

Key findings of public comment on the draft Climate Action Plan

About the public engagement process

Feedback on the draft Climate Action Plan was gathered from February 9 to March 3, 2021, through community meetings, an online comment form, and a survey for public entity partners. Anyone interested in the county's response to climate change was encouraged to attend an online meeting or submit comments. Feedback was received from residents, representatives of community organizations and advocacy groups, and staff from state agencies, cities, and watershed districts.

A total of 79 participants attended one of two online community meetings where county staff presented goals and core strategies. A recording of the meeting and the polls were also made available for those who couldn't attend the meetings live. Using online facilitation tools, participants completed polls about the goals and strategies, offered comments, and asked questions that were answered through a moderated process.

The online comment form received 150 responses. Respondents who submitted comments represented a spread of age groups, with the most common being age 30 to 39 and were fairly even split among genders. They were predominantly white, about 90%, with about 10% of respondents being people of color. Responses were received from residents of 18 cities: Bloomington, Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn Park, Crystal, Eden Prairie, Edina, Excelsior, Golden Valley, Hopkins, Maple Grove, Minneapolis, Minnetonka, Mound, Osseo, Richfield, St. Louis Park, St. Anthony, Wayzata.

The public engagement process generated more than 1,000 ideas and comments. The feedback received was categorized based on alignment with the five plan goals and subsections and then analyzed to identify key themes and calls to action. The feedback summary along with the verbatim comments were shared with county leadership and staff on the climate action teams. In addition to the summary below, all comments received are available in the Appendix.

Overall

What do you like?

Respondents were happy to see the county is working on a climate action plan and making it a priority. They are grateful to live in a place that recognizes the need to take urgent action.

They thought the county developed a comprehensive plan and appreciated the emphasis on collaboration, equitable outcomes, complex and overlapping impacts, and community input. They appreciate the county acknowledging that county policies, systems, and practices need to change.

Respondents appreciated the process of developing the plan and the opportunity to provide feedback, and they expressed support for the plan's implementation and the county's response to climate change.

What is missing or could be improved?

Ensure the plan results in meaningful action that meets the urgency of the climate crisis

Respondents emphasized that they want to see the Climate Action Plan produce meaningful action. They explained that they have seen the county and other governments put out visionary plans and policies that are never fully implemented and therefore nothing changes.

They encouraged the county to think bigger and more boldly to meet the reality of the climate crisis. They wanted to see a more ambitious plan with stronger commitments to not just explore strategies or increase awareness on issues but to act on the solutions identified. Some were concerned that the plan was too focused on adaptation and preparedness strategies and wanted to see more on mitigation and emissions reduction.

Respondents also felt the county needed to more clearly communicate the immediacy of climate change and the urgency required to respond. Additionally, the county needs to more explicitly acknowledge that climate change is caused by people and therefore changes need to be made in how we live and how our society operates. The county could also more clearly connect how climate change will impact or cause breakdowns in other systems and compound other crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, racial disparities, and economic inequality.

Set bigger goals and define performance metrics, timelines, and responsibilities

Respondents made it clear that the county's current greenhouse gas emission reduction goals are no longer adequate based on the global scientific consensus. They said a more aggressive goal of 80% reduction by 2035 and net zero carbon emissions by 2050 should be adopted.

Respondents also noted that the plan felt more like a framework and lacked specific and measurable goals, targets, and implementation plans. They felt specific action plans would be needed to provide details on how the work will be accomplished and who is responsible.

Respondents said the strategies and tactics identified in the plan should have specific, quantitative metrics and implementation timelines that clearly define which county departments are responsible for implementing the strategies. They explained that these specifics would not only help ensure the plan was on track, but also could be used to put pressure on other local governments, businesses, and institutions to set goals and take action.

Respondents also wanted to know how progress on the plan would be shared with the public. They were interested in reporting requirements for the plan's strategies and set dates for reviewing and updating the plan.

Define the county's role, scope, and capacity

Respondents felt they needed a better understanding of the scope of the county's responsibilities and the relationships the county has with external partners who will be involved in accomplishing the goals of the plan. They wanted to better understand what strategies are focused on internal county operations versus strategies that would apply countywide.

Respondents want to understand the capacity of the county departments involved to accomplish the goals laid out in the plan. Some respondents were concerned that the plan seemed to be embedded in public works, and they wanted to see a stronger commitment from county leadership and departments throughout the county. They wanted to see requirements that all county departments use race equity and climate impact assessment tools when evaluating plans, projects, and investments, and they wanted to see the resources and budget allocated to make implementation possible. Others suggested the county have separate working groups focused on emission reduction and mitigation strategies and adaptation and preparedness, saying that it is difficult for one team to focus on both.

