

Integrating Climate Action into the Lancaster City Comprehensive Plan

23 November, 2022

Summary

Lancaster City is drafting a new Comprehensive Plan updating the most recent plan from 1993. Lancaster City also recently worked with the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection to develop a draft climate action plan that describes goals to cut GHG emissions by 26% by 2025 and 80% by 2050. Given the urgency of climate action and the generational implications of the Comprehensive Plan, many Lancaster residents and stakeholders recognize the critical need to connect climate action to the Comprehensive Plan.

Over the summer and early fall of 2022, Lancaster City worked with RegenAll to better understand resident's perspectives on climate change and climate solutions and identify key opportunities to integrate climate solutions into the Comprehensive Plan. This report summarizes feedback from four listening sessions and associated surveys and comments.

Our key findings include:

- Participants were clearly passionate about climate action and wanted to see policies and investments to cut emissions and adapt to changing weather. There is a significant constituency in the City that sees climate action as an urgent priority.
- Participants were somewhat more skeptical of solutions that would require significant infrastructure investments, including developing a Bus Rapid Transport system or building utility scale solar arrays on outlying farmland. Many participants would prefer to see more moderate options pursued first, such as improvements to existing bus service or investments in rooftop solar on public buildings.
- Where public investments are made, many participants would appreciate due diligence from the City and stakeholders in carefully reviewing lessons learned from other cities. Residents may also need help to better understand tradeoffs and justifications for public investments. For instance, while prioritizing rooftop solar and protecting farmland makes practical sense, many residents also wanted to see a major transition to renewable energy. Although a significant amount of electricity can be generated from rooftop solar, meeting local demand for electricity with renewables will likely require some investments in farmland solar and other utility-scale projects.

- Climate actions that grow public awareness and help to build community participation could have an outsized impact. Among the climate solutions we discussed, participants were perhaps most enthusiastic and unified in support for urban gardens, more tree cover, and more green space within the city. While urban gardens may not have a huge effect on greenhouse gas emissions, programs and policies that catalyze urban gardening could help residents feel optimistic and engaged and support further climate policy.
- Participants were keenly aware of the challenges involved in balancing the interests of residents, businesses, commuters, and visitors. They want to see climate solutions like public transportation and growth boundaries pursued in coordination with outlying municipalities but also recognize that regional coordination is very hard to do.
- Participants want to see more public education and outreach on climate topics. They also want climate action to incorporate diverse voices and stakeholders from across the City.

How We Gathered Feedback

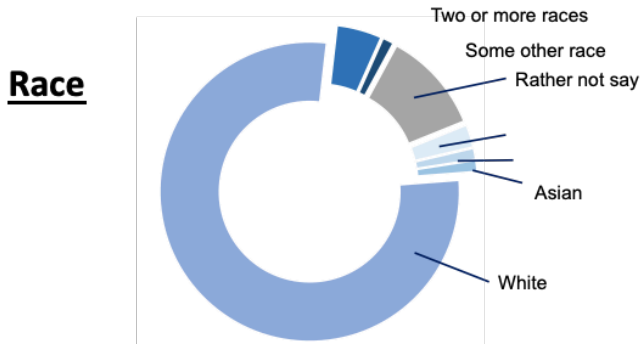
RegenAll and City of Lancaster coordinated a series of four community listening sessions over the summer and fall 2022 (Table 1). Three sessions were held over zoom, and one was held in-person at Community Mennonite Church of Lancaster. We also worked with the non-profit CASA to coordinate a session for Spanish speakers, with translation services. In total, 100 residents participated in these sessions.

Date	Location	Attendance
7-Jun	Community Mennonite Church of Lancaster	37
13-Jun	Online	16
7-Jul	Online	18
4-Oct	Online, bi-lingual	29
Total Attendees:		100

We recruited participants for each session by working with community partner organizations. We called and emailed leaders at 14 different community organizations and supplied fliers and social media templates to help them circulate details. Sessions were also advertised via City of Lancaster and RegenAll channels, and through a *Lancaster Newspaper* press release on May 23, 2022. Demographics for participants from the first three English-only sessions are summarized in Figure 1, with complete record presented in Appendix C. Unfortunately, our outreach partner CASA was unable to collect demographic information for the fourth bilingual session.

