

MEMORANDUM

TO: Climate Action Steering Committee (CASC)
FROM: Allison Osterberg, Senior Planner, Thurston Regional Planning Council
DATE: April 19, 2021
SUBJECT: Policy Research Support Options (White Papers)

Requested Action

Move to approve up to four topics for policy research white papers:

Option 1: Approve the four policy research topics identified in the March 22 CASC meeting and described below:

1. Energy Efficiency for Residential Buildings
2. Electric-Vehicle-Ready Infrastructure
3. Equitable Climate Outreach and Engagement
4. Regional Program for Carbon Sequestration (already approved by CASC)

Option 2: Approve fewer than four topics, so white papers can go into more detail.

Option 3: Suggest and approve alternative policy research topics.

The Steering Committee can also provide guidance and suggestions on the scope for each policy topic white paper.

Background

The *Thurston Climate Mitigation Plan* (TCMP) identified a need for additional research for policymakers and staff to understand how best to move ahead on some regionally coordinated actions in the plan. Under Task 3 of the Phase 3 Climate Interlocal Agreement, Thurston Regional Planning Council staff will develop a white paper that researches and documents a recommended implementation pathway for up to four topic areas. Each white paper will include:

- Background information on topic, including information gathered through TCMP development.
- Comparison or case studies of 2-5 existing programs in other regions, states, or countries.
- Summary of up to three policy/action options for implementation, including the potential benefits and challenges and equity considerations of each option. Identified options should clearly delineate between policy/actions that could be taken by individual jurisdictions and those that could be most beneficial if addressed through regional cooperation among the Parties.
- Rough cost estimates and timelines of different policy options.
- Where appropriate, model code or policy language for use by individual jurisdictions.

The Steering Committee will determine the priority topics and order for developing white papers. White papers will be developed in consultation with the Multijurisdictional Staff Team and reviewed by the Steering Committee.

White Paper Topics

The Steering Committee is considering the following options for white paper research topics, based on the discussion at the March 22 Steering Committee meeting. TRPC staff will develop up to four white papers under the scope of work, but the Steering Committee could opt to do fewer topics with more detail. At the March 22 meeting, the Steering Committee unanimously approved a white paper on the regional program for carbon sequestration as one of the topics and removed from consideration a previous suggestion for a paper on “climate-informed decision making.”

1. Energy Efficiency for Residential Buildings

Why This White Paper: Energy use in residential buildings accounts for 32 percent of the Thurston region’s greenhouse gas emissions—making it our largest source by sector. The state Clean Energy Transformation Act (CETA) puts us on a pathway to dramatically reduce emissions from the building sector, but it will be a big lift for utilities like Puget Sound Energy. One of the best things we can do locally to support CETA is to reduce the amount of energy we demand, and that utilities need to develop renewable sources to supply. Changes to building codes that require greener building practices and materials only address new buildings—nearly 90 percent of the housing units that will exist in Thurston County in 2030 and 67 percent of the units that will exist in 2050 already exist today. Lower income residents in our region live in housing that is generally older and less efficient, which means they already pay a higher proportion of their income on energy costs—this inequity could be exacerbated if CETA pushes up energy prices and as wealthier residents opt to move into newer, more efficient homes built under the newer building codes. For these reasons, increasing the energy efficiency of existing residential buildings is one of the most important strategies local governments can do to reduce emissions in the short term in a way that equitably distributes the costs and benefits of climate mitigation. Yet most of the priority actions in the TCMP that address this strategy were flagged by jurisdiction staff as requiring legislative action before they could proceed. Some stakeholders in the community disagree that state action is the right or necessary course for all these actions. If state legislation is the best approach for these actions, we need to better define our legislative ask. This white paper would dig into these questions: what can we do locally to increase energy efficiency in residential buildings (starting with the actions prioritized in the TCMP and looking at examples in other communities), and what specific funding authority or other change do we want to request from the legislature.

Desired Outcome of Paper: Identify specific “asks” around residential energy efficiency to include in the legislative agenda for the upcoming session, with enough time to begin outreach to legislators. Identify whether there are some actions around residential energy efficiency that can be taken on locally, without waiting for state legislative action. Recommend path forward.

TCMP Actions Addressed:

- B1.1 – residential energy performance ratings
- B1.2 – residential energy audits
- B1.4 – rental housing energy efficiency incentives
- B1.5 – property tax credit
- B1.6 – rental housing energy efficiency baseline

Considerations: This is a big topic, and an important one – some Steering Committee members were interested in expanding this topic, and doing only three topics total, so we can dig into this one in more detail. On the flip side,

Thurston Climate Action Team (TCAT) has been doing outreach with local realtors and builders around how to do Action B1.1, so this topic could be left for them to continue work out. However, TCAT’s work will not address the question of financing incentives for building energy efficiency or what items should be part of a future legislative agenda.

