



2023

BOULDER COUNTY COLORADO

**sustainability,
climate action
& resilience
plan**

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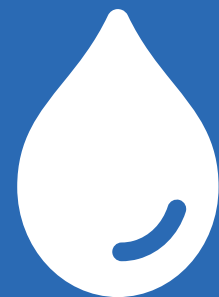
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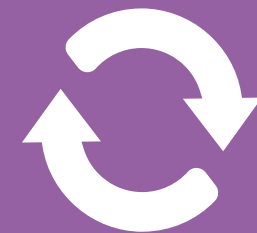
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Vision Statement

A sustainable, just,
and resilient community
where all people and
natural systems thrive.

Mission Statement

To advance policies and
programs that conserve
resources, protect
the environment, and
safeguard our climate
in order to build a
sustainable, just, and
resilient community.

INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE

A Plan for All

The Sustainability, Climate Action & Resilience Plan is intended to articulate Boulder County’s vision to create a more environmentally sustainable and just community, and to provide a blueprint for achieving our collective climate action and resilience goals.



“The latest scientific findings, including the most recent United Nations reports from experts across the world, make clear that reducing greenhouse gases and removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere need to happen now, and not in future decades, if we want to protect our planet and our quality of life. Boulder County is leading efforts to create regional alliances to extend the reach of the innovative programs we have pioneered. The climate and sustainability work we are doing here in Boulder County is critical. It underscores the power, possibility, and necessity of action in local government.”

—Commissioner Claire Levy

Since its original adoption in 2013, this plan has illustrated how Boulder County will collectively carry out the vision of environmental sustainability. Revised in 2018 and now in 2023, this plan brings a thorough and comprehensive approach to carrying out our mission.

In addition, this plan addresses county internal operations, as well as the environmental, climate, and resilience services provided for county employees, residents, and businesses.

PLAN APPROACH

Boulder County’s leaders and employees have long held a commitment to stewardship of our land, environment, and community. The Sustainability, Climate Action and Resilience Plan provides guidance for how Boulder County can become a healthier and more sustainable place to live, work, and play, and is meant to provide direction for Boulder County’s sustainability and climate priorities. The goals and strategies outlined in the plan are not meant to be prescriptive, but rather to lay out a series of priorities and directions that will help Boulder County, as a community and as a government agency, become more environmentally

sustainable, equitable, and climate forward.

This plan uses a “systems-wide” approach, taking careful account of the numerous and diverse components that provide the foundations for the quality of our environmental, economic, and social condition. The vast list of topics discussed throughout include climate risk, climate accountability, agricultural viability, human health, forest health, energy production and use, resource consumption and preservation, transportation, air and water quality, and meaningful public participation. While this plan attempts to highlight the linkages between social, economic, and environmental sustainability, it does not presume to cover all of these factors. Instead, it focuses on environmental sustainability and climate change impacts as a starting place to build these larger connections. The distinct foci on sustainability, climate



“In Boulder County, climate action is personal. We’ve been hit by climate-related disaster upon disaster, and we all have loved ones, friends, or neighbors whose lives have been shattered by fires and floods fueled by conditions created by our changing climate. As the Marshall Fire showed me and countless others, the climate emergency isn’t theoretical and far away. It is happening here and now. I am proud of Boulder County’s leadership in supporting policies, developing programs, and fostering innovation to both fight the climate crisis and adapt to its impacts.”

—Commissioner Ashley Stolzmann



“As a global leader in climate action with a strong commitment to addressing inequity within the sustainability movement, Boulder County is centering its work on those at increased risk and thereby most impacted by climate change, including children, people who are living in poverty or who are unhoused, Indigenous and Native communities, and other communities of color. With the recent hiring of a Climate Equity Specialist, the county, through the Office of Sustainability Climate Action Resiliency, will continue to build on the critical work of reaching equitable outcomes in climate action policies, programs, and practices.”

