

INTRODUCTION

CLIMATE ACTION PLAN



CHAPTER 1

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Introduction

This Climate Action Plan demonstrates the City of Walnut Creek’s commitment to addressing the challenges of climate change. The City acknowledges the significant changes that may occur in Walnut Creek, throughout California and the world as a result of global climate change. In response, the City of Walnut Creek will show leadership in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from municipal operations and facilitate the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from sources in the community. This document outlines the City’s approach to mitigating the impacts of climate change through a number of goals, measures, and actions that provide a road map to achieving the City’s greenhouse gas reduction target of 15 percent by 2020.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE PLAN

Local governments play a primary role in reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and mitigating the potential impacts of climate change. Through increasing energy efficiency in buildings and vehicle fleets, bolstering the use of clean, renewable energy sources, establishing land use and transportation plans that reduce vehicle use, and encouraging waste reduction, communities can respond to the challenges of climate change and adapt for the future. In addition, benefits such as lower energy bills, improved air quality, economic development, reduced emissions, and an enhanced quality of life throughout the community can result from the actions outlined in this Climate Action Plan (CAP).

In September 2009, the City was awarded an Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) from the United States Department of Energy for the development of an Energy Efficiency and Conservation Strategy and the implementation of projects or activities that had demonstrated reductions in energy use and greenhouse gas

emissions. The City set aside a portion of its EECBG funds to prepare this Climate Action Plan.

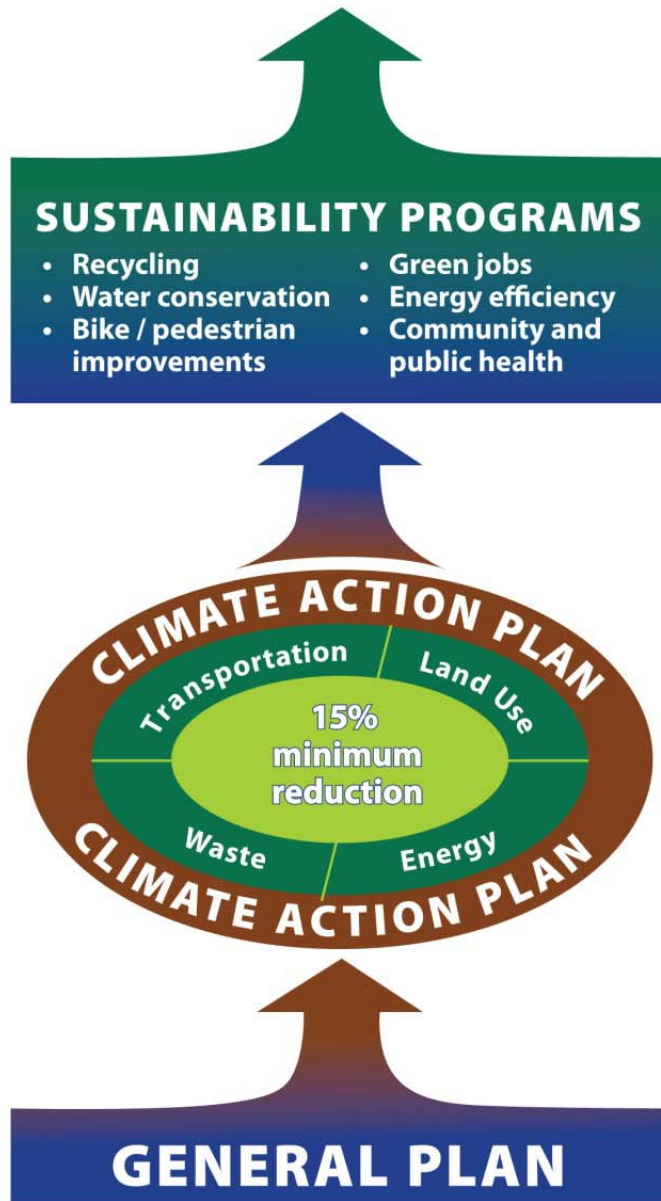
The Walnut Creek Climate Action Plan is the beginning of an ongoing planning process that assesses, prepares, mitigates, and adapts to climate change. The purpose of this Plan is to identify how the City will achieve (or exceed) its greenhouse gas emissions reduction target. The Plan provides goals and associated measures, also referred to as climate change mitigation measures, in the sectors of energy use, transportation, land use, and solid waste. In addition, this Plan provides goals and measures for longer-term climate change adaptation and plan implementation, acknowledging that adaptation to climate change is necessary because reductions in greenhouse gases will not immediately reverse the impacts of climate change.

