

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# KING COUNTY 2020 Strategic Climate Action Plan



May 2021

 King County  
**CLIMATE ACTION**  
Clean Future. Strong Communities.





# 2020 SCAP Executive Summary

King County's Strategic Climate Action Plan (SCAP) is a five-year blueprint for County climate action, integrating climate change into all areas of County operations and work with King County cities, partners, communities, and residents. The SCAP outlines King County's priorities and commitments for climate action for decision-makers, employees, partners, and the public.

The SCAP is a living document that is updated every five years to reflect the County's continuous learning approach to climate action and associated priority actions. The updates to the 2020 SCAP are rooted in the fundamental understanding that climate change is an urgent local and global challenge. The 2020 SCAP updates are also rooted in the understanding that climate change is a threat multiplier that creates complex challenges, particularly for communities affected by historic and current inequities and who have limited resources to adapt.

The 2020 SCAP is driven by best available science and data, local community experiences and expertise, internal and external partner relationships, and global to local best practices and technological advances. Recognizing the importance of taking a holistic approach to climate action, King County has adopted internal operational goals and priorities as well as external countywide goals and priorities. This approach reflects the fact that robust collaborative actions inclusive of the voices, experiences, and expertise of all partners and communities are needed to fully realize climate action successes.

## What Is New in the 2020 SCAP

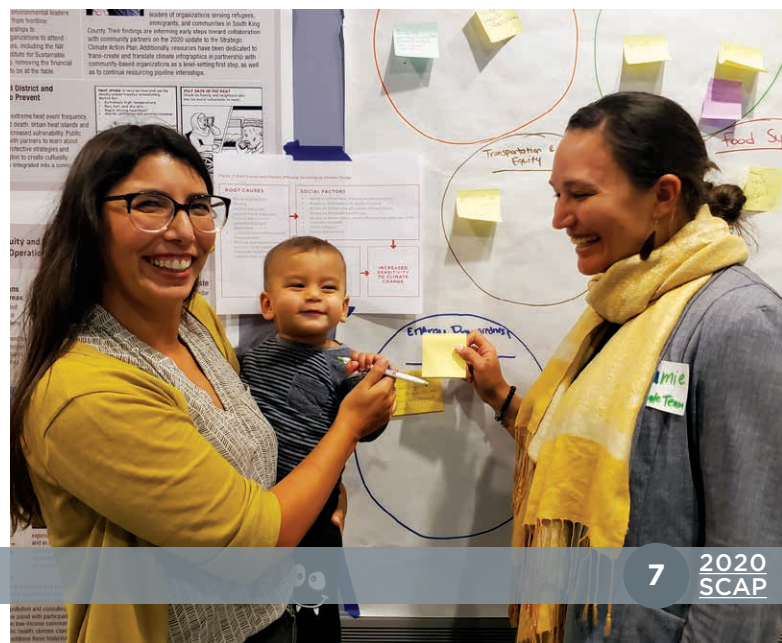
The 2020 SCAP continues King County's focus on reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and preparing for climate change impacts while strengthening the County's commitment to lead with equity, engage communities, and reduce health disparities. New content includes:

- Guiding principles developed by the Climate Action Team, with input from stakeholders, and adopted by the King County Climate Leadership Team.
- A new section entitled "Sustainable & Resilient Frontline Communities," which brings the voice, experiences, and expertise of frontline communities disproportionately affected by climate change to the SCAP
- Updated targets and supporting actions in all GHG focus areas that together achieve overarching GHG goals
- A new strategic framework for climate preparedness, including a vision of success, strategies, and performance measures for evaluating progress

*King County used collaborative processes to ensure the 2020 SCAP reflects input and direction from a diverse range of people and partners.*

## 2020 SCAP Guiding Principles

- Act with urgency and intention.
- Lead with racial justice and equity.
- Respond to community needs and priorities.
- Use and develop best available science.
- Seek systemic solutions.
- Build partnerships.
- Lead through local action.
- Prioritize health and co-benefits.
- Be transparent and accountable.



