Knoxville’s Vision
Mayor’s Statement
As Mayor of Knoxville, I’m committed to working toward a clean and resilient future for our city. I believe in being good stewards of our natural resources.

I’m grateful to everyone, especially Climate Council members and our community and industry partners, who have contributed to this update of the City of Knoxville’s Sustainability Plan. Thank you for lending your time and expertise to helping establish progressive goals and identifying ways to achieve them.

Our Sustainability Plan identifies buildings, transportation and waste management as areas where emissions can best be managed and reduced. This work plan serves as a guidepost for city departments as they develop projects to make Knoxville clean and resilient. This plan outlines our successes and, as our city continues to prosper, helps focus our sights on where we can reduce emissions and make Knoxville a great place to live.

There is no one single solution to reducing our municipal and community emissions and their impact on our environment and climate. Together, we are plotting a roadmap to reach our goals that reflects the priorities of our residents.

Through the work of our Office of Sustainability, the City of Knoxville is demonstrating how a municipality can take responsibility for our impact and reduce it.

We are taking steps now that will make a difference in 2030, 2050 and beyond.

Indya Kincannon
Mayor Indya Kincannon
Sustainability Leaders

Director’s Statement

Changing and improving the City of Knoxville isn’t done in a vacuum. Reducing community emissions takes the work of many passionate individuals (and their teams), and luckily Knoxville is home to many sustainability leaders from non-profits to businesses, and from federal research partners to enthusiastic citizen climate activists. Our success is rooted in their hard work.

Brian Blackmon
Director, Office of Sustainability

Contributors

**Mayor’s Climate Council**
Mayor Indya Kincannon
Pastor Chris Battle, The Underground Collective/Battlefield Farms
Gabe Bolas, Knoxville Utilities Board
Chris Cimino, University of Tennessee
Erin Gill, Chief Policy Officer, City of Knoxville *E
Amy Hathaway, Forest Heights Neighborhood Association *W
Brian Hann, Dewhirst Properties
Alicia Hemmings, Sunrise Movement Knoxville Hub
Stan Johnson, Socially Equal Energy Efficient Development *B *E
Nancy Nabors, Knoxville Chamber *B *T *W
Cortney Piper, Piper Communications/Tennessee Advanced Energy Council *B
Dr. Stephen Smith, Southern Alliance for Clean Energy
Rebecca Tolene, Tennessee Valley Authority
George Wallace, Coldwell Banker Wallace

* E, Equity; T, Transportation; B, Buildings & Energy; W, Waste

**Equity Working Group**
Kendra Berry, Great Schools Partnership
Claudia Caballero, Centro Hispano de East Tennessee
Terrence Carter, Knoxville Area Urban League
Misty Goodwin, Knox CAC - Neighborhood Centers
Rick Held, Community Voices
JD Jackson, Socially Equal Energy Efficient Development (SEEED)
Dave Ndiaye, University of Tennessee - Student Disability Services
Albert Nelson, Knox CAC - Neighborhood Centers
Janea Peterson, Knoxville Area Urban League
June Rosten, AFL-CIO
Calvin Skinner, NAACP

Transportation Technical Working Group
Melissa Allen-Dumas, Oak Ridge National Lab
Nicholas Bradshaw, City of Knoxville - Fleet Services Department
Chris Cherry, University of Tennessee - Transportation Engineering and Science Program
Caroline Cooley, Bike Walk Knoxville
Stan Cross, Southern Alliance for Clean Energy
Michael Humphrey, Knoxville-Knox County CAC Transit
David Greene, University of Tennessee - Transportation Engineering and Science Program
Carter Hall, City of Knoxville
Chasity Hobby, Knoxville Utilities Board
Jon Livengood, City of Knoxville - Traffic Engineering
Kent Minault, Sierra Club Harvey Broome Group
Jonathan Overly, East Tennessee Clean Fuels Coalition
Melissa Roberson, Knoxville Area Transit

Virginia Salazar Buda, East Tennessee Clean Fuels Coalition
Jeff Welch, Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Organization
Belinda Woodiel-Brill, Knoxville Area Transit
Ellen Zavisca, Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Organization

Energy/Building Technical Working Group
Peter Ahrens, City of Knoxville - Plans Review and Inspections
Mike Bolin, Knoxville Utilities Board
Michael Davis, Sanders Pace Architecture
Elizabeth Eason, Elizabeth Eason Architecture
Zane Foraker, Knox County Schools
Tori Grindstaff, Knoxville-Knox County CAC Housing and Energy Services
Gil Hough, Tennessee Solar Energy Industries Association
Emma Houston, Sunrise Movement Knoxville Hub
Joshua New, Oak Ridge National Lab
Steven Seifried, Ameresco
Maggie Shober, Southern Alliance for Clean Energy
Charles Sims, University of Tennessee – Howard H. Baker Jr. Center
James Tente, City of Knoxville - Plans Review and Inspections Division
Liz Upchurch, Tennessee Valley Authority

