mitigating and adapting to climate change both individually and by working collaboratively with other local governments. Current science indicates that to avoid the worst impacts of global warming we need to reduce global GHG emissions sharply.

In 2008, the City created a Climate Action Task Force which was charged with developing a climate action plan for the City and community. The resulting plan called for tracking emissions and the formation of a City/community partnership which was called the Green Ribbon Commission. It was tasked with identifying strategies to reduce GHG emissions. Notable outcomes were the successful promotion of Puget Sound Energy's Green Power Program, which generated funds to cover the cost of the solar array the City installed at the Mercer Island Community and Events Center, and the 22 Ways emissions reduction campaign.

Leap for Green Sustainability Fair spearheaded by IslandVision and co-developed with the City is a vital instrument to educate and encourage engagement in sustainability. In addition to food and entertainment, the fair offers activities for kids and adults, demonstrations and displays of environmentally friendly ways of living, sustainability vendors, and more. The fair was not held in 2019 due to budget constraints.

The City has been very active in addressing climate change and has received national recognition for its efforts. In 2013, the City was recognized by the EPA as a Green Power Community of the Year for its very successful Green Power sign-up campaign for residents and for its commitment to local solar power generation. It was awarded Sol Smart Gold Designation from the Department of Energy in January 2018 for meeting stringent and objective criteria targeting removal of obstacles to solar development including streamlined permitting. As of January 2018, there were 184 known solar installations in the City, higher per capita than any other Eastside City. The City offers same-day permitting for most solar installations and most require only an electrical permit. The City has also installed electric vehicle charging stations, banned plastic bags, successfully piloted bike share and ride hailing services, and contracted with PSE for energy from a new windfarm to power 100 percent of City facilities, among many other actions.

The Capital Facilities Element includes a summary of the City's actions to reduce its own carbon footprint.

In 2014, King County and cities formed the innovative King County-Cities Climate Collaboration (K4C) to coordinate and enhance local government climate efforts. Mercer Island was a founding member and remains a very active participant. The K4C has charted opportunities for joint action to reduce GHG emissions and accelerate progress toward a clean and sustainable future. Mercer Island, through K4C, seeks opportunities to partner on outreach to decision-makers and the public, adopt consistent standards and strategies, share solutions, implement pilot projects, and cooperate on seeking funding resources. In 2016, Mercer Island, along with King County and other partners in K4C, was recognized with a national Climate Leadership Award from EPA. In 2019, the City Council passed Resolution 1570, which adopted an updated version of the K4C Joint Climate Commitments.

Community GHG emissions have been inventoried and reported to K4C and the public when possible, though 2016 through 2019 data have yet to be entered. The major sources of GHG on Mercer Island have been found to be passenger car travel (estimated at 40 percent of total) and building energy consumption (48 percent residential plus commercial).

With many good efforts completed and underway, it is necessary to take further action in order to meet GHG reduction targets, both in our households and in our community.

Beginning in 2018, the City assessed the City's strengths and weaknesses in supporting sustainability using the STAR Communities framework. Information from this assessment, along with the measures discussed above, and others under consideration, will be identified in more detail in a rolling six-year Sustainability Plan, to be adopted in 2019, which will guide the City's internal and external actions while taking into account the interrelated issues of climate change, population change, land use, public infrastructure, transportation choices, natural resources management, equitable services and accessibility, arts and community, public health and safety, human services, and economic development.

In 2018 and 2019, the City added goals and policies to the Land Use Element that support climate change planning with Ordinances 18-13 and 19-23. These ordinances established Goals 26 through 29. This included a goal and policies that referenced the STAR Community Framework as a means for assessing the City's sustainability efforts. During the 2024 periodic review, goals and policies referring to the STAR Community Framework were amended to reflect that this framework was absorbed into the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED for Cities program.

Beginning in 2022, the City began composing a Climate Action Plan. The Climate Action Plan establishes strategies for the City to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and vehicle miles traveled to address climate change. Those strategies are an important step to move the City forward in its response to the changing climate. Where needed, goals and policies were amended or added to this Land Use Element to support the strategies in the Climate Action Plan, including **Note: A list of amendments made in response to the Climate Action Plan will be inserted here!**

GREEN BUILDING

GOAL 21:

Promote the use of green building methods, design standards, and materials, for residential development, to reduce impacts on the built and natural environment and to improve the quality of life. Green building should result in demonstrable benefits, through the use of programs such as, but not limited to, Built Green, LEED, the Living Building Challenge, Passive House, Salmon Safe, or similar regional and recognized green building programs.