# Developing the 2020 SCAP

## Oversight

Including diverse voices was a focus for the 2020 SCAP update. King County sought input and direction from County partners, community leaders, County staff, frontline communities, and the public. Frontline communities are those communities that often experience the most acute impacts of climate change, face historic and current inequities, and have limited resources and/or capacity to adapt. The 2020 SCAP commits King County to continued collaboration with these groups, including the new Climate Equity Community Task Force.

The 2020 SCAP was developed by the County Executive, with oversight by the King County Council. Ongoing implementation guidance for the SCAP is provided by the interdepartmental Climate Leadership Team representing leadership from different King County departments and agencies. Progress on meeting SCAP commitments is reported every two years through a biennial report available at [kingcounty.gov/climate](http://kingcounty.gov/climate).

## Building on Accomplishments Since 2015

King County is regionally and nationally recognized as a leader in innovation and investment in climate action. The 2020 SCAP builds upon the significant progress made toward 2015 SCAP targets and outcomes. Actions in the 2020 SCAP continue work on these priorities while expanding the County's commitments, particularly in the new SRFC section. Highlights of accomplishments since 2015 include:

- Launched the Frontline Community Climate Partnerships program to support climate literacy, language access, and leadership development in communities of color.
- Contributed to stabilizing countywide GHG emissions and an 11 percent reduction in per person emissions over the last decade.
- Led the country with the fastest growth rate in transit riders in 2017, growing total ridership by 14 million annual trips from 2015 to 2019, and positioned King County Metro Transit as the nation's leader in transitioning to fleets powered by clean, renewable energy.
- Continued to focus more than 98.5 percent of new residential development and growth in urban areas connected to the region's growing transit and trail systems.
- Launched the Land Conservation Initiative, accelerating the pace to permanently protect the last, best open space lands, farmlands, forestlands, urban green spaces, and trails.
- Created a partnership that planted 1 million trees throughout King County and made King County the nation's first local government to offer certified carbon credits that protect local forests.
- Supported countywide residential green building with a total 50 percent increase in green building certifications from 2015 to 2019, and surpassed energy efficiency goals in County operations, reducing internal energy use by more than 20 percent since 2007.
- Through the King County-Cities Climate Collaboration (K4C), led efforts of cities representing 80 percent of King County's 2.25 million residents to advance transformational state energy policies that will result in stronger building and appliance efficiency, conservation requirements for fossil fuel gas, and 100 percent clean electricity.
- Advanced the Local Food Initiative, supporting local farmers and making access to locally grown, nutritious food more equitable.
- Strengthened land use codes and developed adaption strategies to address sea level rise.
- Launched the Puget Sound Climate Preparedness Collaborative, developed in partnership with neighboring counties, cities, and partner organizations to enhance coordination and improve the climate preparedness outcomes in the Puget Sound region.

## Stakeholder Engagement

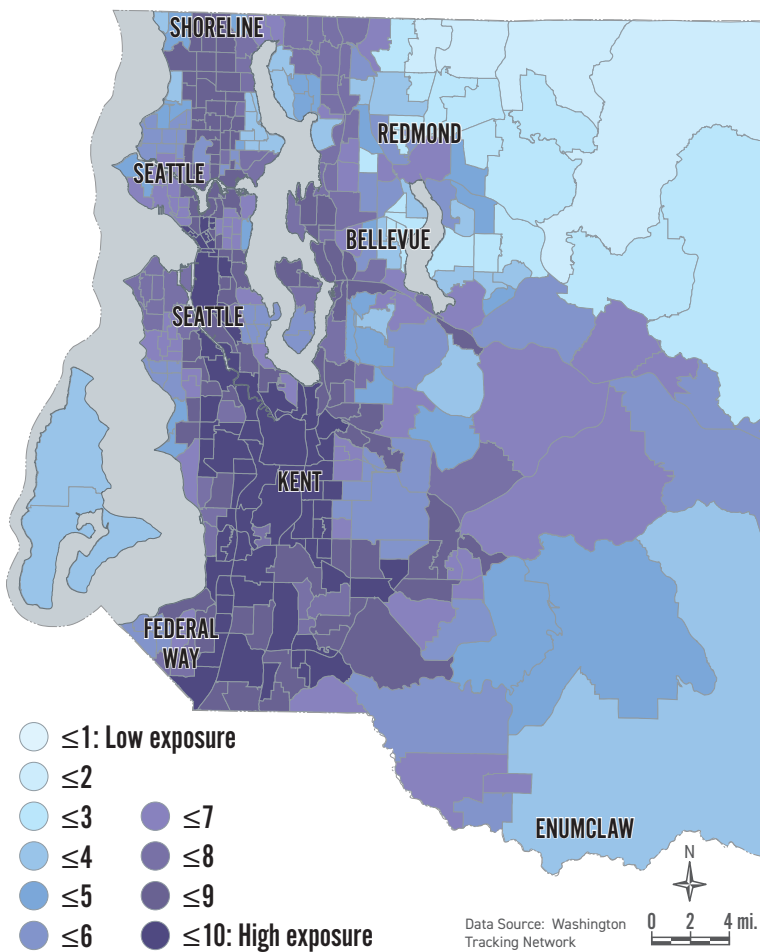
The 2020 SCAP used a collaborative process for co-development of climate actions and targets, rooted in an understanding of climate science and progress on previous climate actions.