Local governments play a primary role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.



The Role of a Climate Action Plan

City and community together achieve greenhouse gas reduction targets!



Climate Action Plan measures are implemented by a variety of government and citizen actions.

The Climate Action Plan includes greenhouse gas reduction measures for four sectors.

Development of a Climate Action Plan supports implementation of the sustainability goals and policies in General Plan 2025.

Specifically, this Plan:

- Identifies sources of greenhouse gas emissions from sources within the City of Walnut Creek’s jurisdictional/political boundary and estimates how these emissions may change over time.
- Outlines ways in which the City can prepare for and adapt to the consequences of climate change.
- Discusses the various outcomes of reduction efforts and how these reduction efforts can be implemented and advertised.
- Provides energy use, transportation, land use, and solid waste strategies to reduce Walnut Creek’s greenhouse gas emissions levels to 15 percent below 2005 levels by 2020.
- Mitigates Walnut Creek’s impacts on climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions consistent with the direction of the State of California through the Global Warming Solutions Act (AB 32), Governor’s Order S-03-05, and Public Resources Code Section 21083.3. [The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines encourage the adoption of policies or programs as a means of addressing comprehensively the cumulative impacts of projects. See CEQA Guidelines, § 15064 subd. (h)(3), § 15130 subd. (c).]
- Provides substantial evidence that the emission reductions estimated in the Climate Change Action Plan are feasible.
- Meets the requirements of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District’s (BAAQMD) criteria for a qualified greenhouse gas reduction strategy as defined in the district’s updated CEQA Air Quality Guidelines.

GREENING WALNUT CREEK

Walnut Creek has taken considerable steps toward more efficient and sustainable municipal operations and programs. This Plan comprehensively identifies the existing “green” activities under way in Walnut Creek and is only one portion of many concurrent sustainability efforts initiated by the City.

Walnut Creek has acted as a leader in taking early actions to reduce the impacts of municipal activities on climate change. In 2007, the City joined ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI). Membership in ICLEI requires local governments to initiate and implement reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. Specifically, members are asked to determine current greenhouse gas emissions, set reduction targets, develop and implement local action plans to achieve targets, and monitor progress and report results. Each jurisdiction has the responsibility both to provide local leadership for achievement of local targets and to contribute to regional success.

Walnut Creek has taken early actions to reduce the impacts of municipal activities on climate change.

Walnut Creek initiated an internal green team in 2008 to identify emissions reduction targets, policies, and actions to reduce emissions and develop a framework for advancing the greenhouse gas reduction process in Walnut Creek. The City completed a GHG emissions inventory in 2008 as an important first step in Walnut Creek’s efforts to address climate change.



The results of the inventory are provided in **Chapter 3**. Based on the results of the inventory, the City selected a reduction target of 15 percent below the baseline 2005 greenhouse gas emissions levels by 2020. The City chose this reduction target to affirm the commitment to developing greenhouse gas reduction measures and to maintaining consistency with state reduction targets.

This Climate Action Plan is the culmination of numerous city and regional initiatives. A brief overview of these initiatives is provided below.