—Commissioner Marta Loachamin

action, and resilience are important, as this outlines a blueprint for Boulder County’s vision for a healthier planet and community in the face of today’s environmental and climatic challenges.

This plan has progressed over time through a series of strategic planning

efforts, incorporating elements from numerous Boulder County plans, as well as state and federal legislative agendas. The intent for this current iteration is not to reinvent the wheel but to extract, integrate, and activate the sustainability-, climate-, and equity-focused elements of Boulder

County’s existing plans and processes. This plan leverages the following other countywide plans that have undergone rigorous public engagement and input: the Comprehensive Plan, the Climate Change Preparedness Plan, the Open Space Strategic Plan, the Public Health Improvement Plan, the Transportation Master Plan, the Coordinated Human Service Transportation Plan, and the Zero Waste Action Plan.

This document will continue to evolve, as new strategies and technologies are developed and as unforeseen events challenge us to modify our responses. The plan, therefore, is a tool for the continuing inclusion of new focus areas, policies, and action plans relating to sustainability as they are identified, agreed to, and developed through the planning process.

We hope this plan will continue to help set community-wide sustainability, climate, and resilience priorities and guide the development of shared resources to achieve environmental sustainability, climate, and equity goals on a regional scale.





A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF BOULDER COUNTY'S OFFICE OF SUSTAINABILITY, CLIMATE ACTION & RESILIENCE (OSCAR)

Climate change is not about statistics and numbers being crunched in some faraway place. It's about us. It's about you, me, and the people and places we love. It's personal.

In Boulder County, we know the next few years are critical. The world's top scientists—many of whom live and work right here—have issued a clear warning: we must limit warming to 1.5°C (2.7°F) to avoid the most catastrophic impacts of a changing climate. This will require us to cut the production of global greenhouse gas emissions while also removing legacy emissions from the atmosphere. We are at a crossroads: not only do we need to fight the climate crisis, but we also need to adapt to its impacts. The decisions we make now can secure a livable future.

Boulder County and OSCAR are committed to the radical transformations needed to meet this challenge. Our efforts include supporting programs and policies that foster sustainability innovation,

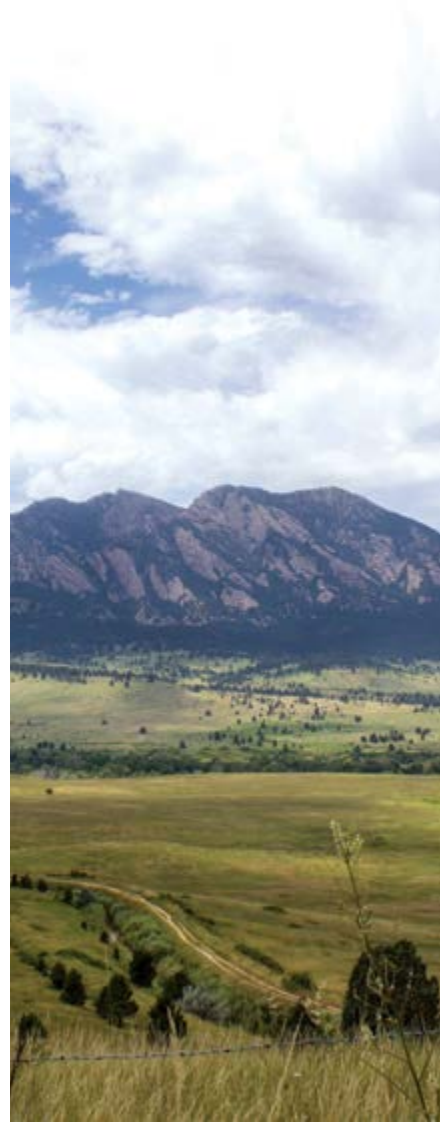
coalition building, and equitable outcomes; reducing emissions and removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere; supporting systemic change to fight the climate crisis; implementing sustainable grazing practices on local ranches and energy efficient appliance upgrades in mercados; employing policies that reduce air pollution; rebuilding after horrific climate disasters; educating students about our waters; and filing a precedent-setting lawsuit against oil companies that bear significant responsibility for the climate crisis. Each one of these adds up to a vision on the horizon.

