

## Climate Action Sustainability and Resiliency

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## Summary and Assessment

### Overarching Takeaways from CASR Transition Committee

- A. Mayor sets expectation of a whole-of-government approach with a Climate Cabinet and accountability for meeting climate and equity goals throughout all City departments
- B. Lower barriers to implementation and take to scale the excellent policies and plans CASR has already developed. IRA and IJA funding as generational opportunity.
- C. Climate justice requires a bottom-up approach, by proactively prioritizing community engagement and transparency around integration of community voices.

*What key things is this agency doing well right now, according to feedback from stakeholders?*

With 68 FTEs and a voter-approved dedicated funding source of \$40M annually, the transition committee is pleased to report that the City and County of Denver has built one of the largest climate offices of any major U.S. city. CASR is built on a solid foundation (particularly the [2020 stakeholder and planning process](#)), is well-engaged with the community, and has a strong focus on equity. The City and County of Denver has developed thoughtful policies, programs, [plans and goals](#) for taking climate action across city departments, and now the opportunity lies in implementation.

*What are the key challenges for the City in this area, according to stakeholders and current employees? // What are the key challenges facing this agency, according to stakeholders and current employees?*

While CASR has strong programs and dedicated funding, meeting Denver's climate goals is dependent on aligning key departments, especially DOTI, CPD, DDPHE and DPR with climate targets and actions needed to meet them.

High visibility Mayoral leadership on climate, sustainability and resiliency is also needed to strengthen and embed shared values across departments and ensure implementation within internal agencies, improve coordination with external municipalities and stakeholders at the federal, state and regional levels, and secure additional funding.

Lastly, in order to be successful in implementing plans and reaching the city's outlined goals, the city must take its work to scale which requires increased funding. High visibility leadership and dedicated staffing, including for community engagement, and more resources for follow through can elevate this work, as well as prioritization of pursuing federal, state and alternative funding sources. In addition, integrating sustainability into the city budgeting process (akin to OSEI

integration) will help to align funding with climate goals and streamlining grants and contracts will help to effect timely change in the community.

In summary, here are the challenges.

- Shared cross-departmental commitment to hitting the city's climate emission reduction targets and shared sustainability values, especially by leadership of DOTI, CPD, DDPHE and DPR.
- Need for Mayoral leadership setting climate as a top tier administration priority and providing national, regional and internal thought leadership and focus
- Additional funding to bring implementation to scale, including exploring innovative financing models and seeking federal and state funding opportunities. See the funding recommendations from the Climate Action Task Force.

### Answers to Specific Guiding Questions

*What would it take for Denver to become the national model for climate policy?*

For Denver to become a national model for climate policy demands vocal leadership from the mayor, with climate and equity champions empowered throughout all City departments. Denver must defend and expand model programs like Energize Denver and Climate Action Rebates as well as maximize federal funding opportunities for residents, businesses, government agencies, and nonprofits. The Office of Climate Action, Sustainability, and Resilience (CASR) should lead efforts to rapidly transition all buildings off fossil fuels, work with Xcel Energy and the Public Utility Commission (PUC) to achieve Denver's goal of 100% renewable electricity, and lead by example in municipal buildings and invest in an all-electric vehicle municipal fleet. The Mayor's Office can lead by developing innovative financing mechanisms to help communities afford clean energy solutions such as low-interest loans, on-bill financing, and social impact bonds. Climate programs must enhance resilience in disproportionately impacted communities, prepare people for clean energy jobs through workforce development programs, and address cumulative burdens (e.g., air and water quality, housing insecurity, transportation mobility, cooling access). Climate justice requires a bottom-up approach, by proactively prioritizing community engagement and transparency around how community feedback is integrated into decisions.