Including diverse voices was a focus for the 2020 SCAP update. King County staff pursued an equitable engagement process, receiving input and direction from County partners, frontline communities, community leaders, County government staff, and the public. Public engagement efforts included residents from communities across King County, environmental organizations, BIPOC and youth serving organizations, businesses, labor representatives, affordable housing professionals, state and local jurisdiction representatives, scientists, and others. The process included many stakeholder engagement strategies (see box) and different types of involvement. Attention was paid to language access, getting diverse feedback, going to communities, meeting in accessible locations, and providing a collaborative space for solution development and feedback.

## Stakeholder Engagement Strategies

- Climate Equity Community Task Force
- Topic-based convenings
- Youth workshops
- Public Workshops
- King County Comprehensive Plan meetings
- Community presentations
- King County employee engagement
- Online information and survey

## ENVIRONMENTAL EXPOSURE INDEX



## Current Context: GHG Emissions, Climate Impacts, Climate Change and Equity

As the 2020 SCAP was developed, the County used best available research to analyze the current context of climate drivers and impacts in the region. Data about sources and trends in GHG emissions inform the priorities of the Reducing GHG Emissions section. Science about current and projected climate impacts in the Puget Sound region and the effects on local communities supports the Preparing for Climate Change section. Knowledge about disproportionate risks, health vulnerabilities, historic and current social inequities, and environmental exposure guides work and investments to reduce GHG emissions, support sustainable and resilient communities, and reduce climate change risks and impacts.

*This Environmental Exposure Index is one example of how the 2020 SCAP is using best available data and research to analyze the current context of climate drivers, equity implications, and impacts in the region. This map and others show that areas with less opportunity, higher pollution exposure, existing inequities, and lower health and economic wellbeing outcomes are often concentrated in south King County. This type of information guides work and investments outlined in the SCAP.*

# 2020 SCAP Section Introductions, Focus Areas, and Highlights

The updated 2020 SCAP consists of three core sections:

- **Section I, Reducing GHG Emissions:** Includes strategies, priority actions and performance measures to reduce GHG emissions countywide and from County government operations.
- **Section II, Sustainable & Resilient Frontline Communities:** Focuses on climate equity and community-driven actions, as identified by the Climate Equity Community Task Force.
- **Section III, Preparing for Climate Change:** Identifies climate preparedness actions that help King County government and communities prepare for the impacts of climate change and increase climate resilience.

An introduction to each section, its focus areas, and highlights of 2020 SCAP commitments are presented on the following pages.

## Section I Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions



## Section II Sustainable & Resilient Frontline Communities



## Section III Preparing for Climate Change





## Section I Introduction: Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions

The Reducing GHG Emissions section includes strategies, priority actions and performance measures to reduce GHG emissions countywide and from County government operations. Focus areas were determined based on major GHG emissions sources and opportunities for reductions and carbon sequestration. All focus areas include commitments that advance both GHG emissions reductions and racial justice and equity, as part of the SCAP’s commitment to lead with this guiding principle.