Increase engagement to build community buy-in and trust

Respondents want the county to do more to collaborate and engage with the community. Some were concerned that the ideas and strategies in the plan were coming from the county and being brought to the community for feedback, rather than being generated by the community. Others felt the timeline for gathering feedback on the plan was too short and the opportunities were too limited. They expressed concern that those providing feedback are likely those who are already engaged in this work, and more approaches are needed to ensure broad participation and create space for more meaningful and diverse engagement. They felt that more community engagement earlier in the process would be critical when developing action and implementation plans to ensure success.

Goal 1: Protect and engage people, especially vulnerable communities

Climate resilience

What do you like?

Respondents liked the diverse approach to assisting communities with increasing their resiliency.

What is missing or could be improved?

Ensure capacity to address health impacts of extreme weather

Respondents want to ensure health impacts from all potential extreme weather events (heat and cold) and natural disasters are included in the plan. Concern was shared regarding capacity to address health issues due to climate change impacts, including responses to natural disasters. Respondents would like to see more public communication about the risks and causes of climate change and opportunities to prepare and respond.

Increase investment in social determinants of health

Some respondents appreciated that the plan includes housing and transportation as social determinants of health, while others did not see the connection clearly. Many commented that the county should increase investment and improve access to affordable housing, food, healthcare, transportation, and other social determinants of health. Strategies toward resilience should include increased financial investments to serve those most vulnerable and in need.

Protecting vulnerable communities

What do you like?

Respondents valued the focus on racial equity and vulnerable communities and appreciated the acknowledgement that climate change is a threat to public health.

What is missing or could be improved?

Define vulnerable communities

Respondents wondered about the criteria and data used in the definition of vulnerable communities and asked that this information be more readily available. A few respondents asked how the county will prioritize vulnerable populations in relation to specific vulnerabilities. Some commenters suggested prioritizing projects in key geographic areas, including Minneapolis Green Zones and other communities of color, and establishing metrics using human-centered design processes that address intersectional environmental principles.

Incorporate lessons from COVID-19

Some respondents wanted to know how the COVID-19 pandemic will influence updates to this plan.

Engaging the public

What do you like?

Respondents liked the reference to collective action and the recognition that residents, businesses, government, and organizations all have a role to play in mitigating and responding to climate change and we all need to work together.

What is missing or could be improved?

Invest in community-led initiatives

Many respondents believe the county should invest in community-led programs, like those centered around local food production and increasing tree canopy. The county should spread awareness through existing community-based programs and networks, such as schools, childcare settings, SNAP and WIC programs.

Better engage with communities of color

A number of respondents said the county should better listen to and engage Black, Indigenous, Asian, Latino, and communities of color in identifying issues and formulating solutions. Some respondents felt that the timeline for public engagement was short and the process was not as accessible as it should be to ensure marginalized voices are heard. Respondents stated that more effort should be put into using cultural and community trusted media to communicate, and the county should engage community and build relationships “from a place of transparency and authenticity that builds reliability and trust.”

Acknowledge and address racial inequities

A few respondents believe the climate plan highlights that the county needs to grapple with racism more fully. One respondent wondered how during this process the county will address internal bias, systemic racism, and outdated systems that often exclude and oppress residents of color. Another stated that the county should confront the root causes of inequities, be explicit about how a racial equity lens will be used, and that policies and investments should be prioritized for those most impacted and historically marginalized. In addition, an intersectional approach should be taken that accounts for housing, access, race, and more.

Green jobs

What do you like?

Respondents support investments in increasing equitable access and workforce training for a variety of green jobs, both in the community and at the county. Respondents were excited about green jobs in a variety of fields including green infrastructure, reuse and repair, sustainable agriculture, transportation, renewable energy, education, inspections, and enforcement.

What is missing or could be improved?

Increase access to green jobs and economic opportunities

Respondents are very interested in green jobs pathway programs and want racial equity and youth engagement to be a priority for these jobs. Some respondents would like to see more action steps in this area. County workforce and small business development should include green job investments. The county should partner with schools, colleges, unions, minority business councils, trade associations to increase access to economic opportunities.

Goal 2: Enhance public safety

Reducing long-term risk

What do you like?

Respondents liked that safety preparations include flooding and extreme weather. They considered the topic to be timely in regard to recent extreme weather in Texas. They appreciated the amount of data included to determine high risk areas and safety concerns. Many respondents agree that we need to be better prepared. They think that many people believe we are more prepared than we are.

What is missing or could be improved?

Increase the focus on health care planning and capacity building

Respondents were concerned about the capacity to respond to natural disasters or other health issues related to climate change. Some said the health-oriented actions are too general and vague. Some mentioned concerns about water quality, including the health of swimming beaches and the increase of disease vectors. Climate change adaptation staff with the Minnesota Department of Health's Climate and Health Program were mentioned as a good potential partner.

Increase communications and public education

Many respondents stated that the public needs more education, and there were mixed feelings about the inclusion of this goal. One person thought safety should not be a primary goal, and another believes public safety would benefit from a warmer climate. The county should be sure to provide translated information and reach out to residents, landlords, and property owners.