In this plan, you will see a blueprint of the work Boulder County has set out to meet our new climate future. We have a brilliant team, dedicated leaders, and an activated community,

all of whom are committed to working together for a better future.



SUSIE STRIFE, PhD
Director of OSCAR



THE PLAN STRUCTURE

How to Use This Plan

The plan is broken into eight chapters, each containing a brief introduction and an overarching goal. (See goals and lists of strategies identified to reach them on page 9.) Together the chapters represent Boulder County’s sustainability, climate action, and resilience vision.

County operation strategies refers to approaches to advance internal county operations and to lead by example. *Community strategies* refer to the actions that both the public and private sectors will need to take for the community’s collective achievement of the goals.

The strategies include policies, codes, and services that the county provides to the public, as the speed and scale of change necessary to address our goals will take ALL of us. Several chapters also share success stories and short case studies to showcase beneficial

community partnerships, programs, and county leadership. Key policies adopted through Boulder County’s legislative agenda are also included. Each chapter concludes with a call to action for individuals and businesses in our community, as well as resources for more information.

We—each of us and collectively—can be environmental stewards and ensure a healthy quality of life now and for future generations. Our health and the health of the planet depend upon it.

 <p>air quality Ensure clean, clear, and healthy air for current and future generations.</p>	 <p>climate Achieve rapid and deep emission reductions and increase resilience to the impacts of climate change.</p>	 <p>ecological health Ensure healthy and vibrant ecosystems that sustain diverse species, support thriving natural systems, and provide valuable services for our human population.</p>	 <p>energy & buildings Reduce energy consumption, promote energy efficiency, increase the use of clean energy, and transition away from fossil fuels.</p>
 <p>local food & agriculture Ensure a sustainable, local, safe, and healthy food supply that is accessible to all and supported by our community.</p>	 <p>transportation Provide environmentally sustainable transportation choices and support diverse opportunities for mobility for all Boulder County residents.</p>	 <p>water Continue to implement water efficiency and water quality efforts that ensure sufficient clean water for healthy ecosystems and human use.</p>	 <p>circular economy Reduce the amount of materials consumed and discarded in landfills, manage resources responsibly and effectively, promote reusability, and support a circular economy.</p>

CORE VALUES

As trusted stewards of Boulder County’s future, we provide the best in public service. We believe the path to a healthy environment is integrally tied to overcoming social, economic, and racial injustice. We care deeply about the people and places that make our community unique, and are committed to Boulder County’s organizational values:

INCLUSION

We value, respect, and support all individuals by being an inclusive, culturally responsive county government.

STEWARDSHIP

We honor our county’s past and work in partnership with our community to ensure a thriving, healthy quality of life for present and future generations.

SERVICE

We work with passion and integrity in a supportive, positive environment to ensure accountability, responsiveness, efficiency, and justice.

ENGAGEMENT

We listen to all community members and provide them with opportunities to actively collaborate and engage with us in order to continually improve our services.

SUSTAINABILITY

We are committed to environmental, social, and economic sustainability, and we build partnerships to help make the broader community more sustainable.

INNOVATION

We are motivated, progressive, and visionary. We continually challenge ourselves to lead with innovation, collaboration, and creativity.

RESILIENCE

We plan for the future and forge strong partnerships that allow us to adapt quickly to challenges and manage community impacts.

TOP STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR FOCUSING OSCAR’S WORK

Below are the three most important areas for us to focus on in our strategic planning, as well as what we should prioritize in our programming in the coming years.

1

Focus on innovative solutions that drive large-scale, systems-level change.

We understand that the urgency of our time demands solutions that address the intersectional crises of environmental destruction, climate chaos, and inequality. By focusing on large-scale transformation of our social, economic, and energy systems, we are forced to explore new, innovative initiatives that will set us on a path toward a sustainable, just, and resilient future.