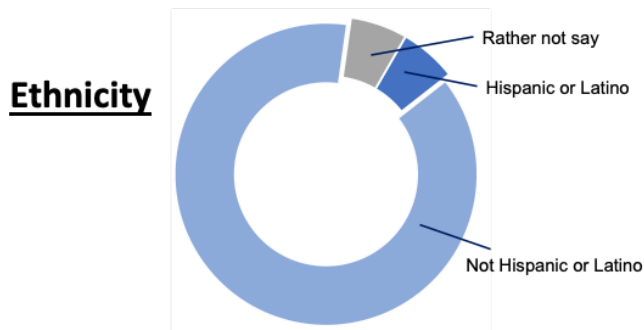
We began each session with an overview presentation that described the City’s comprehensive plan process and provided some context “level setting” information on how climate change may affect the region and how communities can mitigate emissions and adapt to changing weather (Appendix A and B).

Figure 1. Combined demographic profile of participants in English-only listening sessions.



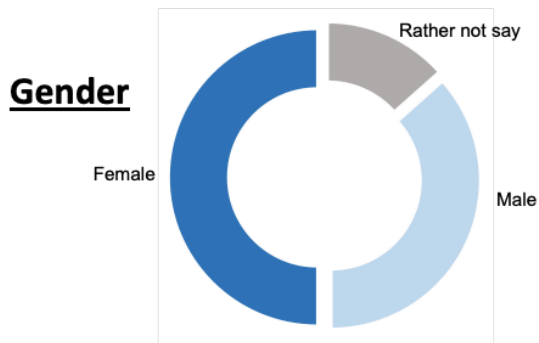
Age

under 18	1%
18-24	5%
25-39	29%
40-64	36%
65+	29%



Residence

Downtown Lancaster	8%
Northeast	15%
Northwest	26%
Southeast	8%
Southwest	10%
Lancaster City Annex	6%
Lancaster County	26%
Outside Lancaster County	1%



Following the presentation, we facilitated an exercise designed to draw out perspectives on a range of potential climate actions and solutions. We described a pair of climate solutions for three major sources of greenhouse gas pollution: Transportation, Buildings & Energy, and Green Space. Potential solutions were described as a “Tweak”, involving smaller, incremental changes, and a “Transformation”, describing a major change to city infrastructure or policy. Participants were invited to share their responses to each potential solution verbally or through the Zoom chat function. We invited participants to frame their responses through the lens of the following questions:

1. How would the proposal affect your daily routine?
2. How would the proposal affect how you interact with your community?
3. How do you think the proposal would affect other residents in the City?

A written version of this exercise was also shared online through the City’s Engage Lancaster platform from June 23, 2022 to October 14, 2022 and gathered 78 separate online responses.

To summarize feedback from these sessions, we scored transcripts from each session for recurring themes and concerns. We also distributed a short online survey the day after each session, giving attendees an additional opportunity to share comments. In the survey, the respondents rated their support along a 4-pt scale for each Tweak and Transformation, as well as some additional solutions that were frequently discussed in the sessions. Complete survey responses are presented in Appendix D and scored transcripts and comments have been collated in Appendix E.

In the following section, we summarize feedback for each pair of solutions.

Participant Feedback

TRANSPORTATION

Tweak: Lancaster City is already a fairly bike-friendly city, boasting over 20 miles of bike routes and a city bike share program. With this proposal, the City takes some steps to further increase the safety, convenience, and popularity of bike-riding as a way to get around. A few notable steps include:

- 20 new miles of dedicated bike facilities (e.g., bike lanes, trails)
- Reduced speed limits on major streets.
- Expanded bike parking facilities at business and recreation areas.

Participants were generally very supportive of measures to increase bike riding in the City but emphasized that rider safety concerns may limit adoption of cycling today. In addition to expanding bike lanes, participants emphasized safety measures like reducing car vehicle speed limits on some routes. There was also support for public education efforts to help cyclists, motorists, and pedestrians better understand rules and regulations and better share the road.

At the same time, there was some skepticism that efforts to increase cycling would significantly reduce vehicle miles traveled or make a real dent in transportation emissions. This sentiment was especially prevalent in the *Engage Lancaster* feedback. Several participants felt that cycling is impractical or impossible for many people (e.g., people with young children, people with physical challenges), and others pointed out that high temperatures, increased rain, and other extreme weather from climate change may make cycling more dangerous in the future.

Comments:

“In addition to biking, we need to figure out how to bolster the biking culture, better educate drivers, and protect cyclists.”

“Anything that gets people out of cars is good - but let's be honest, this is just small peanuts that is useful only to those who are young and fit and inclined to bike in the first place.”

Transformation: Lancaster City becomes the first small city in the US to build a modern Bus Rapid Transit system. Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is basically a public bus system that feels like a train system to users. BRT is far cheaper to build and maintain than rail systems but share many of the advantages of trains with ease and efficiency. Riders buy tickets before boarding the bus and board at dedicated platforms and stations that make it quicker and easier to get on and off the bus. The BRT system also has dedicated bus lanes through parts of the city, which make the bus routes faster and safer.

