

Focus Groups

Summary | October, 2021

FOCUS GROUP OVERVIEW

To inform key elements of Santa Clara’s Climate Action Plan (CAP) Update, Cascadia Consulting Group conducted three virtual focus groups in September and October of 2021 with representatives from sector and demographic groups that were underrepresented in previous engagement efforts.

- **Focus Group #1:** 9/14
 - Representatives from local non-profits, faith-based organizations, and advocacy groups focused on representing the unhoused population, low-income community members, and other vulnerable groups.
- **Focus Group #2:** 9/15
 - Representative from affordable housing advocacy groups, local English as a Second Language (ESL) educational programs, and regional Asian American trade groups.
- **Focus Group #3:** 10/5
 - Developers, contractors, and other representatives from the regional building community.

MEETING OBJECTIVES

- **Educate** participants on the draft CAP.
- **Gather input** on the draft CAP.
- **Discuss** opportunities and considerations for effective **CAP implementation**.

MEETING FORMAT

- An **overview presentation** of the CAP development process and key elements of the plan.
- A facilitated discussion focused on support and/or opposition to select **actions within the CAP**.
- A facilitated discussion focused on the **implementation of the CAP**.



FOCUS GROUP KEY FINDINGS

Focus Group #1:

- General **support for actions** across focus areas.
- **Support** for **more partnerships** between the City and the private sector as well as local non-profits.
- **Suggestion** to add more actions focused on promoting **sustainable business practices** (e.g., green business certifications, expanding educational campaigns targeted directly at commercial entities).
- **Concern over energy costs** and the possibility of an increased energy burden on low-income residents.
- **Concern** about **split incentives** between tenants and landlords in investing in energy efficiency and renewable energy upgrades.
- **Concern over affordable housing** and support for using the CAP to address a persistent lack of housing in Santa Clara.
- **Strong support** for developing a **more robust local food recovery** network.
- **Emphasis** on the need for **community engagement**, particularly surrounding incentive and rebate programs.

Focus Group #2:

- General **support for actions** across focus areas.
- General concern over the **costs of implementing actions**.
- General need for clarity regarding **how the City will implement the plan**, particularly how cost concerns will be addressed.
- Concern over who would **bear the cost of energy efficiency upgrades** (landlords vs. renters).
- Emphasis on the **need to improve transit regionally** to reduce reliance on automobiles.

Focus Group #3:

- **Support for the goals** of the CAP, but substantial **concern over the feasibility** of implementation.
- **Concern over cost and the technical capacity** to implement many actions, particularly those requiring substantial building retrofits.
- **Suggestion** to pair actions with **more financial incentives** to increase participation and ease the burden of regulations on the building community.
- **Suggestion** to **exempt some projects** from certain requirements to reduce the burden on some developers (e.g., exempting older buildings from some energy efficiency requirements that would require significant upgrades, or requiring less from affordable housing developers).

FINDINGS BY FOCUS AREA

Buildings & Energy

Focus Group #1

- **General concern** over utility **costs**.
- **Support for Action B-2-2** (*Free home-energy upgrades for qualifying residents*)—benefits residents of all income levels, saves costs, and yields environmental benefits.
 - **Clarify** how eligibility will be determined.
- **Support for Action B-3-3** (*Renewable energy generation on private property*) but **concern** about landlord/tenant split incentives with landlords not incentivized to participate.
- **Suggestion** to add additional initiatives/incentives focused on encouraging renters to invest in solar panels.
- **Suggestion** to create energy **efficiency retrofit incentives** focused specifically on commercial entities and NGOs.
- **Suggestion** to form **partnerships with private sector** organizations to fund sustainability programs.