- 21.1 Eliminate regulatory and administrative barriers, where feasible, to residential green building.
- 21.2 Develop a green building program that creates incentives for residential development and construction to incorporate green building techniques.
- 21.3 Evaluate requiring the use of green building techniques for new construction and development of subdivisions as a component of a green building program.

21.4 Educate and provide technical resources to the citizens and building community on Mercer Island regarding green building as a component of sustainable development.

~~21.5 Conduct annual tracking of new, or significantly remodeled, structures verified under various green building programs on Mercer Island and incorporate statistics into the City's sustainability tracking system and performance measures.~~

DISASTER PLANNING AND RECOVERY

GOAL 22:

Maintain and enhance current community emergency preparedness and planning efforts, and provide for long-term recovery and renewal.

22.1 Periodically review and update the City's emergency management plans.

22.2 Identify, and implement, necessary enhancements to the City's emergency planning and preparedness program.

22.3 Coordinate with, incorporate, and support, the emergency management preparedness and planning efforts of local, regional, state, and national agencies and organizations, with attention to impacts on vulnerable populations.

22.4 Maintain current local community emergency preparedness programs, including volunteer coordination, City staff drills, and community outreach and education programs, with attention to impacts on vulnerable populations.

22.5 Adopt regulations and programs to mitigate and control hazards that are created by a natural event. For example, the creation of a new landslide hazard area resulting from a naturally occurring slope failure.

22.6 Continue to develop an action plan to expedite development review following an emergency event.

STAR Climate Change

Note: This section will likely need more significant restructuring and amendments to align with the Climate Action Plan. After getting initial feedback from the Planning Commission, staff will work with Ross Freeman to draft additional revisions. Those amendments will be provided for review and discussion at a future commission meeting.

GOAL 26:

~~Use the STAR Community framework, or a similar assessment framework, to help develop the City's sustainability practices and to determine the effectiveness of such practices.~~

~~26.1 Assess the effect of proposed Comprehensive Plan or development regulation amendments on sustainability.~~

~~26.2 Assess the effect of proposed City programs on sustainability.~~

~~26.3 Assess the City's existing strengths and weaknesses in supporting sustainability, using the STAR Communities framework or similar assessment framework, and identify desired programs or policies supporting sustainability.~~

GOAL 276:

Reduce community-wide greenhouse gas emissions.

~~276.1 Establish and support annual data gathering, and reporting on, Collect data and report on Mercer Island GHG emissions annually. Document progress toward emission reduction targets and progress consistent with King County-Cities Climate Collaboration (K4C).~~

~~276.2 Partner with the King County-Cities Climate Collaboration (K4C) and the community to mitigate climate change.~~

~~276.3 Provide public information and support to individual and community efforts to mitigate climate change.~~

~~276.4 Evaluate and prioritize actions to reduce GHG emissions.~~

~~276.5 Encourage the reduction of emissions from passenger vehicles through the development of zero- or low-greenhouse gas emitting transportation options and by reducing single-occupancy vehicle trips.~~

~~276.6 Promote an energy-efficient built environment by:~~

~~276.6.1 Focusing development where utility and transportation investments have been made;~~

~~276.6.2 Promoting the use of renewable and zero- and low-GHG emitting energy sources;~~

~~276.6.3 Encouraging the use of carbon-efficient building materials and building design; and~~

~~276.6.4 Mitigating urban heat island effects by expanding tree canopy and vegetation cover.~~

~~276.7 Promote renewable power generation in the community.~~

GOAL 287:

Develop and implement a Climate Action Plan.

287.1 The Climate Action Plan is hereby adopted by reference.

GOAL 298:

Adapt to and mitigate local climate change impacts.

- 298.1 Prioritize the prevention of climate change.
- 298.2 Develop an adaptive response to expected climate change impacts on the community.
- 298.3 Increase carbon sequestration through expanding tree canopy and vegetation cover.