Ensure access to heating, cooling, and assistance

Respondents mentioned that heating and cooling needs are equally important, particularly around affordability and access. Some respondents would like to see more focus on basic needs like access to energy and shelter. Additional respondents mentioned that financial assistance should be equitable and easy to access, especially during times of emergency or distress.

Use green infrastructure to decrease impacts

Many respondents support additional green infrastructure, from planting more trees to painting roofs white to decrease impacts.

Make hidden costs more explicit

Respondents felt the county should highlight the hidden costs of climate change, including increased costs for health care, emergency responses, infrastructure and road repairs, agricultural losses, and repairs to property. One way to do this would be to set a social cost to carbon price for accounting and procurement purposes, as the City of Minneapolis has done.

Goal 3: Protect building sites, roads, infrastructure, and natural resources

Buildings and transportation infrastructure

What do you like?

Most respondents recognized the need to upgrade existing infrastructure and build new infrastructure that will account for future climate impacts. Respondents liked the idea of reassessing policies, standards, and maintenance practices for county buildings, roadways, and infrastructure. Many echoed the need for better public transit, winter maintenance of sidewalks, and stormwater management.

What is missing or could be improved?

Reconsider the need to “protect” the built environment

Respondents questioned the use of protect in this goal regarding buildings and transportation infrastructure, citing how the built environment often has negative impacts on the natural environment. They suggested making enhancements or adjustments instead. They also wondered if there were strategies around removing unnecessary infrastructure and carefully analyzing the need for new infrastructure.

Focus more on reducing salt use and improving drainage for freeze/thaw cycles

Respondents wanted to see more done to address drainage issues, especially on sidewalks, related to freeze/thaw cycles. Many sidewalks do not drain well and become icy when the snow melts, making them unsafe and leading to increased salt use. Safety improvement for pedestrians and people with limited mobility, such as those using walkers and wheelchairs, must be prioritized. There was a call to have cities maintain sidewalks, citing that infrastructure maintained by cities is much less likely to become icy during freeze/thaw cycles. Respondents see an opportunity for the county to lead by example in following best practices for reducing salt use and changing expectations around salt use.

Adopt guidelines, requirements, and incentives for sustainable buildings and stormwater capture

Respondents wanted to see increased use of local and sustainable materials and wanted to see more on green infrastructure practices like green roofs and green walls. Some respondents suggested adopting Minnesota Sustainable Building Guidelines and other site development guidelines to protect natural areas. They encouraged the county to follow guidelines for county buildings and offer incentives for green infrastructure and sustainable building practices on private property.

Use a longer timeframe to plan for infrastructure needs

The county is encouraged to look beyond mid-century climate predictions (e.g., 2050) and also consider late-century predictions (e.g., 2080) for planning infrastructure needs.

Increased stormwater and localized flooding

What do you like?

Respondents appreciated that flooding, groundwater, and drinking water were included in the plan.

What is missing or could be improved?

Focus more on drinking water and other basic needs

Respondents were encouraged to see groundwater protection included in the plan and would like to see the county take a larger role. Some respondents were concerned about access to clean drinking water in cases of emergency and would like to see more focus on basic needs like access to food, water, and energy in the plan.

Acknowledge the impact of cars and pavement on water quality

Respondents said the county cannot effectively focus on managing stormwater and protecting water quality without acknowledging the need to reduce car use and remove parking and pavement. Pavement increases runoff, and cars contribute oil and microplastic pollution to our waterways.

Coordinate with partners

Respondents were concerned that plans for partnerships are lacking in regard to protecting natural resources. Other comments mentioned partnering more with educators, landowners, and small farmers.

Green infrastructure

What do you like?

Respondents like the inclusion of green infrastructure in the plan, and many respondents want more green infrastructure incorporated more quickly. Many encouraged the county to reduce hard surfaces, add trees and native vegetation, and use county property for green infrastructure projects.

What is missing or could be improved?

Integrate more green infrastructure and allocate proper funding for maintenance

Respondents would like to see more emphasis on green roofs and green space in urban areas. They suggested that planning for infrastructure projects be required to consider green infrastructure. Some would like to see more use of carbon sequestration techniques incorporated into green infrastructure projects, including on private property. Taking a targeted subwatershed approach was suggested to assess and plan for the priorities for green infrastructure. Some mentioned goals for construction projects to minimize soil disturbance, explaining that treating soil as a valuable asset and minimizing disturbance will help to maintain soil health. Many mentioned that proper funding for maintenance of green infrastructure must be included, as this is often the reason that green infrastructure projects don't get implemented.

Protect and plant the right trees

Respondents were concerned that the county had not adjusted planting recommendations to accommodate the warmer and wetter climate. Others were concerned that there is not enough emphasis on native plants, native trees, and protecting mature trees. One commenter mentioned that the county should adopt a policy of no net loss of forest on county-administered land.

Natural areas and agricultural lands

What do you like?