Waste Technical Working Group
Chad Hellwinckel, University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture
Alisa Kyle, Waste Management, Inc.
Jason McCue, Waste Connections, Inc.
Kat McDearis, Green Heron Compost Services
Alana McKissack, Keep Knoxville Beautiful
Patience Melnik, City of Knoxville - Office of Solid Waste
Michael Niemann, WestRock Recycling
Jay Price, University of Tennessee - Office of Sustainability
Hal Risher, Westrock Recycling
Rachel Stewart, Sunrise Movement Knoxville

Special Thank You
Luke Gebhard and Virginia Barry Milepost Consulting
Erin Rose and Beth Hawkins, Three³, Inc.
In 2008, the City of Knoxville set a goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 20% by 2020 relative to 2005 levels for both municipal operations and the Knoxville community. Resolution R-265-2019, adopted by City Council on Aug. 13, 2019, confirmed target reductions of 50% by 2030 for City operations and an 80% reduction by 2050 for community emissions.
For more than a decade, the City of Knoxville has worked to make Knoxville a greener, more sustainable city – one where the economy, environment and community can thrive together today and in the future. In 2008, the City set a goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 20% by 2020 relative to 2005 levels for both municipal operations and the community. In 2011, the first Energy & Sustainability Work Plan became the guiding document to lower emissions and combat climate change. Those foundational task force discussions shaped Knoxville’s trajectory for much of the past decade.

While operational emissions (-32%) continue to improve, community emissions have increased over the same time (+8%) as Knoxville continues to grow. There are many successes to celebrate despite that trend. Since 2011, weatherization programs like KUB’s Round It Up, TVA’s Home UpLift, and the 2016-2017 Knoxville Extreme Energy Makeover (KEEM) reduced energy use and lowered energy costs in more than 1,800 homes in the Knoxville area.

**Celebrating Success**

Since the first work plan, the City and a multitude of community partners have worked to establish Knoxville as a regional and national sustainability leader. City employees have: avoided approximately $1 million in annual utility costs by investing in building performance; reduced streetlighting costs by an additional $2 million; optimized fleet use to minimize fuel waste; and improved bus service while reducing emissions.
Re-evaluating Priorities

In 2020 to re-evaluate our priorities, the City launched the Mayor’s Climate Council. This new task force brings fresh perspective to past successes, priorities and lessons learned from other communities. Mayor Kincannon convened more than 65 local experts to discuss effective strategies to reduce community emissions and meet the 80% by 2050 goal.

The scale of change required to drive emissions down goes well beyond the boundary of the City of Knoxville and will require leadership at all levels (local, regional, and national).

To assess the potential impact of various emission reduction strategies, the Office of Sustainability took the feedback from the Mayor’s Climate Council and technical experts and used modeling tools to project potential emissions reductions.
These scenarios, shown below, project both estimated growth (e.g. population, energy use, waste generation, and transportation) and the potential of various strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The 2021 Sustainability Work Plan will refocus on community priorities to drive greenhouse gas emissions down and identify new metrics to evaluate long-term success. These priorities are not specific, shovel-ready projects; rather, they are multi-year priorities to direct the Office of Sustainability and other city departments in aligning projects with desirable community outcomes. In other words, how can we advance climate goals while also supporting the specific needs of the most vulnerable in our community?

Embedded in the selection of these new priorities was an emphasis on strategies that are also likely to advance equity outcomes.

The Climate Council’s Equity Working Group screened strategies by considering subject matter expertise, lived experiences, and community surveys. Office of Sustainability staff used the Equity Working Group rankings and special considerations to identify the focus areas for emissions reduction priorities reflected in the subsequent sections.

“The 2021 Sustainability Work Plan will refocus on community priorities to drive greenhouse gas emissions down and identify new metrics to evaluate long-term success.”
Transportation
Overview

Knoxville, like most communities across the nation, observed increased emissions related to transportation, which increased the sector share of community emissions over the past decade. The increase in traffic volume is a byproduct of population growth and a strong economy (GDP +46.8%). Unfortunately, average vehicle fuel economy has not significantly increased since 2012. Emissions attributed to transportation have become a larger share of emissions profiles as building codes have led to increased energy efficiency, and utilities increasingly invest in lower carbon renewable electricity.

Focus areas

The City has promoted the use of public transit and increased route efficiency, while improving and expanding infrastructure for bikes, pedestrians, and the adoption of electric vehicles. The Office of Sustainability oversees 21 free public EV charging ports across City parks and downtown garages. Operationally, the City is working to further diversify its fleet and ensure that we’re optimizing lower carbon fuel sources as much as possible. The City is also actively exploring ways to modernize transportation infrastructure in order to accommodate new technologies and improve local transportation systems.