Many targets and commitments in this section were co-developed with partners of the K4C. These actions are also reflected in the [K4C’s Joint Climate Action Commitments](#) (2019) which represent a shared vision for countywide progress to reduce GHG emissions. Countywide targets also build on [technical analysis](#) completed to support the 2020 SCAP update that assessed recent trends in countywide GHG emissions and identified major opportunities for reductions.

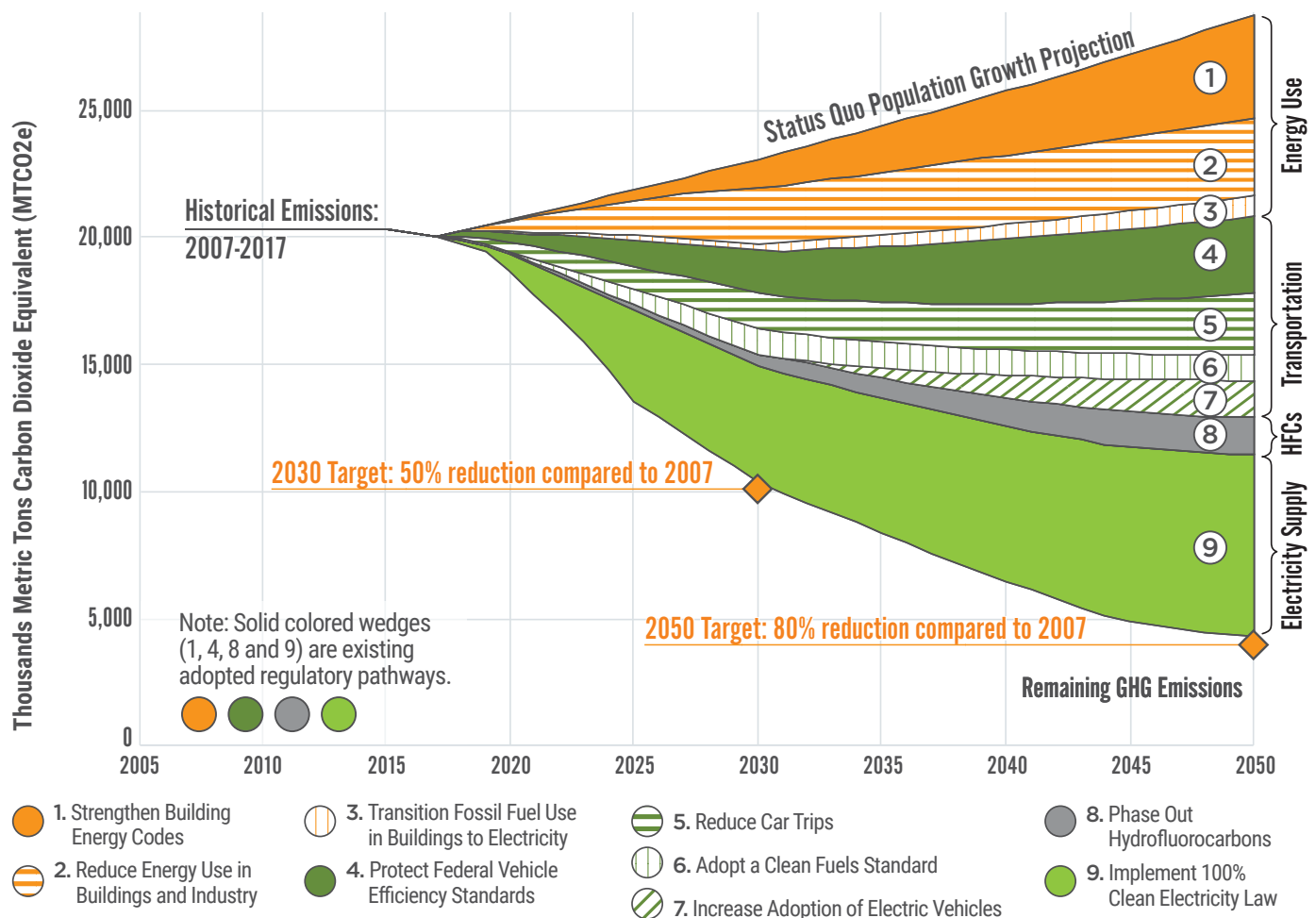
### Overarching Goals

Reduce countywide sources of GHG emissions, compared to a 2007 baseline, by 25 percent by 2020, 50 percent by 2030, and 80 percent by 2050. Pursue additional goals and actions to sequester carbon and reduce emissions from consumption of goods and services.



Reduce Emissions

### GHG Reduction “Wedge” Pathways to Achieve Overarching Countywide Goals



The Reducing GHG Emissions section builds on technical analyses that define key opportunities and pathways to achieve emissions reduction goals. The “wedge” analysis illustrated here defines the nine key pathways the County and K4C partners will pursue to reach the 2030 and 2050 countywide GHG emission reduction goals. The 2020 SCAP also builds on a parallel analysis about opportunities and strategies to reduce GHG emissions from County operations as identified in the [King County Carbon Neutral Implementation Plan](#).

## Section I Focus Areas & Highlights: Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions

- 1 Greenhouse Gas Targets and Policies** – Advances new pathways, strategies, and targets to reduce countywide GHG emissions by 50% by 2030 and 80% by 2050 while accelerating the County’s government operations GHG reduction commitments by 20 years to reduce emissions by 80% by 2030.



- 2 Transportation and Land Use** – Commits to a three-part strategy to reduce car trips through (1) sustained and increased use of transit; (2) focusing almost all new development in urban areas; and (3) developing vehicle usage pricing strategies that are equitable, while also reducing emissions from County-owned vehicles by 45% by 2025.



- 3 Building and Facilities Energy** – Targets reducing countywide energy use by 25% and fossil fuel use by 20% by 2030, including developing efficiency programs and proposing a financing program for commercial and multi-family building efficiency, renewable energy, and resiliency upgrades. For County operations, extends strong efficiency targets, eliminates fossil fuel use in new facilities, and recommits the County to use 100% carbon-free electricity.