- The City has worked to address traffic concerns since the 1950s through new roadways and major road improvements and, in subsequent years, through growth management measures and a transportation demand management (TDM) program.
- Efforts to preserve open space in the 1970s demonstrate Walnut Creek’s early commitment to sustainability. Walnut Creek has one of the largest aggregations of city-owned open space per capita in California—2,704 acres of oak woodland, savannah, and chaparral.
- Walnut Creek has offered a free BART shuttle to its Downtown since 1986. The shuttle quickly became the most heavily used bus route in the county’s system.
- Walnut Creek has been a regional leader in pedestrian-friendly development, with the emergence of Downtown Walnut Creek’s dense mix of land uses and “park once” strategy. The strategy—in which shoppers, visitors, and

employees park once and then enjoy walking or using the free shuttle to get around Downtown—reduces the number of vehicle trips and thus reduces greenhouse gas emissions.

- Walnut Creek’s network of multi-use pathways ensures that residents can travel safely by bicycle and on foot. Grade-separated crossings, such as the Iron Horse Trail overcrossing of Ygnacio Valley Road, help to reduce congestion and ensure safe crossings for cyclists and pedestrians.
- The City has offered curbside recycling for nearly 20 years, which allows households to recycle newspapers, glass, and aluminum cans. Recycling is also offered at City facilities.
- The City fleet includes clean air vehicles, electric vehicles, and vehicles that run on natural gas and electricity. These vehicles greatly reduce carbon emissions.
- City traffic lights have been converted to light-emitting diodes (LEDs), which use less power than conventional traffic lights and last longer. The City has completed numerous other lighting retrofits for increased energy efficiency.

Several City departments are recognized by the County of Contra Costa Green Business Program for their green business practices.

- The City has been planning for sustainability for many years, with General Plan 2025 featuring 23 policies and 58 action items focused on environmental integrity.
- Walnut Creek worked with Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) Energy Watch to complete a citywide Energy Assessment Report, Energy Action Plan, and City Hall Retro-Commissioning.
- The City has built a “green” library that was completed in 2010. The facility includes numerous green features such as sun screens, Energy Star heating and cooling systems, energy-efficient lighting, infrastructure for future photovoltaic installation, and recycling of construction waste. The City is pursuing a Gold Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification for the library.



Benefits from these existing initiatives and activities have been numerous and include the increase of green building in the community, reductions in waste, and increased community participation in reductions in greenhouse gas emissions in addition to those benefits that do not directly result in emissions reductions—such as increased public health from walking and biking.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

Development of a Climate Action Plan relies heavily on community involvement. Engaging community members early in identifying ways the City and community can reduce greenhouse gas emissions will lead to more successful implementation of these programs and projects in the future. As part of this project, community input was gathered through an informal event-based outreach exercise at the Walnut Creek Farmers’ Market on Sunday, November 1, 2009, as well as through an online survey which was open to the public during the first three weeks of November 2009. The survey was distributed via the City’s website and various contact lists of business owners and residents who had previously expressed interest in sustainability issues.

In addition, development of the Climate Action Plan relied on information gathered during community engagement efforts that focused on sustainability issues, such as “Going Green Together.”

Key results and themes identified during each outreach process are summarized below.

Farmers’ Market Outreach Event

On November 1, 2009, the Climate Action Plan team gathered input on plan content through an informal brainstorming exercise conducted during the Walnut Creek Farmers’ Market, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Educational presentation boards were provided, featuring explanations of the role of a climate action plan, the development of a plan’s reduction measures, and highlights of Walnut Creek’s GHG emissions inventory and sustainability efforts to date.

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Information was gathered from more than 100 participants by asking “What else can we do to ‘green’ Walnut Creek?” and “What else can Walnut Creek do to reduce greenhouse gas emissions?” Participant responses were written on sticky notes and collected on a “green screen” under the title “Our Climate Action Plan Vision.”