Strategies prioritized for transportation were ranked for their potential to directly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and their community benefits. Vehicle electrification strategies also benefit community health by reducing ground-level particulate matter and other pollutants. Investments to improve
Transportation Priorities

Expand and improve bicycle and pedestrian facilities, connectivity, convenience, and/or safety in a manner that significantly increases the number of trips taken by walking or biking

**Measuring success:** Miles of improvement, mapping corridors of connectivity, estimating pedestrian and bicycle trips

Make public transit investments that significantly enhance coverage, service quality, frequency, and/or speed

**Measuring success:** Number of trips, average route frequency, number of bus stop improvements, Community VMT

Significantly accelerate community adoption of electric vehicles

**Measuring success:** Number of EV registrations, number of EVSE by level of service, EVSE distribution

Partner with major local commercial fleet operators to transition to electric vehicles

**Measuring success:** EVSE on commercial property, EV registrations

Legend

- **CO₂** Greenhouse Gas Potential
- **Timeframe**
- **Community Benefit Potential**
  - Likely to advance outcomes
  - Somewhat likely to advance outcomes
  - Less likely to advance outcomes
Buildings & Energy
Overview

In Knoxville, energy use in buildings makes up approximately 37% of all community-wide emissions, which come from the natural gas and electricity we use in our homes and workplaces. Greenhouse gas emissions from buildings are more than 29% lower than in 2005. That reduction has been driven by utility investments in lower carbon electricity. Approximately 60% of all energy use in buildings is electricity, and investments in clean energy have been able to outpace the increase in overall energy use in our growing community.

Focus areas

Wasting energy means wasting money. Because much of our energy comes from fossil fuels, wasting energy also creates unnecessary negative impacts on the environment. The Office of Sustainability champions efforts by City departments, partners and contractors to minimize and reduce energy waste across buildings, parks and roadways, advance clean energy investment opportunities, and promote policies and programs that improve building efficiency.

Strategies prioritized for addressing buildings and energy were ranked for their potential to directly reduce greenhouse gas emissions in addition to their community benefits. Investments in energy efficiency, especially in homes, is a valuable strategy to address housing affordability through lower energy expenditures. Common practices employed by major weatherization programs (e.g. KUB’s Round It Up) such as air sealing combined with updated HVAC can not only improve comfort, affordability, and reduce emissions, but they can also improve indoor air quality.
### Buildings & Energy Priorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Measuring success</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create voluntary large, commercial, and multi-family energy upgrade program(s) (e.g., incentives, technical assistance) that achieve deep energy savings (~25%+) in ~20%+ of buildings</td>
<td>Permits for improvements in commercial buildings, tracking average energy intensity, participation in incentive programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amplify and opportunistically expand voluntary home energy upgrade program(s) that will achieve deep energy savings (~25%+) in 20% of homes</td>
<td>Participation in existing assistance programs, report on energy savings results of programs relative to target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop or amplify opportunities to invest in renewables at scale. Including community solar and in-valley investments</td>
<td>Total solar generation, TVA energy mix, participants in community solar programs, participants in other renewables programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research and develop strategies to promote opportunistic electrification (e.g., replacement of fossil fuel-fired furnaces with electric heat pump technologies) in existing buildings over time</td>
<td>Total energy share by fuel source, average use by service type</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Community-Wide Emissions Profile 2019

- **Transportation**: 59%
- **Buildings & Facilities**: 37%
- **Other**: 0.3%
- **Waste & Water**: 4%

### Legend
- **Greenhouse Gas Potential**
- **Timeframe**
- **Community Benefit Potential**
  - Likely to advance outcomes
  - Somewhat likely to advance outcomes
  - Less likely to advance outcomes
Emissions from Knoxville’s waste stream make up approximately 4% of all local emissions. Most emissions in our waste stream come from methane that results from the breakdown of organic materials in wastewater treatment and our solid waste stream. Common organic materials in our garbage are paper, cardboard, food waste, and yard waste. Overall reduction in waste is the best approach to reducing emissions, but ensuring we have robust solutions to divert organic waste through opportunities like recycling and backyard composting are essential to minimizing those emissions.

**Focus areas**

Working with Knox County and other community partners, the City has strengthened its waste management practices. The City has worked to reduce the amount of methane-emitting items in our waste stream by adopting backyard composting standards, expanded recycling services, and engaging businesses to reduce organic waste in the waste stream.

Strategies prioritized for addressing waste emissions are highlighted for their potential to directly reduce greenhouse gas emissions in addition to their community benefits. The Equity Working Group of the Mayor’s Climate Council highlighted opportunities to improve engagement as ways to improve services, better understand nuisances, and boost civic engagement.