- 4 Green Building** – Advances countywide green building codes and a more sustainable commercial energy code toward net zero GHG in new buildings by 2031; implements the highest green building, sustainable development, and equity and social justice standards in King County government capital projects, including 20 Zero Energy or Living Building Challenge projects by 2025.



- 5 Consumption of Goods and Materials** – Advances a countywide circular economy framework, including achieving zero waste of resources and zero edible food waste by 2030; commits to increased purchasing of sustainable and recycled products, including materials with low carbon impact in King County construction projects.



- 6 Forests and Agriculture** – Highlights the new 30-Year Forest Plan; advances the Land Conservation Initiative, including a new commitment to invest \$25 million by 2025 to improve access to urban green space and support immigrant and refugee farmers; expands work to plant, protect and prepare 3 million trees by 2025.



**Related major plans and initiatives for this section:** K4C; King County Comprehensive Plan; METRO CONNECTS (King County Metro Transit’s vision for the next 25 years); Regional Equitable Development Initiative Fund and related transit-oriented development programs; Living Building Challenge; 30-Year Forest Plan; SWD Comprehensive Plan.

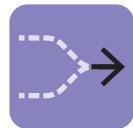
## Section II Introduction: Sustainable & Resilient Frontline Communities

As part of King County's commitments to action on climate change and equity and social justice, the 2020 SCAP includes a new Sustainable & Resilient Frontline Communities (SRFC) section focused on climate equity and community-driven policy.

The SRFC framework was developed through a community-driven process where leaders of frontline communities, as part of the Climate Equity Community Task Force (CECTF), established the goals and identified the priority areas for climate action based on climate justice values and community needs. Frontline communities are those communities that often experience the earliest and most acute impacts of climate change, face historic and current inequities, and have limited resources and/or capacity to adapt.