Respondents were very interested in efforts to protect natural resources, preserve open space, and support regenerative agriculture and local food systems. Many emphasized the need for more green space and natural areas, citing that protecting and improving ecological functions as an important climate change mitigation strategy. Some appreciated the inclusion of agriculture in the plan, and many encouraged increased support for urban agriculture and soil improvement strategies. They support efforts to promote best practices to landowners and farmers.

What is missing or could be improved?

Increase protection of natural areas

Respondents would like more focus on the role of natural resources in reducing climate change impacts. Many questioned why protection of natural resources was grouped in with buildings and transportation infrastructure, and they felt the plan underestimated the role of healthy, functioning ecosystems. They think natural resources play a critical role in mitigating climate change impacts and preserving biodiversity and wanted more emphasis placed on these strategies.

Some respondents wanted to know which natural resources strategies are new for the county and what measurable outcomes the county is aiming for. A number of respondents wanted the county to prioritize protecting and restoring large swaths of land, suggesting the creation of an urban growth boundary to contain development and protect natural areas. Some respondents wanted a great emphasis on planting native vegetation and noted that the climate plan did not include essential protections for wildlife, birds, beneficial insects, and pollinators.

Support regenerative and community-based agriculture

Respondents would like the county to support sustainable agriculture and local food production. A number of respondents mentioned that support for regenerative agriculture should be prioritized above industrial, commodity agriculture to reduce impacts on natural resources and increase the carbon sequestration capacity of soils. Respondents called on the county to increase access to healthy, affordable, local food via community gardens and food forests. Many respondents want the county to convert underutilized county land to productive community gardens or green spaces, especially in predominantly low-income and communities of color. A number of respondents mentioned supporting plant-rich diets to help improve health and reduce the impacts of climate change.

Improve outreach to residents and landowners

The need to change practices on residential lawns so that natural systems aren't stressed by pesticides, excess nutrients, and other pollutants was echoed by many respondents. Some respondents mentioned providing incentives for residents, property owners, and farmers to change practices on their land, including reducing emissions from lawn and farm equipment and practices.

Coordinate with more partners and public agencies

Respondents were concerned that partnerships to protecting natural resources are lacking in this plan. Some respondents mentioned a need to partner in regard to local food systems and food waste with educators, food shelves, and staff administering public programs like WIC and SNAP.

Goal 4: Reduce emissions in ways that align with core county functions and priorities

Metrics and approach

What do you like?

Respondents liked that the county has goals for reducing emissions and a comprehensive plan to achieve those goals with diverse ideas and pathways. They liked that the approach includes coordinated efforts with the county leading by example.

What is missing or could be improved?

Set higher and more urgent goals

Many respondents expressed that the county's goals are not big enough in relation to the scale of the climate crisis. We need greater emission reductions and they need to happen faster. Specifically, respondents called for goals of 80% reduction by 2035 and net-zero emissions by 2050, saying this would encourage transformational actions needed to achieve decarbonization.

Some said it wasn't clear if the greenhouse gas emission reduction goals were for county operations or countywide, encouraging the county to have both operational and community wide goals. Other respondents urged the county to look at options for rapid emission reductions rather than a long-term tapering off as a way to avoid devastating consequences. They also suggested we go beyond "encouraging" changes, and instead focus on "require," "transition," or other stronger actions.

Difficulty in achieving goal is underestimated

Respondents worried that this goal would be hard to achieve and underestimates the difficulty of making progress in specific areas such as reducing vehicle miles traveled and increasing efficiency in residential and commercial buildings. Achieving this goal requires both big shifts by utilities to carbon-free energy sources and getting people to change their habits, which together is a big lift. Respondents wondered how aggressively behavior change could be pursued. Population growth was one factor that respondents identified as missing from the plan.

Define roles and new efforts

Some respondents had questions about what roles various entities – including individuals, organizations, and institutions – would play. One respondent observed that much of the work seems to fall on the county, which could be both overwhelming and not as community based. Respondents wanted to see more details on specific new actions that would be undertaken, explaining that while the work the county is already doing is a good start, innovation and new efforts will be needed to bring about the required changes.

Energy and buildings

What do you like?

Respondents liked the focus on energy efficiency and support for weatherization for low-income households. They also liked the focus on increasing reuse of quality building materials, citing how many current building materials are cheaply

made and not meant to last. They thought the building requirements for county-funded buildings were a good example of the county leading by example.

What is missing or could be improved?

Increase efforts to transition to clean, renewable energy technologies

Respondents want the plan to include more strategies to support the transition from oil and natural gas to clean, renewable energy technologies. In addition to addressing climate change, renewable energy such as community solar and distributed electricity generation with battery storage helps build resiliency in the energy grid and prevents outages.