*What can we do to better integrate climate strategies across all City agencies, as well as in partnership with the Metro Mayors Caucus and Commissioners? The Denver One Water Plan was issued in 2022. What is the current state of implementation, and what steps should the City take to improve its water management, including options to incentivize xeriscaping and artificial turf replacement?*

To become a national model for sustainability, the Johnston administration must lead with a bold and comprehensive vision that commits to equitable climate and sustainability solutions and incorporates the needs and concerns of the larger metropolitan region. At the regional level, the mayoral administration needs to strengthen relationships with public officials, civic leaders, public utilities, and private service providers in metro counties and cities to coordinate strategies for water and waste management and develop consistent messaging on best practices for residents and businesses. The administration can also deepen the City's involvement with ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability through exchanging transferable lessons with its international network of cities and towns while representing Denver at global sustainability events. At the municipal level, the Office of Climate Action, Sustainability, and Resiliency (CASR) should leverage the \$40+ million Climate Protection Fund in combination with federal

and state grants and private venture capital to support more climate-related projects. Specifically, city leaders should be more innovative regarding how they define climate actions by linking them to other social equity and environmental initiatives such as housing security, transportation mobility, healthy food access, workforce development, circular economy, grassroots environmental stewardship, and community resilience. As CASR works to update the City's Comprehensive Adaptation Plan, it should consider forward-looking strategies such as creating Denver-specific decadal climate projections on temperatures, precipitation, and extreme events, developing climate resilience design guidelines for city agencies and private property owners, outlining climate resilience investments prioritizing combined adaptation and mitigation benefits, examining insurance-related issues, and ensuring that historically burdened communities are represented in policy discussions and decision making.

*[Optional/As Time Allows]: Phoenix recently appointed an Office of Heat Response and Mitigation. What steps should Denver consider to prepare for the long-term consequences of rising temperatures?*

As average temperatures continue to rise year after year in Denver, the Johnston administration must take necessary steps to increase access to indoor cooling appliances for Denver residents and mitigate the urban heat island effect with strategies such as revegetation, forestation, and cool roof efforts. A [June 2023 report](#) found that nearly a quarter of Coloradans with annual incomes below \$35,000 lack access to cooling, making heat an equity issue that impacts Denver's schools, Denverites' health, and Denver's buildings and parks policies and programs. To succeed with these actions to plan and prepare Denver for the long-term consequences of rising temperatures, the City and County of Denver (CCD) should expand current programs and create new programs where necessary, increase collaboration between city agencies, leverage federal funding in the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) such as Hope for Homes and High-Efficiency Electric Homes Rebates to bolster local programs, and invest in robust direct outreach to residents and landlords to ensure community members are aware of funding, technical assistance and programs for heat equity solutions. Lastly, the CCD, as they embark on climate adaptation and resiliency planning, should assess risk and vulnerability to extreme weather events and develop climate resilience guidelines for city agencies for long-term planning and capital project development.

*[Optional/As Time Allows]: How can we accelerate community solar gardens focused on low income communities, as a way to both increase renewable-energy generation and decrease utility costs for historically excluded communities? What would it take to launch an energy efficiency retrofitting program, potentially including easy-to-use financing as well as workforce training?*

Energy efficiency and renewable energy should be implemented in concert, along with health and safety upgrades and beneficial electrification, to promote right-sized, efficient, full systems solutions. While community solar gardens (CSGs) are not a panacea for renewable energy generation, Denver should implement CSGs for the many co-benefits they can provide, if implemented thoughtfully: high-visibility community education about renewable energy and climate change, access to renewables for those unable to have on-site residential solar, ease of delivery to low-income households, resilience through local power generation and microgrids, power for electric vehicle charging, shade provision and cooling, weather protection, etc. Denver should also work with Xcel Energy to promote utility-scale generation outside the city to most economically accomplish these objectives. Rather than launching a new energy efficiency retrofitting program, Denver should focus on promoting, expanding, and collaborating with existing federal, state, local, and utility programs that provide whole-building retrofits that include health and safety upgrades, weatherization and insulation, appliance electrification, renewable energy, and EV charging. Denver can play a key role in making citizens aware of these

programs, helping to streamline application processes, expanding eligibility, filling gaps between program offerings, and providing new access to low-cost financing opportunities. Denver should coordinate across departments and partner closely with the state and Xcel to educate, explain, and validate the opportunities that already exist while addressing barriers to access.

### Group Discussion Summary

The committee engaged with several dozen stakeholders during the transition. This included one on one interviews, a public forum, and an open comment form. Major themes included:

- There is a clear desire for continued community engagement by CASR, including the forums like that head by the transition. Particular desire for engagement on environmental justice.
- A call for CASR to be involved in decision making on other city priorities including housing, transit, and planning.
- Support for Denver leadership on climate throughout the region, and partnership with other surrounding cities particularly on shared challenges.