2. Electric-Vehicle-Ready Infrastructure

Why This White Paper: Car trips made in passenger vehicles account for 27 percent of the Thurston region’s total greenhouse gas emissions—our second largest source by sector. Actions that reduce the emission intensity of vehicles—such as switching to electric or alternative fuels to power cars, trucks, and buses—account for about two-thirds of the reductions needed in local transportation emissions to meet our targets. Currently, less than one percent of Thurston County residents own an electric vehicle (EV). On April 14, the Washington State Legislature passed a new law that sets 2030 as the target year for all passenger and light-duty vehicles sold in Washington State to be electric vehicles ([E2SHB 1287](#))—this is currently the most ambitious timeline for EV transition in the nation. To reach our targets, we need to make it easier for residents to switch to EVs, and one of the barriers is a lack of charging infrastructure. While new public charging stations are opening up, the most convenient option for most people will be to charge their EVs at home. One thing local governments can do is to ensure that new homes are constructed in a way that makes it easy for someone to install a charger in their garage. Stakeholders in the building community have requested that local jurisdictions coordinate to adopt the same standards to support climate actions, whenever possible. This white paper would look at options to develop a simple and consistent residential charging station permitting process to reduce costs and time to development, and look at the options for residents who don’t have an enclosed garage at their home.

Desired Outcome of Paper: Model code amendment language that all four jurisdictions could place on their development code dockets in 2023. This paper has the potential to be leveraged with a regional project to look at what’s needed for an electric vehicle charging network (currently unfunded).

TCMP Actions Addressed:

- T3.5 – EV-ready building code
- T3.7 – EV integration

Considerations: Some Steering Committee members requested policy research that would result in code amendments—this is the only white paper proposed that is slated to result in actual code amendment language that jurisdictions can take forward on their development code dockets next year. Alternatively, an individual jurisdiction could allocate their own staff time to research and develop a code that could be used and modified by the others.

3. Equitable Climate Outreach and Engagement

Scope of White Paper: In approving the TCMP, policymakers committed to a continued focus on equity to guide climate action in the Thurston Region. Though we often think about equity as a distribution of costs and benefits, an equitable focus should include procedural equity, which is defined as ensuring inclusive, accessible, authentic engagement and representation in processes to develop or implement programs and policies. A key principle for implementation of the TCMP is that everybody has the right to take part in building a climate-forward region. Communities of color, lower income, and otherwise disadvantaged groups are often less represented in discussions of climate actions, even though they can benefit from climate solutions that improve livelihoods, services, and public

health. Delivering an equitable approach to mitigating climate change will require building relationships and community pathways to ensure a variety of voices shape that implementation. This white paper would look at examples of how other communities have built inclusive engagement in climate implementation and identify potential actions our region could take to ensure broad participation in developing and refining our implementation actions.

Desired Outcome of Paper: Recommendations for ensuring procedural equity and broad community engagement in implementation of regional climate actions.

TCMP Actions Addressed:

- None specified

Considerations: While an important topic, this paper would not directly address any priority actions identified in the TCMP process. Individual jurisdictions and partners each have their own existing processes for community outreach and engagement, and many are already looking at equity issues. Recommendations on a centralized, regional approach to outreach may not add significant value to efforts already under way.

4. Regional Program for Carbon Sequestration

Scope of White Paper: The wedge analysis completed for the TCMP identified carbon sequestration as necessary to meet our 2050 emissions reduction target, and sequestration actions were strongly supported by community stakeholders. Yet there is a lot unknown about how a regional carbon sequestration program could or should work. This white paper would look at the assumptions around sequestration and dig into these questions:

- What actions are required on the ground to meet our carbon sequestration assumptions?
- How should different potential sources of sequestration be included in a regional program (agriculture, prairies, forests, marine areas, other)?
- How can or should we account for the carbon sequestering potential of existing trees and other habitat?

Desired Outcome of Paper: Options for certifying, tracking, and administering a regional carbon sequestration program.

TCMP Actions Addressed:

- A2.1 – regenerative agriculture
- A5.1 – reforestation & afforestation program
- A7.1 – prairie preservation

Considerations: ****Note that the Steering Committee has already approved a white paper on this topic.**** This is another big topic area—it could become a stronger product if there are fewer topics and white papers overall.

Decision Options

Option 1: Approve the four policy research topics identified above:

5. Energy Efficiency for Residential Buildings
6. Electric-Vehicle-Ready Infrastructure
7. Equitable Climate Outreach and Engagement
8. Regional Program for Carbon Sequestration (already approved by CASC)

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