### Key Strategies of the SRFC Framework:

The SRFC framework uses the following six crosscutting strategies across eight focus areas to advance climate and equity in frontline communities:



Build Equitable Practices

1. Build King County and community capacity to prioritize climate equity.



Language Access

2. Prioritize collaborative language access in partnership with trusted community partners.



Community Leadership

3. Advance frontline community leadership by investing in long-term community and tribal partnerships, community capacity development, and improved infrastructure for community driven policy and decision-making.



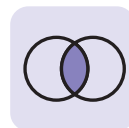
Solutions for Root Causes

4. Address root causes of climate vulnerability by prioritizing comprehensive solutions co-developed with frontline communities that reduce systemic inequities and have co-benefits.



Equitable Climate Future

5. Advance an equitable climate future and outcomes by investing in climate solutions and opportunities with and for frontline communities.



Aligning Initiatives

6. Align with and elevate actions in related County plans and programs that support frontline communities and climate resilience.

### Vision

Frontline communities are centered in developing climate solutions and have the knowledge, skills, resources, capacity, and social and political capital to equitably adapt, lead, and thrive in a changing climate.



Climate Equity



## Section II Focus Areas & Highlights: Sustainable & Resilient Frontline Communities

- 1 Community Leadership and Community-Driven Policy-Making** – Invest in long-term community partnerships, leadership development, and improved structures for equitable and racially just community-driven policy and decision-making. Provide frontline communities with access to knowledge, leadership development, and policy-making processes regarding climate change. 
- 2 Community Capacity Development** – Invest in and build capacity to advance climate literacy, increase community capacity around climate equity, and elevate youth leadership. Prioritize language access and climate education for community leaders, youth, and organizations. 
- 3 Equitable Green Jobs and Pathways** – Build partnerships across sectors to develop an equitable green jobs strategy that advances racial equity and climate action. Create pathways to green jobs that increases BIPOC representation, including in leadership positions. Support workers and green skill development in the transition to a more regenerative economy. 
- 4 Community Health and Emergency Preparedness** – Support frontline communities and small businesses to prepare for, and have adequate resources to respond and bounce forward from emergency events and climate-related health impacts. Partner with frontline communities on data and health indicators to inform climate actions to equitably reduce impacts of extreme events, including urban heat. 
- 5 Food Systems and Food Security** – Support strengthened healthy and culturally relevant food access, expanded nutrition incentive programs, and improved land access and technical assistance. Collaborate to maintain the health of ecosystems and water ways that support food systems, cultural practices, and tribal sovereignty. Support a just food economy that is regenerative, sustainable, zero waste, and prioritizes worker health. 
- 6 Housing Security and Anti-Displacement** – Align County agencies, community partners, and other stakeholders to support green, healthy, and affordable housing that fosters stable and resilient frontline communities. Advance equitable development with BIPOC community-centered anti-displacement strategies and resources that support climate-resilient infrastructure. 

*continued on next page*

## Section II Focus Areas & Highlights: Sustainable & Resilient Frontline Communities

- 7 Energy Justice and Utilities** – Provide frontline communities with energy education, tools, and resources, to increase access to energy-efficiency and utility assistance programs, and assist in affordably transitioning to renewable energy alternatives, and influencing energy policy decisions.



- 8 Transportation Access and Equity** – Improve transit options and infrastructure in frontline communities with the greatest need for sustainable public transportation. Support transit design processes that prioritize climate equity, and meaningful, inclusive, and community-driven planning approaches that engage BIPOC community members.



**Related major plans and initiatives for this section:** King County Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan; King County Blueprint for Addressing Climate Change and Health; King County Metro Mobility Framework, King County Local Food Initiative; Open Space Equity Cabinet Report; Regional Affordable Housing Task Force Five-Year Action Plan

*Some members of the Climate Equity Community Task Force at a meeting in Tukwila; this group of 22 community leaders led development of the 2020 SCAP's new section, Sustainable & Resilient Frontline Communities, which is focused on climate equity, BIPOC communities, and community-driven policy.*



## Section III Introduction: Preparing for Climate Change

The Preparing for Climate Change section identifies climate preparedness actions, organized under a new strategic framework, that help King County government and communities prepare for the impacts of climate change and increase climate resilience. The actions represent important next steps in an ongoing and necessary pivot toward becoming a more climate-resilient King County.