Focus Group #2

- **Concern** over **Action B-1-6** (*Burnout ordinance*) and potential for pushback from residents. **Clarify** whether building owners/landlords or renters are responsible for replacing expired equipment.
- **Confusion** over the implementation of **Action B-1-3** (*Electric panel upgrades upon sale/turnover*) for multi-family properties and whether upgrades would occur unit by unit or across the whole building.
 - **Suggestion** to clearly define residence categories, specifically what constitutes “small” and “multi-family.”
- **Support and confusion** for **Action B-3-4** (*Renewable energy generation and storage on private property*) and **Action B-3-1** (*SVP Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) for carbon neutral electricity*).
 - Actions align **with other regional carbon neutral electricity initiatives, including those of focus group organizations**.
 - **Confusion** over why **Action B-3-1** only outlines a 70% carbon neutral electricity goal and not 100%.
 - **Suggestion** to install solar panels in empty parking lots as part of **Action B-3-4**.

Focus Group #3

- **Support for overall focus area goal** but significant **concern** over the feasibility for **implementation**.
 - **Concern** over the **costs** of building retrofits, particularly for existing buildings.
 - **Concern** over a **lack of technical capacity**/knowledge among building community to participate in electrification and efficiency programs/comply with reach codes.
 - **Suggestion** to take a three-pronged approach for building actions: outline specific goals, offer financial incentives, and identify the technology needed to reach those goals.
- **Concern** over potential future retrofit **requirements for existing buildings** given the higher costs and added complexity.
- **Strong support** for **Action B-1-1** (*Electrification incentives and financing*) and for **expanding incentives generally** in the CAP.
- **Clarify plan for incentives** throughout the CAP—what they include, how they will be funded, which incentives will be newly developed and which exist already.
 - **Note** that many builders and contractors will depend on financial support to comply with reach codes.
 - Suggestion to collaborate with SVP to **offer financing early on in projects**.
- **Suggestion** to include **non-monetary incentives** in addition to financial offerings. These might include flexibility with design requirements, streamlined permitting, or zoning incentives.
- **Suggestion** to collaborate with the City department developing reach codes to ensure that CAP actions support and align with these efforts (i.e., consider timing/sequencing).
- **Concern** over **Action B-1-6** (*Burnout ordinance*), specifically whether electric boilers can support demand in in multifamily housing.

Transportation & Land Use

Focus Group #1

- **Significant concern** over a lack of **affordable housing** in Santa Clara.
- **Concern and support for Action T-2-3** (*Bike and shared mobility improvements*)
 - **Support** for expanding bike access.
 - **Concern over accessibility** and the challenge for transitioning away from cars for certain demographics (e.g., seniors).
- **Cost concerns for Action T-3-2** (*Sustainable development in underutilized non-residential areas*), specifically whether non-profits and NGOs with limited budgets could afford to participate in new development projects.
- **Support for Action T-3-3:** (*Transit-oriented development*) and other actions that facilitate multi-modal transportation.
- **Suggestion** to consider **rezoning commercial and residential areas** in Santa Clara to reduce the travel distance between homes and businesses.
- **Emphasis** that transportation initiatives should focus on **reducing commuting** (i.e., reducing the distance between home and work and promoting telework).

Focus Group #2

- **Support** for existing EV charging actions: **Action T-1-3** (*EV chargers at single family and two-family townhomes*) **Action T-1-2** (*Multi-family EV chargers*), **Action T-1-4** (*Commercial EV chargers*) and **Action T-1-5** (*Office EV chargers*)
 - **Suggestion** to include charging stations at local schools and universities.
- **Suggestion** to use **Action T-2-3** (*Bike and shared mobility improvements*) to connect Mission College to the bike network.
 - **Clarify** how the City will **fund this action**.
- **Consider the last mile** issue when implementing **Action T-3-2** (*Sustainable development in underutilized non-residential areas*) and ensure that the transit system can reach these new developments.
- Support for **Action T-3-3** (*Transit-oriented development*)—more access to public transit saves costs, etc. **Emphasis** on the need to **pair TOD with an efficient and reliable transit system** that is equally (or more) convenient than driving.
 - **Suggestion** that transit needs to improve regionally and cannot just be addressed at a City level—until it's more efficient to use public transit even between cities, people won't stop using cars.
 - **Note** that expanded car and bikeshare infrastructure is necessary when TOD reduces individual parking spots.
- **Suggestion** to add a street paving action with the goal to reduce asphalt usage and promote high albedo streets.