DRAFT

EXHIBIT 2

Climate Action Plan (CAP) Land Use Element Comparison Chart

	Climate Action Plan	Comprehensive Plan – Land Use Element
<p>Cross Cutting & Municipal</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Engage and support community climate action. ○ Reduce climate impact of municipal operations. ○ Institutionalize climate considerations into City planning and decision making. 	<p>GOAL 276: Reduce community-wide greenhouse gas emissions.</p> <p>276.1 Establish and support annual data gathering, and reporting on, <u>Collect data and report on Mercer Island GHG emissions annually.</u> <u>Document progress toward emission reduction targets and progress</u> consistent with King County-Cities Climate Collaboration (K4C).</p> <p>276.2 Partner with the King County-Cities Climate Collaboration (K4C) and the community to mitigate climate change.</p> <p>276.3 Provide public information and support to individual and community efforts to mitigate climate change.</p> <p>276.4 Evaluate and prioritize actions to reduce GHG emissions.</p> <p>276.5 Encourage the reduction of emissions from passenger vehicles through the development of zero- or low-greenhouse gas emitting transportation options and by reducing single-occupancy vehicle trips.</p> <p>276.6 Promote an energy-efficient built environment by:</p> <p>276.6.1 Focusing development where utility and transportation investments have been made;</p> <p>276.6.2 Promoting the use of renewable and zero- and low-GHG emitting energy sources;</p> <p>276.6.3 Encouraging the use of carbon-efficient building materials and building design; and</p> <p>276.6.4 Mitigating urban heat island effects by expanding tree canopy and vegetation cover.</p> <p>276.7 Promote renewable power generation in the community.</p>

EXHIBIT 2

Climate Action Plan (CAP) Land Use Element Comparison Chart

<p>Buildings & Energy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce GHG emissions from buildings by reducing energy use, electrifying buildings and transitioning to clean and reliable renewable energy sources. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Transition to non-fossil building energy. ○ Reduce energy use in new and existing buildings. 	<p>GOAL 21: Promote the use of green building methods, design standards, and materials, for residential development, to reduce impacts on the built and natural environment and to improve the quality of life. Green building should result in demonstrable benefits, through the use of programs such as, but not limited to, Built Green, LEED, the Living Building Challenge, Passive House, Salmon Safe, or similar regional and recognized green building programs.</p> <p>21.1 Eliminate regulatory and administrative barriers, where feasible, to residential green building.</p> <p>21.2 Develop a green building program that creates incentives for residential development and construction to incorporate green building techniques.</p> <p>21.3 Evaluate requiring the use of green building techniques for new construction and development of subdivisions as a component of a green building program.</p> <p>21.4 Educate and provide technical resources to the citizens and building community on Mercer Island regarding green building as a component of sustainable development.</p> <p>21.5 Conduct annual tracking of new, or significantly remodeled, structures verified under various green building programs on Mercer Island and incorporate statistics into the City's sustainability tracking system and performance measures.</p>
<p>Transportation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce GHG emissions from transportation by transitioning to electric vehicles (EVs), expanding multimodal transportation options and improving cycling and pedestrian networks. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Plan for expansion of EV infrastructure and fleet 	

EXHIBIT 2

Climate Action Plan (CAP) Land Use Element Comparison Chart

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ electrification; decarbonize offroad equipment. ○ Reduce vehicle travel. ○ Reduce aviation emissions. 	
Consumption & Disposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reduce community waste and the GHG emissions associated with the consumption and disposal of goods and materials. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reduce waste generation and landfill disposal. ○ Consume sustainably. 	
Natural Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Foster climate resilient natural landscape by protecting vital habitats, ecosystems and conserving water resources. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increase urban tree canopy and greenspace. ○ Foster healthy and resilient natural systems. 	<p>GOAL 298: Adapt to and mitigate local climate change impacts.</p> <p>298.1 Prioritize the prevention of climate change.</p> <p>298.2 Develop an adaptive response to expected climate change impacts on the community.</p> <p>298.3 Increase carbon sequestration through expanding tree canopy and vegetation cover.</p>
Community Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure that all Mercer Island residents are prepared for current and future climate impacts. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increase resilience of community members to climate impacts. ○ Prepare infrastructure and emergency services for climate change. 	