King County's climate preparedness actions address a range of climate impacts, including those related to heavier rain events, hotter summers, lower snowpack, increased flooding, sea level rise, and changes in the potential for wildfire. Because climate change exacerbates many existing environmental, health, and safety challenges, the actions the County takes now to prepare for climate change will also create near-term benefits.

A key objective in the 2020 climate preparedness section is mainstreaming climate action by making it part of daily work at King County. Climate preparedness will be operationalized through the development of methods and guidelines that incorporate climate considerations into day-to-day agency processes such as policy development, strategic planning, capital planning, and project implementation.

Addressing health and equity disparities is another priority embedded throughout the climate preparedness section. All climate preparedness actions will be implemented with a focus on connections to health and equity. Actions specifically targeting climate change-related inequities and health impacts on frontline communities are also included in Strategy 3 of the Preparing for Climate Change section. This work will include coordination and collaboration with the priorities and activities identified in the SRFC section.

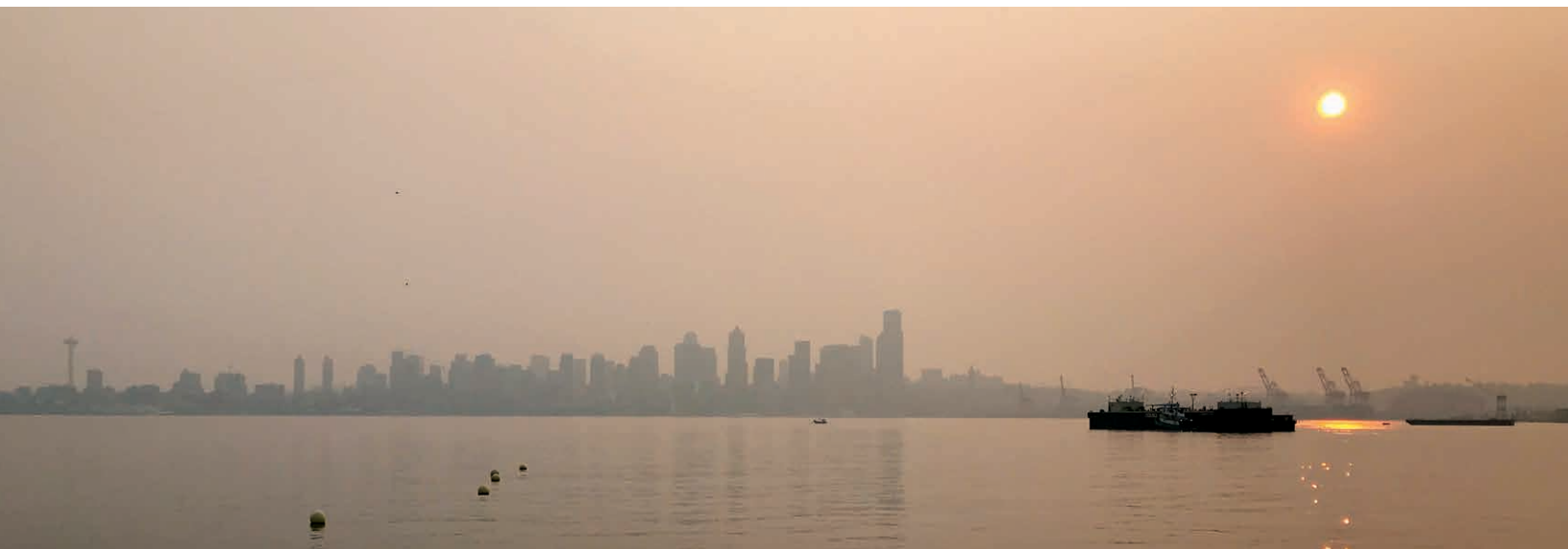
Other strategic focal points include building technical capacity, strengthening partnerships to increase resilience across King County, and investing in outreach and engagement. A new performance measurement framework for climate preparedness will be implemented as part of the 2020 SCAP, helping to ensure that King County is making progress on its climate preparedness strategies and overall vision of success.