2

Center our work on equity and racial justice.

At their core, climate change and environmental degradation are justice issues. Black, Indigenous, and other community members of color are most impacted by economic insecurity, toxic exposure, and climate-driven natural disasters. These disproportionate impacts are compounded by centuries of systemic racism that make it difficult for historically and currently marginalized communities to have the influence they deserve in shaping our shared future. By centering our work on equity and racial justice, we will share power with those who are most impacted, and make decisions only after asking who benefits, who is harmed, and how our actions affect those who have the most at stake.

3

Engage the community.

In order to create a world that supports healthy ecosystems, addresses systemic inequality, and is resilient in the face of climate change, we must engage partners at all levels within the Boulder County community and beyond. We will collaborate with county departments to achieve collective impact; we will engage citizens and businesses to take climate action and support our work; and we will partner with funders, technical experts, marginalized community members, environmental groups, and other stakeholders to discover and deploy game-changing solutions to meet our goals.



DEFINITION OF SUSTAINABILITY

Within this plan, *sustainability* refers to the use, development, and protection of resources for Boulder County residents.

In this context, “resources” include land, air, and water, along with the inherent value of the natural resources, biodiversity, and life-supporting functions associated with them; energy and materials for development and habitation; the essentially rural, low-density character of the unincorporated county; the uniquely historic, cultural, and geographic composition of distinct rural communities within the county; the diversity of economic activities and opportunities available to individuals;

and the people who continue to shape our developed and natural landscapes.

In addition, it is important to call attention to the linkages between environmental, social, and economic sustainability. For example, the county’s sustainability practices seek to support and enhance the diversity of economic activities, such as viable local agriculture, green jobs creation, and multimodal transportation, as well as to support the well-being of our residents.

The strategies set out to achieve the plan’s targets are actions that support, maintain, conserve, and enhance the environmental, economic, and social systems on which we depend. Achieving sustainability may demand substantial departures from past and present actions, as well as a fundamental commitment to conserving finite resources. Therefore, sustainability requires a coordinated approach to planning and public policy that involves public participation.

Success depends on the widespread understanding of the critical relationship between people and the environment, an appreciation of the interrelationships among the systems that sustain human existence, and the will to make necessary changes. We not only have a relationship with and depend on nature’s systems, but we are also a part of them.

Similarly, we seek to ensure affordable access to clean energy, efficiency improvements, transit, and housing for all members of our community.

Importance of Land Use

Boulder County’s land-use policies and regulations foster sustainability by encouraging a compact land-use pattern. A compact land-use pattern focuses growth in urban areas, which helps to avoid sprawl and ensures efficient use of land and natural resources, while also preserving farmland, open space, and wildlife habitat. When development remains within defined urban areas, people can live and work within their communities, live close to public transit, and depend less on their cars. Avoiding sprawl also conserves our natural resources by reducing inefficiencies associated with extending energy and water services out to nonurban areas.

RESOURCES

More Information

This plan incorporates elements from state and federal legislative agendas, as well as numerous Boulder County plans. The intent is to extract, integrate, and activate the environmentally focused pieces of Boulder County’s existing plans and processes, such as those listed below:

Boulder County Comprehensive Plan

bouldercounty.org/property-and-land/land-use/planning/boulder-county-comprehensive-plan

Climate Change Preparedness Plan

bouldercounty.org/environment/sustainability/climate-change-2/preparedness-plan

Zero Waste Action Plan

bouldercounty.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/zwap2011.pdf

Sustainable Energy Plan

assets.bouldercounty.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/sustainable-energy-plan.pdf

Transportation Master Plan

bouldercounty.gov/transportation/plans-and-projects/transportation-master-plan/

Human Services Strategic Priorities

bouldercounty.gov/departments/housing-and-human-services/

Parks & Open Space Cropland Policy

bouldercounty.org/open-space/management/cropland-policy

Parks & Open Space Water Policy

assets.bouldercounty.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/water-policy.pdf