Focus Group #3

- **Concern** over **Action T-1-2** (*Multi-family EV chargers*) and whether existing developments can handle the added electric demand.
 - **Note** that buildings might require new transformers to handle the load. **Suggestion** to add more **financial incentives** to support developers in retrofitting buildings to prepare for increased electrical demand.
- **Suggestion** to revise **Action T-1-3** (*EV chargers at single family and two-family townhomes*) to only require level 1 chargers—sufficient for this building type and could reduce energy demand on building.
- **Clarify** the role of load management software in **Action T-1-2**.

Materials & Consumption

Focus Group #1

- **Strong support** for **food waste recovery** actions and the need to improve the regional food recovery network.
- **Support and concern for Action M-2-2** (*Food recovery and donation*):
 - **Support** for improving regional **food recovery**.
 - **Concern** over the **feasibility of implementation** because of gaps in the existing food recovery networks. **Clarify** who will support food pickup and redistribution and generally expand outreach and education surrounding food recovery.
 - **Suggestion** to look internationally for examples of successful food recovery models, and to **partner** with local restaurants and grocers to donate surplus food and local non-profits to support pick-up.
- **Concern** over the cost of **Action M-1-2** (*Waste diversion pricing signals*), specifically that waste collection costs are rising. **Suggestion** to partner with other cities to reduce costs.
- **Strong support** for **improving composting**; confusion over the status of Santa Clara’s existing composting efforts, the results of past pilot programs, and why citywide composting is not yet available. **Suggestion** to refocus efforts to **improve the composting infrastructure**.

Focus Group #2

- **Support** for **Action M-1-2** (*Waste diversion pricing signals*)—aligns with other regional and institutional initiatives surrounding food waste.
- **Suggestion** to **partner** with Mission College Hospitality to recover edible food waste.
- **Concern** about overemphasizing the impact of recycling, particularly given insufficient education surrounding how individuals should properly sort waste—leading recyclable materials to end up in landfills.
 - **Suggestion** for the City to expand outreach and education, including visuals for waste sorting.
- **Suggestion** to do a citywide **waste characterization** study.

Focus Group #3

- **Overall support** for **Action M-3-1** (*Reuse of salvageable building materials*) and **Action M-3-4** (*Carbon-smart building materials*)—actions align with existing initiatives within the building community.
- **Some concern** over the cost of deconstructing buildings to salvage building materials as part of **Action M-3-1**.

Natural Systems & Water Resources

Focus Group #1

- **Support** for the City’s **existing tree program** and suggestion to build upon existing initiatives.
- **Suggestion for Action N-3-2** (*Fixture replacements*)—integrate residential shower fixtures that allow for different pressures for cold and hot water to save water.
- **General support** for strengthening **water conservation mandates**.
- **Suggestion** to focus actions on expanding rain collection/cisterns for residential properties to conserve water and save costs.
- **Support for Action N-3-6** (*Recycled water connection requirements*) and suggestion to expand recycled water usage.
- **Suggestion to expand outreach and education** surrounding water conservation.

Focus Group #2

- **Support** for tree planting actions.
- **Confusion** over **Action N-3-1** (*Water conservation rebates*) and whether the action is focused on all residents or just certain homes (e.g. single or multifamily residences).
- **Concern** over fixture replacements in **Action N-3-2** (*Fixture replacements*) that might require double piping, which can be costly.
- **Suggestion** to focus on planting **fruit bearing trees** as part of tree planting initiatives—requires coordinating, but also provides free produce.
- **Concern** over **Action N-3-4** (*Water-efficient landscaping requirements*) and whether these might limit the types of trees that could be planted.
- **Support** for **Action N-3-6** (*Recycled water connection requirements*) and the need for more programs to expand reclaimed water usage.

Focus Group #3

- **Clarify** “high-end” terminology in **Action N-3-2** (*Fixture replacements*)—could be confused as indicating high income.

Community Resilience & Wellbeing

Focus Group #1

- **Concern over Action C-1-2** (*Support for people experiencing homelessness*) and whether it is necessary to adopt new support services or instead focusing on expanding outreach for existing programs.
- **Support** commercial buildings serving as resilience hubs in **Action C-1-1**: (*Community resilience networks*)
Suggestion to engage with the private sector to encourage participation.