### Vision

King County creates, supports, and implements policies and actions that reduce climate change vulnerabilities equitably and increase the resilience of King County communities, natural systems, and the built environment.



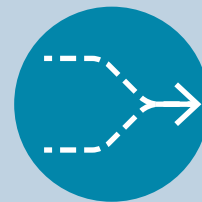
Climate Preparedness





## Section III Focus Areas & Highlights: Preparing for Climate Change

**1 Mainstream Climate Preparedness** - Updates King County policies, plans, practices, and procedures to account for climate impacts, and commits to implementing climate-resilient decisions. Adapts centralized and program-based capital planning processes to include consideration of climate impacts when designing and building infrastructure; incorporates climate change into operations and program delivery.



**2 Technical Capacity** - Invests in the development and use of best available science and other technical information to inform climate preparedness work at King County. Includes developing a climate change resource hub and guidance to inform County climate preparedness activities across County departments and programs; expands research on the impacts of heavy rain events and sea level rise in King County to support long-term planning and infrastructure design.



**3 Health and Equity** - Commits to prioritizing health and equity in climate preparedness actions and activities. In partnership with additional preparedness actions in the SRFC section, takes steps to reduce the impacts of extreme events, including urban heat, on frontline communities; develops inclusive and equitable climate and health messaging, resources, and guidance.



**4 Community and Organizational Partnerships** - Strengthens collaborations and partnerships to address climate impacts and increase regional resilience. Works with internal and external partners to reduce risks related to wildfire, flooding, landslides, and drought; deepens and expands partnerships that advance climate preparedness across King County, including through the Puget Sound Climate Preparedness Collaborative.



**5 Outreach and Education** - Invests in public outreach, engagement, and technical assistance related to climate preparedness. Increases opportunities for sharing information about climate impacts and preparedness in outreach and engagement activities; supports technical assistance to the public and partners related to wildfire, agricultural impacts, and hazard mitigation planning.



**Related major plans and initiatives for this section:** Puget Sound Climate Preparedness Collaborative; K4C; King County Comprehensive Plan; King County Hazard Mitigation Plan; Land Conservation Initiative; Clean Water Healthy Habitat Initiative; Clean Water Plan; Stormwater Strategic Plan; Flood Hazard Management Plan; 30-Year Forest Plan; Blueprint for Addressing Climate Change and Health.

## Commitment to Action and the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic and related economic and County budget impacts will affect how fast 2020 SCAP commitments are implemented. However, climate action has been, and will continue to be, a top County priority. In the near term, County agencies are making climate action part of core work and budgets and reviewing how existing resources can be used to implement the SCAP. In the long term, the County's ability to deliver on 2020 SCAP commitments is dependent on additional investments in climate strategies, including transit, energy efficiency, community partnerships, public health, and resilient public infrastructure.

## Conclusion

As global GHG emissions continue to accelerate and climate impacts grow, the urgency to act on climate change increases. King County and many partners have made important progress, but there is much more to be done.

The 2020 SCAP is the County's comprehensive and bold blueprint to reduce GHG emissions; develop a clean energy economy; elevate the voices and lived experiences of frontline communities; and ensure that King County residents, natural systems, and the built environment are resilient in the face of a changing climate.

The 2020 SCAP defines the County's guiding principles for climate action and near- and long-term goals and commitments, with a focus on actions through 2025. The 2020 SCAP builds on progress from the 2015 SCAP, technical analysis, extensive public input, and collaboration with diverse stakeholders to recommend specific actions to reach shared overarching goals.

King County can't accomplish these goals on its own, however. Partnership with businesses, non-governmental organizations, other governments, community leaders, and county residents is essential to success.

Climate progress requires more than setting ambitious goals. It requires the courage to transform entire systems and tackle huge challenges. The 2020 SCAP defines King County's role in this transformation and is part of King County's commitment to build a more resilient, sustainable, and equitable region.