“Common organic materials in our garbage are paper, cardboard, food waste and yard waste.”
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Waste Priorities</th>
<th>Measuring success: Number of private collection programs, number of participants, research audit of waste composition</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pursue food waste reduction and collection programs that capture ~80%+ of organic waste from all high-volume locations (eg. restaurants)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measuring success: Number of private collection programs, number of participants, research audit of waste composition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase residential recycling through community engagement and education strategies</td>
<td>Measuring success: Participants, number of presentations, number of participating households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote consumption-reduction approaches such as sharing and re-use through education campaigns</td>
<td>Measuring success: Participants, number of presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research pathways to offer organics (food/yard waste) collection for single-family and multi-family residential properties</td>
<td>Measuring success: Number of private collection programs, number of participants, research audit of waste composition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend
- **Greenhouse Gas Potential**
- **Timeframe**
- **Community Benefit Potential**
  - Likely to advance outcomes
  - Somewhat likely to advance outcomes
  - Less likely to advance outcomes

Community-Wide Emissions Profile 2019

- Buildings & Facilities: 37%
- Transportation: 59%
- Water & Wastewater: 63%
- Other: 0.3%
East Tennessee is known for its beautiful and scenic open spaces. Knoxville has rapidly emerged as a leader in outdoor recreation and tourism, with its sprawling outdoor parks and trail systems located just a short ride from the heart of downtown. These lush spaces are not only an economic asset but a tool to sequester carbon and reduce environmental problems that plague urban environments such as localized flooding and urban heat island effect.

The City promotes resilience in the community by embedding support for low-impact design and investing in infrastructure to handle the demands of increased localized flooding events. The Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan, identifies the myriad environmental risks that face residents. In the most recently adopted edition from 2017, the document incorporated forward-looking changing severity of impacts of climate change, including extreme temperatures, leveraging technical expertise from Oak Ridge National Laboratory.

**Sustainable Landscapes**

*Green Infrastructure*

City of Knoxville Engineering oversees dozens of water quality and green infrastructure projects per year on both public and private property. Public projects like wetland construction at Fountain City Lake, the permeable parking lot at the City’s new Public Works Service Center, and infiltration islands on Dale Avenue are critical to mitigating the damages caused by stormwater and increasing high-intensity rainfall events.
Trees

Trees are a valuable, understated public asset in cities. Trees can reduce cooling costs by shading buildings, sequester carbon from the atmosphere, reduce stormwater runoff and help mitigate urban heat island effect. The City of Knoxville has approximately 24,252 acres of tree cover. Those trees store an estimated 760,000 tons of carbon and sequester 21,000 tons annually. The City’s Urban Forestry Division works to maintain a healthy urban tree canopy and seeks opportunities to increase the coverage of these valuable assets.

Heat Islands

Heat islands are urbanized areas that experience higher temperatures than outlying areas. Structures such as buildings, roads, and other infrastructure absorb and re-emit the sun’s heat more than natural landscapes such as forests and water bodies. Urban areas, where these structures are highly concentrated and greenery is limited, become “islands” of higher temperatures relative to outlying areas. Daytime temperatures in urban areas are about 1–7°F higher than temperatures in outlying areas and nighttime temperatures are about 2–5°F higher. 

https://www.epa.gov/heatislands
Mayor Haslam appoints the City’s first Energy & Sustainability Task Force 2007

City releases the first Energy & Sustainability Work Plan 2010

Mayor Rogero establishes Office of Sustainability

Knoxville Convention Center becomes first convention center in the state to achieve LEED certification 2012

Knoxville awarded Platinum Certification in TVA’s Sustainable Communities’ program

Mayor Rogero appointed to White House Task Force on Climate Preparedness & Resilience 2013

2008
Selected as one of 25 DOE Solar America Cities

SOLAR AMERICA CITY

2011
Knoxville Sustainability staff co-founds the Southeast Sustainability Director’s Network

2012
Knoxville wins IBM Smarter Cities Challenge grant and launches the Smarter Cities Partnership to improve home comfort, quality, and affordability through energy efficiency

One of the 100 Resilient Cities, by the Rockefeller Foundation
City of Knoxville designated a “Best Workplaces for Commuters”

TVA awards Knoxville $15 million for the Knoxville Extreme Energy Makeover Program

Knoxville recognized as one of 25 international finalists for a 2017 C40 Cities Bloomberg Philanthropies Award

Mayor Indya Kincannon convened the Mayor’s Climate Council

2014

Knoxville named one of 16 Climate Action Champions by the White House and Department of Energy

2017

Mayor Rogero named co-chair to national Climate Mayors network

Knoxville designated National Wildlife Federation Certified Wildlife Community (the first municipal certification in Tennessee)

2019

Knoxville City Council adopted new emission reduction goals: 50% by 2050 municipal and 80% by 2050 community

2021

Updated Sustainability Work Plan Released