The following key needs were identified during this exercise:

- More bike lanes
- Increased walkability and more sidewalks and pedestrian zones
- More solar panels for commercial, residential, and civic buildings
- Increased composting options
- More education and marketing on “green” topics like recycling and composting
- More frequent shuttles to BART
- Plastic bag/bottle/container bans
- More recycling opportunities
- Reducing energy consumption Downtown, particularly Broadway Plaza

2009 Online Survey

The online survey queried a total of 103 participants, the majority of whom were Walnut Creek residents, with other responses coming from residents of unincorporated Walnut Creek or from Walnut Creek business owners or workers who reside elsewhere. Questions gauged existing trends in transportation and energy and water conservation as well as willingness to make changes from current practices to activities that help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Key results include:

- Nearly 60 percent of respondents still commute by private vehicle.
- Only 6 percent of respondents ride public transit daily, while nearly 30 percent would consider riding BART more often if there were more parking at the Walnut Creek BART Station. Nearly 20 percent would ride BART more often if there were more buses to and from BART.
- 31 percent of respondents would consider using buses more often if they stopped more frequently and in more convenient locations.
- 44 percent of respondents would bicycle for transportation more often if there were more bicycle lanes, and 32 percent would bicycle more often if there were more bicycle trails and more bicycle parking.
- Nearly 30 percent of respondents would bicycle more often if there were better bicycle accommodation at signalized intersections.
- Nearly 89 percent of respondents have already changed older light bulbs to more energy-efficient models. Seventy-one (71) percent have already replaced appliances with more energy-efficient models.
- 80 percent of respondents believe that the City should require buildings to be retrofitted to a higher level of energy efficiency at the time of major additions or remodels.

- Sixty-six (66) percent of respondents have changed older faucets and showerheads to reduce water usage.
- Over 75 percent of respondents support diverting all compostable organics from landfills or incinerators and support encouragement of on-site composting.
- Eighty-seven (87) percent of respondents support the restriction of plastic bag and Styrofoam container use.

2009 Community Conversations on Balancing the Future

During the fall of 2009, the City conducted a series of Community Conversations Workshops. These events brought Walnut Creek residents together to discuss the future of their city, in a time of significant budget shortfalls. Results of the conversations were used to help allocate resources to address issues the community values most. The conversations focused on six goal areas identified and approved by the City Council. Key needs identified during the conversations, relevant to the Climate Action Plan, include:

Transportation

- Facilitate environmentally sound transportation systems.
- Plan, build, and maintain a transportation system that eases congestion and optimizes mobility.
- Provide and encourage safe and convenient travel for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Provide and promote convenient access to diverse and efficient modes of transportation.

Stewardship of the Natural and Built Environment

- Preserve, protect, and maintain natural resources, parks, creeks, trails, and open space.
- Promote responsible development and maintenance.



2007 Going Green Together

More than 350 citizens and business owners participated in the 2007 Going Green Together conference. This outreach event queried participants on “How can the City of Walnut Creek support my efforts to ‘go green’?” Eighty attendees participated in small group discussions in response to this question. Key discussion results include:

- Provide more frequent free shuttles and buses to more locations.
- Create a bike-share program Downtown.
- Provide parking for hybrid vehicles.
- Provide a user map for Walnut Creek’s bicycle network.
- Provide recycling bins Downtown.
- Encourage composting and use of cooking oil for biofuel, including curbside composting.
- Promote recycling.
- Ban plastic bags.
- Require Downtown merchants to close doors when air conditioning is in use.
- Encourage use of solar energy, including pre-plumbing for solar and installation of solar panels on new library.
- Raise awareness of “green” activities through community engagement efforts such as websites, newsletters, block parties, and outreach to schools.

Additional electronic polling activities during Going Green Together revealed that participants were already actively greening their lifestyles by using public transportation, purchasing alternative fuel vehicles, switching to energy-efficient lighting at home, and considering the impact on the environment prior to purchasing goods or services.

The feedback gathered during these community outreach exercises has been integrated into the goals and measures of

this Climate Action Plan. Continued public involvement in the Plan’s implementation will be necessary to achieve the target greenhouse gas reductions.



NEED FOR TIMELY IMPLEMENTATION

Timely implementation of this Plan, along with individual initiative on the part of each resident, employee, and visitor to the City of Walnut Creek, will help the global community to reduce our impact on the environment. Achieving the goals set forth in this Plan will help to ensure that Walnut Creek residents can continue to enjoy a high quality of life. And the continuing commitment of the City of Walnut Creek to addressing climate change, as demonstrated by this Plan, will help to ensure that the community adapts to the challenges that lie ahead.