They called on the county to define what types of renewable energy the county is considering, taking into account that some energy sources that are considered renewable undermine carbon reduction and climate justice goals. Specific examples include renewable natural gas, which would perpetuate reliance on natural gas systems, district energy fueled by renewable natural gas or biogas, and waste-to-energy. Respondents urged the county to consider the public health implications and carbon reliance of these fuels compared to other strategies like electrification. They also encouraged the county to require utilities that provide energy in the county to develop no new fossil fuel infrastructure.

Respondents want the county to provide technical assistance and convene cities to collaboratively improve understanding of how to advance energy policy. They also want the county to more strongly advocate for energy policy at the state level.

Several mandates and partnerships were suggested for the county and cities to accelerate the transition to renewable energy. Mandates suggested include electric, water heating, and heat pump requirements on all new construction and major renovations of public and private residential and commercial buildings, rooftop solar requirements on all new buildings where feasible, and requirements that downtown Minneapolis buildings use the district heating and cooling infrastructure. It was also suggested that the county partner with cities on thermal energy grids and to demonstrate the use of municipal water distribution or sewer collection infrastructure as an energy source for heat pump installation. For individual residents, it was suggested that the county offer cost share programs to residents who want to add solar or other renewable energy to their homes.

Focus more on fuel-switching to carbon-free electricity

Respondents want to see a more ambitious plan to phase out natural gas and switch to carbon-free electricity in buildings. They called for carbon emissions associated with natural gas infrastructure, such as leakage from gas pipes, to be clearly factored into the report. They want the county to adopt a carbon-free standard and set clear and aggressive carbon reduction goals for community buildings. They also want a priority placed on electrification in new construction, calling for requirements that new construction projects are sustainably built and all electric.

Keep a strong focus on energy efficiency

Respondents want the county to focus on energy efficiency and reduction strategies, especially given that building electrification may be costly and not feasible for many residents and businesses. They see energy efficiency as both a climate mitigation and adaptation tool that reduces emissions while making residents more resilient to climate-related weather events. They want the county to accelerate plans for increasing the energy efficiency of county owned and managed buildings and vehicles. There was a call to incentivize and support low-tech, zero-energy solutions such as retrofitting buildings for passive cooling and increasing green roofs.

They want to ensure the county will work with utilities through the Conservation Improvement Program to ensure it reaches underserved households and buildings that benefit the most from energy efficiency upgrades. It was suggested

that the plan include a strategy to develop partnerships with cities in the county's business and multifamily energy benchmarking collaborative to accelerate energy efficiency and expand solar and electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

Strengthen and broaden building and building material requirements

The county should further clarify the scope of the life cycle assessment for buildings and consider requirements for construction, building materials, and benchmarking to ensure improvements are actually made. Beyond material use, analysis of the embodied emission of buildings should consider land use and transportation emissions associated with the location. Appropriate additional funding should be budgeted for construction projects to fund the extra costs of these sustainability requirements.

Related to construction and demolition policies, the county should restrict demolition of existing housing stock by increasing affordable housing buybacks or supporting landlords that maintain existing housing stock in good standard. The county should also encourage or require cities to develop construction and demolition policies for city owned and funded projects and encourage requirements at the state level. There was a call to ensure that funding for the salvage and reuse of building materials is included to make these policies possible.

Related to building materials, respondents encouraged the county to include requirements around bird-safe building materials and lighting. They also encouraged the use brick over concrete or the use of alternative materials, such as making new concrete from hemp.

Transportation

What do you like?

Respondents like that reducing vehicles miles traveled, reducing emissions with transit-oriented development, and increasing bike lanes were included in the plan. They appreciate that the plan recognizes the role that air pollution and the design of the county's road network has played in creating greater disparities and health impacts along with the acknowledgement of the role that land use plays in transportation emissions.

What is missing or could be improved?

Respondents want to see changes in how the county supports the use of private vehicles by establishing goals to reduce vehicle miles traveled and car lane miles and increase investments in transit, biking, and walking infrastructure and transit-oriented development. Respondents did not think the plan went far enough in moving the county away from a car-centric transportation system and toward people-centered road design. They also wanted to better understand the county's ability to change the transportation system and where the county has influences with cities, regional and state agencies, and the federal government.

Set a goal to reduce vehicle miles traveled

A lot of respondents called for the county to set a specific goal of reducing vehicle miles traveled, with many referencing a goal from the Rocky Mountain Institute of 30 percent by 2030. They thought this was critical because transportation is a large sources of greenhouse gas emissions and changing our transportation system will impact many other areas of the plan. Respondents acknowledged that reducing vehicle miles traveled is possibly the hardest goal due to cultural norms and fear or dislike of transit and also that there needs to be a better understanding of how cities, the county, Met Council, and the state can reduce vehicle miles traveled.

Shift county road design to focus reducing driving and designing streets for people

Respondents expressed that it's time to shift roadway design to prioritize people over cars. They explained the county system is oversized and contributes to pollution and unsafe roads within neighborhoods. Recognizing that high-traffic roadways contribute to disparate health impacts from both air pollution and safety, they called for transportation investments to support broader county goals of reducing disparities, improving health, enhancing livability, and growing the economy. They suggested the following specific changes to the county's approach to roadway design.