Focus Group #2

- **Support** for **Action C-1-4** (*Incentives for adaptation upgrades*) and suggestion to pair this action with actions focused on building electrification.
 - **Suggestion** to assess the feasibility of solar water heating in Santa Clara and possibly include in incentive program.
- **Clarify** how the City will identify **high hazard areas** in **Action C-2-1** (*High-hazard development restrictions*). For instance, will the City define the areas based on current FEMA floodplain or projections

Focus Group #3

- **Suggestion** to define “high hazard area” in **Action C-2-1** (*High-hazard development restrictions*).
 - Concern that if this high hazard area is too extensive this action will result in significant loss of development in Santa Clara.
- **Note** that permeable pavement is sometimes hotter than traditional asphalt, which could cause **Action C-2-3** (*High-albedo parking lots*) to inadvertently detract from other sustainability initiatives.

Implementation Considerations

Focus Group #1

- **Suggestion** for the City to **work closely with NGOs** and non-profits to support implementation, starting with a formal meeting to kickoff the CAP implementation and delegate support tasks.
- **Suggestion** to use the Silicon Valley sponsoring group as a **model for organizing** regional groups to collaborate.
- **Suggestion** for the City to **facilitate gatherings** with residents and businesses—potentially divided by zip code—to solicit feedback, educate, and encourage participation in implementing CAP action.

Focus Group #2

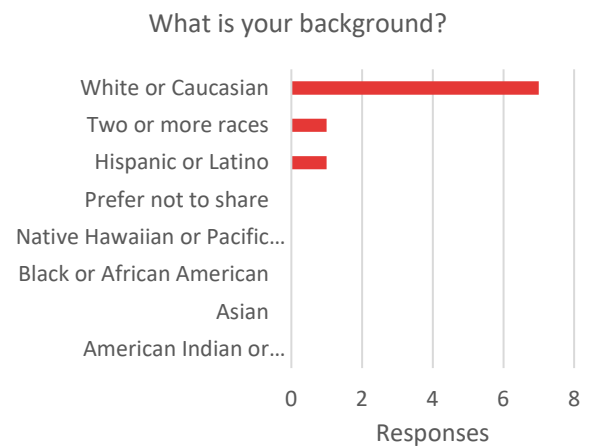
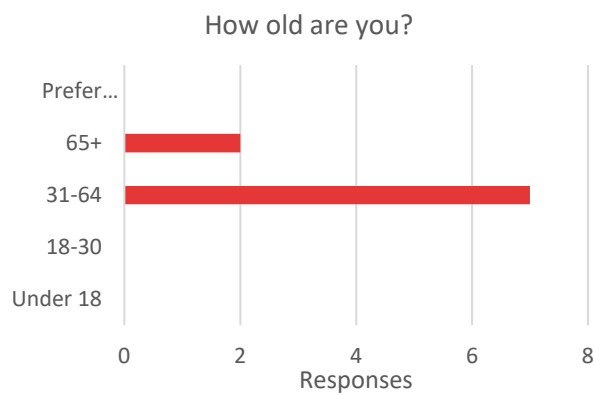
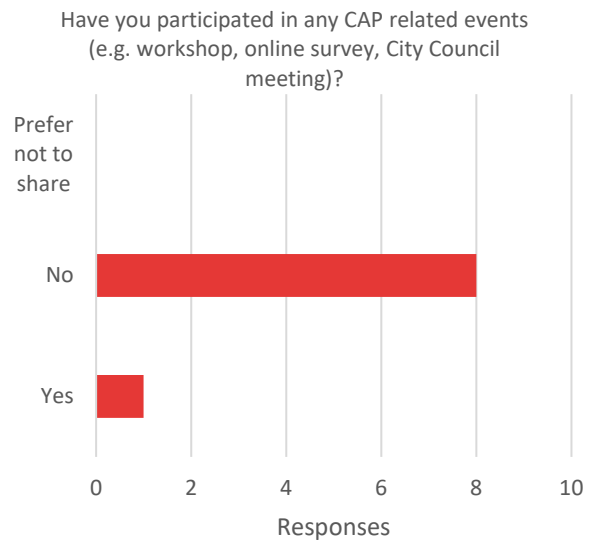
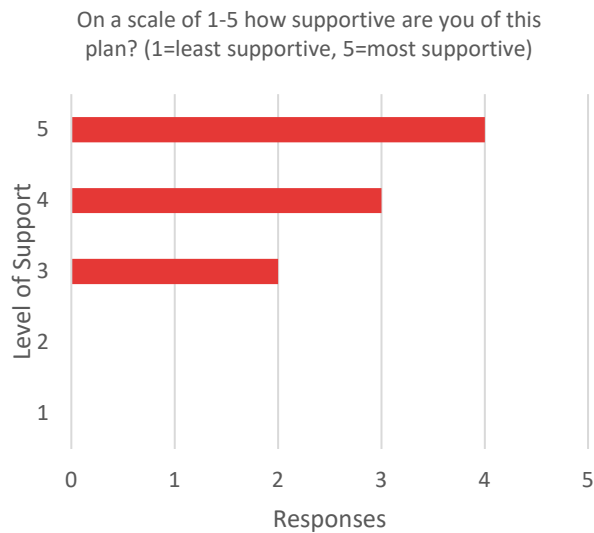
- **Emphasis** on the **need to follow through** with bike and pedestrian infrastructure improvements. Note that past plans have stalled during implementation.
- **Emphasis** on the need for **strong City leadership** in implementing CAP actions—what the City does, others will follow.
- **Emphasis** on the need for **technical support** in implementing actions— need more energy professionals and contracts to do energy assessments and help organizations and homeowners understand what steps they need to take to electrify buildings, make them more resilient, etc.
- **Need for financial support** for some building and housing organizations who cannot increase rent to cover costs of building retrofits.