### Recommended Priorities/Outcomes

*What should be the top priorities for this agency to address under a new administration? // What should the City's priorities be in this area under a new administration?*

The transition committee has identified a unique opportunity for Mayor-elect Johnston and his Administration to transition the Office of CASR from Phase I: Building a robust office to Phase II: Establishing climate action as a citywide priority. Citywide, regional and national leadership is needed from the Mayor in order to take the climate, sustainability and resiliency plans of the city to scale, meet the city's goals and establish Denver as a national hub of forward-looking climate opportunity.

This work will require increased prioritization by the Mayor's Office. The transition committee recommends integrating climate and sustainability into the daily and weekly decision making in the Mayor's Office and aligning staff support to elevate the issue. Here are two approaches for your consideration: dedicating a member of senior staff to this coordination effort (akin to the current Office of Social Equity and Innovation structure) or integrating the CASR Executive Director into Mayor's Office senior staff operations (akin to current Department of Finance structure).

In addition, significant federal funds are available for a limited period (generally through a 2nd Johnston term) through the federal inflation and infrastructure acts and Justice 40 provisions. Competing for and prioritizing access of these funds is extremely important.

Lastly, while the city does everything in its control to meet the its goals, the transition committee recommends the new administration recognize that the City and County of Denver operates in a larger landscape of partners and stakeholders and ensure it has a strong presence in these spaces including but not limited to RTD, Xcel, Denver Water, Metro Mayors Caucus, Region 8 EPA, DRCOG, PUC and the State of Colorado. Through these coordinated efforts, the Mayor can step into national and regional climate efforts and open up more opportunities for partnerships and funding.

In summary, here are the opportunities:

- Clear Mayor's Office leadership on climate across agencies + dedicated CASR staff
- Regional and stakeholder coordination and leadership opportunities
- State, federal, and alternative funding sources, especially federal inflation and infrastructure acts and Justice 40 provisions

**Key Outcomes/Opportunities:**

- Leadership - The committee recommends Denver make it clear that all agency leadership have responsibility, accountability for meeting climate goals.
- Land use & electrification - The committee recommends Denver lean in with the state to modernize land use policies & expand electrification policies.
- Air quality - The committee recommends strong leadership with external stakeholders on matters that impact Denver future air quality.
- Transit - The committee recommends supporting a reinvigorated RTD, expanding micro transit efforts, delivering BRT on Colfax and exploring free transit.
- Water - The committee recommends ensuring Denver (collaborating with Denver Water) become a leader in advancing conservation and drought resilience.
- Building - The committee recommends ensuring that Denver remains committed to implementing the strong city policy to electrify the building code.

**Proposed 100-Day Action Plan**

Top 10 actions for first 100 days

1. As the Mayor builds his administration, ensure appointed leadership across administration, especially CPD, DOTI, DDPHE and DPR, share a strong commitment and have clear responsibility for helping meet the city's climate goals.
2. Increase staffing focused on delivering on environmental justice plans, programs, and goals.
3. Develop a compact with Denver Public Schools, local trade schools, local unions, and related professional organizations to build the needed workforce, focusing specifically on encouraging home-grown small businesses in underserved communities
4. Be responsive to an extremely hot summer including things like: a Tenant Right to Cooling policy, Launch a pilot program that identifies DPS schools with the most significant need for cooling solutions and install mini splits or other emerging heat pump technologies to protect Denver schools from heat and offer schools as cooling centers
5. Prioritize and publicize a high-level team and plan to maximize federal funding opportunities, for example developing a strong plan to access Climate Pollution Reduction Grants implementation funds.
6. Issue an implementation plan including identified funding streams for the City and County of Denver to meet the Energize Denver regulations.
7. Elevate and educate the Denver community regarding the Pay to Throw transition to ensure successful implementation.
8. Launch community engagement and internal planning process to update and/or replace Executive Order 123

9. Identify a high profile project to demonstrate a visible commitment by the City and County of Denver to climate action with city property ie: solar panel project, ev fleet.
10. Prepare for Xcel franchise agreement negotiations and include Integrating updated equity and environmental goals into final agreement.