Commit to not expanding vehicle travel lanes on county roads

Respondents called for the county to commit to not expanding vehicle travel lanes on county roads and instead add a goal for reducing car lane miles. They want the county to implement policies focused on fixing rather than expanding county roads. They explained that reducing driving lanes will disincentive driving and reduce emissions and pollution, whereas continuing to expand opportunities for driving encourages sprawl and negates other efforts to reduce emissions. Instead of adding driving lanes, the county should prioritize providing dedicated space for biking, walking, and transit on county roadways.

Stop using level of service in roadway design

Respondents urged the county to stop using level of service in roadway design because it disproportionately prioritizes the movement of cars and creates dangerous, high-speed streets that encourage sprawl. Instead, the county should focus on efficiently moving people and designing roadway projects based on community values.

Implement solutions that accelerate reduction in driving and improve safety

Respondents want the county to redesign roadways using low-cost, short-term solutions that could be implemented quickly to help jump-start a trend toward reductions in driving. They suggested four to three lane conversions on unsafe county streets to make way for walking, biking and transit and provide dedicated space to vulnerable users. They also suggested lowering speed limits, putting in traffic calming measures, making sidewalk enhancements, eliminating minimum parking requirements, supporting local business development, improving winter maintenance of bike lanes, pathways, and sidewalks, installing pedestrian-scale lighting, planting more boulevard trees, and increasing transit frequency.

Remove the expansion of park and rides

The strategy focused on the expansion of parks and rides was questioned considering that many businesses may increase opportunities for remote work. Respondents felt that park and rides further incentive driving, and funding would be better spent on increasing transit options and access to transit.

Increase investment in transit, biking, and walking infrastructure and complete streets

Respondents want to see greater investment in transit, biking, walking, and rolling infrastructure, and they want county streets specifically identified as a target for this type of investment. They want the plan to more explicitly incorporate Complete Streets principles, explaining how these can benefit people with disabilities, people who don't have access to cars, BIPOC communities, and others who are most vulnerable to climate change. They want the county to update the Complete Streets Policy to better prioritize sustainable and safe transportation in county street design. They called for the expansion of public transit routes, rapid transit, pathways, and bike lanes as well as a focus on connecting new investments to existing infrastructure. They want to see more county funding be allocated to transit and more emphasis

on reducing delays in transit projects and speeding up project timelines. They were interested in the role the county could play in electrifying buses and other transit options.

Respondents called for an increase in dense, transit-oriented development and complete streets that are designed for people rather than cars. They see an opportunity to build on the momentum of transportation trends toward increased walking and biking created by the pandemic and make them long lasting. They want the county to support development that allows people to walk, roll, bike, or take transit to fulfill their daily needs, explaining that shifts away from personal car use are not just about increased remote work but also need to factor in access to basic services. They also want complete street designs to center vulnerable users. These types of investments provide tremendous benefits for county residents by increasing livability and safety.

Respondents expressed support for existing county projects and infrastructure. Shady Oak Road and East Hennepin Avenue were cited as successful transformation projects that added sidewalks, bike lanes, and safer crossing options. Others are excited about light rail expansion, and many appreciate the existing network of biking and walking paths and lanes. But there is also a lot of work to do. Specific roadways called out in need of improvement include Cedar Avenue, Central Avenue, Lowry Avenue, and Lyndale Avenue. Addressing issues with county roads in communities that have historically faced greater disparities or have higher populations of people of color and low-income households is seen as a way to advance environmental justice.

Increase accessibility of county services and update policies around the fleet and remote work

Respondents recognized the role that the location of county services and county policies play in supporting the increased use of biking, walking, and transit over individual vehicles.

Respondents wanted to see a strategy in the plan that requires new or relocated county facilities to be easily accessible by bicycle and transit, encouraging the county to use Metro Transit's high-frequency network map to locate services.

Respondents had many suggestions for the county's vehicle fleet. They encouraged the county to adopt more aggressive goals in relation to the fleet by at least matching the federal government's goal of decreasing emissions from the county fleet by 50% and converting all light-duty fleet vehicles to electric by 2030. They also want to see the county focus on right-sizing vehicles, limiting larger vehicles, adding electric and cargo bikes to the fleet, reducing unnecessary trips, and allowing time for employees to take other modes of transportation. They wanted employee education on combining trips, incentives for employees who commute without a car, and an end to subsidized parking.

Respondents recognized the role that remote work plays in reducing transportation emissions, encouraging the county to commit to offering flexible work schedules and remote work options to employees. They explained that these changes would also make county jobs more attractive and accessible and improve retention.

Improve the transit experience

Respondents said that using transit must be a better experience if we expect people to use it more. Make transit free, clean, and safe, and specifically call out the need for improved and expanded transit shelters. Provide more comfortable places for people while waiting for transit, especially in bad or cold weather, and improve access to transit shelters in icy or muddy conditions.