Focus Group #3

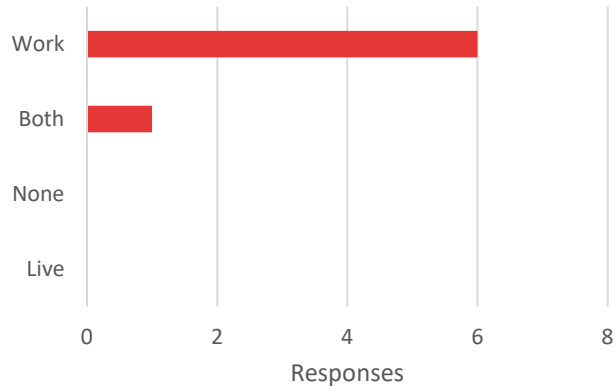
- **Emphasis** that incentives and resource sharing/education, are **critical in implementation**.
- **Concern** over a **lack of cohesion** across City plans and regulations without consideration of the cumulative effect on developers. **Note** that multiple seemingly minimal individual restrictions taken together can significantly **burden developers**.
- **Concern** over the overall cost of implementation.
- **Suggestion** to engage **SVP (a key stakeholder)** throughout the implementation of the CAP.

POLL RESULTS

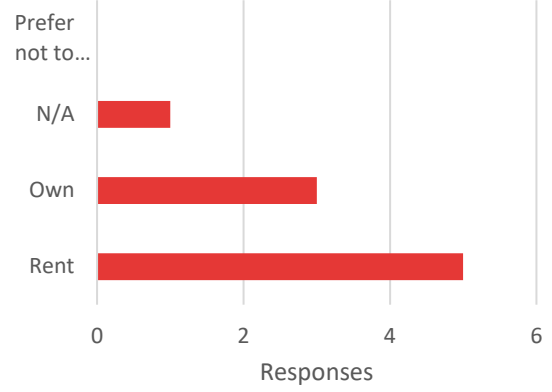
Attendees were asked several poll questions regarding the CAP, as well as demographic questions. Results across focus groups are outlined below. Between the three focus groups, nine focus group members chose to participate in the poll.



Do you live or work in Santa Clara?



Do you rent or own your home/apartment?



Do you represent, or are you associated with, any of the following sectors? (Select all that apply)

