



DATE: May 4, 2022
TO: Council Member Climate Work Group
FROM: Climate Action Plan Project Management Team
SUBJECT: Climate Action Plan Crucial Conversations

We have identified several areas where we believe facilitated conversations with senior leadership are needed to inform the development of the Climate Action Plan. The intention of these conversations is to help identify areas where barriers to progress may exist so that we can anticipate conversations that are required to proceed and aid in decision-making.

Funding and resource allocation

How do we determine appropriate investment in climate change strategies?

We anticipate that addressing climate change will require investments in our physical infrastructure as well as a commitment of other resources (e.g. staff time, training, professional services, etc.). We anticipate that this need for investment and capacity will necessitate changes in the nature and processes for our existing work.

We will need to ascertain how to include climate change in how we prioritize spending on capital projects, maintenance, and operational changes. We will need to assess whether the Council will include explicit cost-of carbon calculations in our financial assumptions and decision-making. To make these decisions, we will also need to discern the scale of change needed to reflect desired outcomes while balancing other needs, like keeping fees competitive. Our decision-making processes will benefit from evaluation of both the economic and the social costs/benefits of our investment decisions. Some communities (BIPOC) are going to require more time and investment because of a historic pattern of underfunding, and lack of trust/political capital.

Environmental Justice

How do we prioritize underserved communities to benefit the most from our climate strategies?

(Ties to leadership: How far are we willing to go and make firm stands on pressing environmental justice issues?)

1. Environmental justice is the intersection of the Thrive MSP 2040 outcomes of equity and sustainability. To best inform the policies and commitments in the CAP, we will need to determine which communities are disproportionately impacted by climate change and which communities are more likely to benefit from climate change strategies in the absence of intentional and targeted implementation.
2. We need to consider how to build new relationships with organizations in our region to align our climate work with their existing environmental justice efforts (e.g., Lower Phalen Creek Project).
3. We need to identify opportunities to collaborate with vulnerable communities to determine metrics and actions for environmental justice.

Compliance

How do we start to plan for potential changes in our regulatory regimes considering climate change?

Addressing climate change likely will bring changes in public policy in terms of both adaptation (e.g., stricter stormwater management standards, mandatory vulnerability assessments) and mitigation (e.g., a price on carbon emissions, net-zero energy design). Climate impacts may also degrade environmental conditions (poorer air quality, degraded water quality), leading to stricter permitting requirements. A robust Climate Action Plan requires a roadmap for understanding and responding to these risks and changing conditions.

Regional Leadership

How far are we willing to go? No one wants to "go first" and there's a need for strong, unified leadership. The Council is well positioned to step into this role. What is our desire to do so?

This conversation seems to be especially apt for Council Members, as they can set the tone for the extent of our efforts. The Council will have to use some of its reputational capital to lead the region towards climate resiliency.

The Council may lose reputational capital by not stepping forward as a regional leader. Many cities, counties, and agencies have jumped ahead of the Council in their climate planning. We will risk more by not embracing this opportunity to lead.

The Council is at the right scale to demonstrate leadership and show measurable outcomes. The state level might be too large to truly see outcomes tied to their leadership and community-level outcomes might be measurable, but not as influential. The regional scale is "just right."

Evaluating success

How do we assess potential impact of our actions, and how do we measure the impact after our actions?

Historically, it has been easy to quantify cost savings, greenhouse gas reductions, and other conservation measures within the mitigation framework. When we apply equity and environmental justice lenses, tools that are both quantitative and qualitative should be employed to measure impact of policies and implementation. The consultant may be able to help us with how best to evaluate and track our commitments through benchmarking to established best practices.

The Council will need to establish an appropriate reporting timeline for our climate efforts, and this should be informed by industry best practices and timelines that align with our standard functions.

The Council should consider asking residents how they would define success of our Climate Action Plan. This can inform our reporting and communication related to the plan.