Be thoughtful about infrastructure and incentives for electric vehicles and higher efficiency vehicles

There were mixed reactions about strategies to expand infrastructure and offer incentives for electric vehicles and more fuel-efficient vehicles. Some respondents support greater investments in electric vehicle charging stations to build out the infrastructure and support the transition to emission-free vehicles. Others thought that the necessary changes to the

vehicle fleet cannot happen quickly enough to achieve the emission reductions needed, and we need to instead focus on reducing driving as much as possible. Respondents said infrastructure to support electric bikes and electric wheelchairs need to be included in the conversation about electric vehicles as this helps increase accessibility of car-free transportation. There was some concern that the scrappage incentive targeted to specific communities could create a message of blame on communities who may not be responsible for the bulk of the vehicle-related emissions.

Carbon sequestration

What do you like?

Respondents liked the inclusion of stormwater mitigation, reducing turfgrass, and carbon sequestration with natural ecosystems.

What is missing or could be improved?

Many respondents called for more focus on the importance of improving soils, reducing turfgrass, increasing the use of native plants and trees.

Place stronger emphasis on the role of carbon sequestration and natural resources

Respondents called out the need for greater attention on carbon sequestration and, in general, the role that natural resources play in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere. Specifically, healthy soils and native ecosystems have greater capacity to absorb carbon by removing it from the atmosphere and cycling it into the ground for plants to take up. Carbon sequestration in soils and native ecosystems address multiple climate issues, including air pollution, extreme heat, floods, droughts, and threats to natural resources.

Reduce turfgrass and increase native vegetation

There were calls to reduce grass and mowing along county roads, create a plan to reduce the amount of impervious surfaces on the county road network, replace unused concrete with native vegetation, and increase wildlife and pollinator corridors. Increasing the use of native vegetation and the trees would help create healthy and livable communities, increase the ability of ecosystems to withstand more intense storms and reduce the impacts of flooding, and help to reduce emissions by absorbing carbon.

Respondents encouraged the county to focus on planting native species that provide food and habitat to wildlife and that are more likely to survive the stresses of future climate change. Respondents called out the need to focus on improving soil health to sequester carbon in urban areas in addition to on agricultural lands.

Use food systems to sequester carbon

Respondents called out the opportunity to use food systems to improve soil health, sequester carbon, provide green jobs, and produce more healthy, local food. They suggested increased support of community gardens and urban agriculture as well as the establishment of permaculture systems on county-owned land. They also suggested the county conduct behavior change research to learn what would be needed to encourage farmers to change their practices and offer programs that encourage them to improve soil health.

Be specific about goals for tree cover and species diversity

Related to trees, respondents want the county to focus on native trees and to be specific about diversifying tree species along roads and on public properties to avoid monocultures and ensure the tree canopy is more resistant to the impacts of pests and diseases. One respondent encouraged the county adopt a goal of no net loss of forest on county-owned

land. Another respondent wanted to see a focus on shrubs in addition to trees as part of a holistic approach to created layered landscapes.

Waste and material use

What do you like?

Respondents liked the focus on reducing food waste, diverting food to people in need, and requirements for the salvage and reuse of construction and demolition materials.

What is missing or could be improved?

Advocate for specific waste prevention policies and producer responsibility

Respondents wanted to see advocacy for waste prevention policies for specific materials, such as bans or fees on plastic bags and Styrofoam. There was also a call to take a stronger position on holding producers responsible for the materials they create, especially for items that contribute a large volume to the waste stream like paper and packaging. Refrigerants were another material called out in need of inspection to ensure proper use and disposal.

Respondents encouraged the county to use its purchasing power to focus on supporting sustainably grown food. They also said the plan needs to include strategies beyond county purchasing policies to reduce the up-front greenhouse gas emissions from the production and transportation of goods.

Make organics recycling more widely available and accessible

There was a strong desire to see organics recycling made available to all residents, especially increasing access for people living in apartment buildings and more support for businesses. Respondents explained that recycling and organics recycling are accessible actions that everyone can do and are a good topic for engagement with BIPOC communities.

Respondents supported efforts to increase organics recycling capacity in the region, such as expanding the county's transfer station and developing anaerobic digestion. There was also a suggestion that the county use incentives or other means to encourage cities to expand their use of compost in a variety of projects, not just on county roadways, as a way to support the organics recycling system.

Do more to shift consumer behaviors and create systems that promote waste prevention

Respondents wanted to see more in the plan related to shifting behaviors around household goods, such as electronics and single-use plastics, to focus more on avoidance, reuse, repair, and zero waste. Plastics especially were a material called out in need of greater focus given that plastics are petroleum-based products that harm ecosystems and human health.

Respondents wanted to see more research conducted to understand the barriers residents and businesses face to reducing food waste and other priority items, and then have programs developed that help address those barriers in order to successfully change behaviors. They also want to see the county change systems to make sustainable choices available, such as creating a countywide reusable container program for food retailers.

Be transparent about the role that waste-to-energy plays in the county's climate goals and waste management plans

Respondents called for increased transparency from the county about the role that waste-to-energy plays in the county's short- and long-term waste management plans. They explained that waste-to-energy is a source of air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions and a key concern among BIPOC community members. They said waste-to-energy should not

be considered a source of renewable energy and called on the county to develop zero waste initiatives as a way to move away from waste-to-energy.

Promote plant-based diets

Respondents wanted strategies added to the plan focused on promoting plant-based diets, citing the impact that reducing meat production would have on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. They want the county to promote the climate benefits of plant-rich diets and to focus on increasing access to healthy food in vulnerable communities.

Goal 5: Partner in ways that can be most impactful

What do you like?

Respondents liked that this goal was included in the plan, feeling it recognizes the important role that partnerships and community engagement play in expanding the county's impact. They see the county's collaboration with cities, other public entities, and community organizations as vital to co-creating initiatives that will help scale up high-impact, equitable, resilient, and low-carbon solutions. They also liked the use of the racial impact equity tool as a way to help understand who to engage.

What is missing or could be improved?

Provide details on how partnerships will be developed

Respondents felt that more details were needed in this section, especially on what approaches will be taken and how partnerships will be developed and maintained.

Suggestions for how to approach partnerships include developing cohorts within or among cities that would convene county and city staff, environmental commissions, nonprofit organizations, and community partners to develop and launch initiatives. Cities and other local units of government expressed support for the convening role the county can play in ensuring a collaborative and cohesive approach to climate action. Support the county could provide to cities include assistance in creating short-term climate action work plans and help with tracking metrics such as greenhouse gas emissions and health and equity outcomes.

Some respondents wanted the county to identify a few initiatives that would be kickstarted right away to get a sense of where the county will start. Some specific resources and examples of successful initiatives were called out that county could use and build on, including the Hennepin County Efficient Buildings Collaborative and the Thrive MSP 2040 indicators.

Account for all potential partners

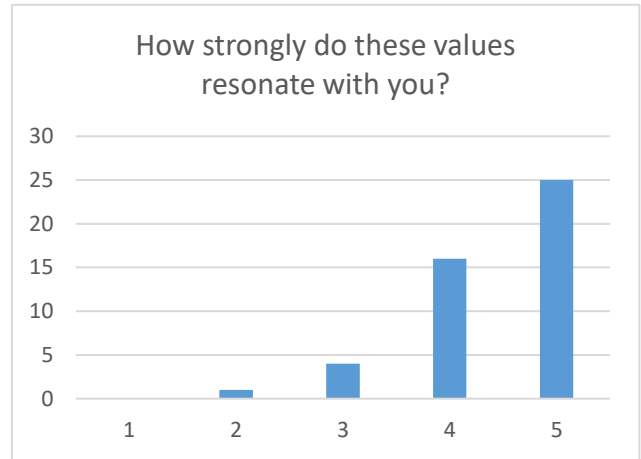
Respondents emphasized the need to engage with indigenous communities, people of color, and youth. They also identified missing groups that will be important to engage, specifically schools and businesses. Respondents especially wanted to make sure that as much or more responsibility is put on businesses to make a difference on climate change as is put on individual residents. They wondered if the county could work with businesses to create net-zero climate plans or provide incentives for net-zero operations.

Values and vision

In the first round of public engagement, survey respondents said the values most important to them in creating a climate-friendly future are:

- Ensuring a healthy environment for future generations
- Protecting the most vulnerable people and reducing racial disparities
- Protecting wildlife and nature
- Responsibly using resources and minimizing wastefulness

These values resonated strongly with participants in the feedback session them, giving them an average rating of 4.4 on a 5-point scale.



What is most important to you as we respond to climate change and envision a climate-friendly future?

When asked what is most important to them as we respond to climate change and envision a climate-friendly future, many of these top values were reflected. Some respondents said it was most important to promote climate and racial justice and equity. They prioritized engagement and partnerships, wanting the county to provide funding and resources to community groups, get community input, and support community-driven solutions. They also called for stronger goals, accountability, and increased urgency, saying we need timely implementation and speed over perfection.

Others said future generations, connection, community, livability and healthy environments were most important. They focused on the need to protect nature, preserve biodiversity, and ensure clean air and water. People also cared about minimizing wastefulness, getting to zero emissions, advancing sustainability, reducing consumption, and preventing harm. Some focused on the approach, saying it was most importance to be approachable, accessible, and affordable. They also wanted to ensure there was a budget assignment and appropriate resources dedicated to our response. Some called out specific tactics, such as renewable energy, decarbonization, minimizing driving, green infrastructure, green jobs, and regenerative agriculture. One respondent summed it up by saying "change is necessary."