While most participants were supportive of public transportation in general, many expressed skepticism that BRT was the right solution for Lancaster County. Several people expressed concern that it could involve large costs and disruptions while not necessarily significantly increasing ridership.

Many participants were more interested in incremental improvements to the current public transportation service. Suggestions included increased service linking up downtown and crosstown neighborhoods, subsidized or cost-share fare programs, and van service for routes with lower ridership.

Participants were also keenly aware of the challenges involved in linking up outlying areas and the City. Participants recognized the need to coordinate with other Lancaster County municipalities in planning improvements to existing bus service.

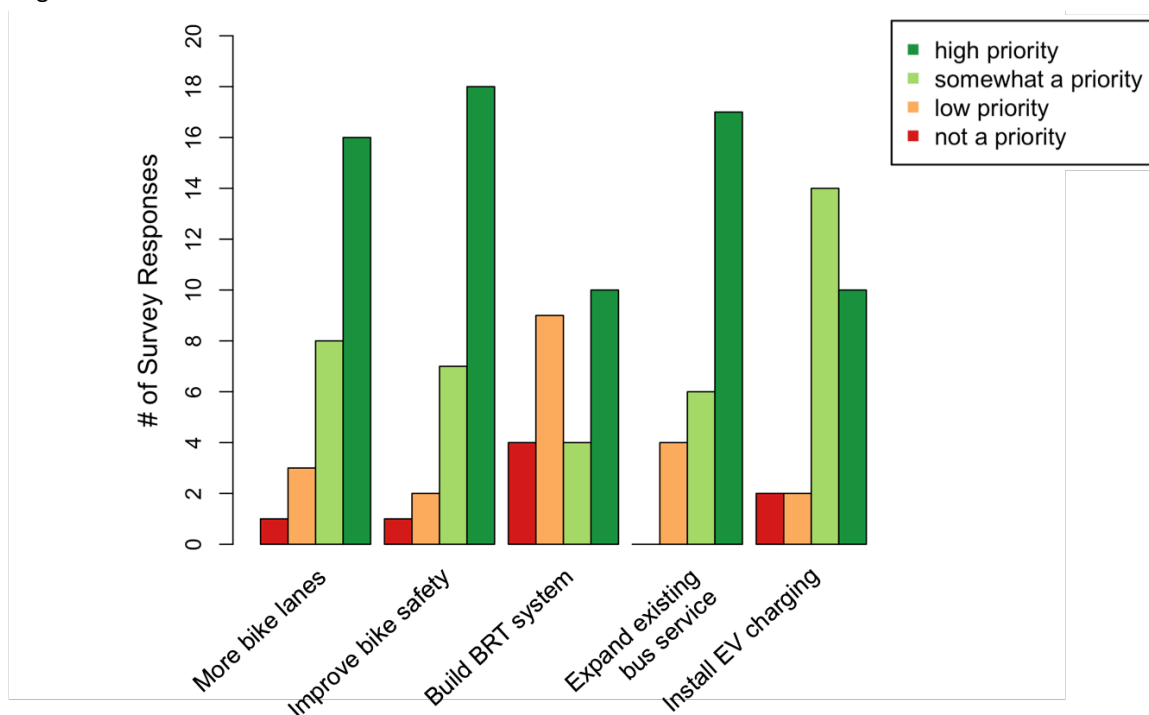
During the transportation conversation, several participants looked to personal electric vehicles (including electric bikes) as an important solution. There was significant support for investments in electric vehicles, although others were discouraged by the cost of EVs or challenges charging them in dense residential neighborhoods, which presents significant equity issues for implementation.

Comments:

“Rather than a bus rapid transit system, has there been any exploration of a fixed route, small van transit service, such as the jitneys in Atlantic City? The existing bus service needs a leadership that is more flexible in approach and it needs more funding to be innovative.”

“It would be really helpful to have people who live outside the city to be able to come in quite easily and quickly. That would be appealing to me living out in the county. Now, the Red Rose bus system does that. But it's very limited in its routes, and perhaps less reliable in its timing.”

Figure 2. Follow-up survey responses to Transportation solutions discussed in the June 7, June 13, and July 7 listening sessions.



BUILDINGS & ENERGY

Tweak: the City adopts “Green Zoning” policies across much of the City. These policies require all new buildings to meet ambitious renewable energy efficiency standards, including:

- Solar ready construction
- Electric vehicle charging capabilities
- High efficiency insulation and other energy saving design principles

Most participants supported the idea of stronger green zoning and green building codes for new developments in the city. Some people expressed concern that green zoning could increase development costs, and therefore increase rents in new developments. Discussion of new development also raised concerns about housing costs overall and the availability of affordable housing through the region.

Participants also clearly recognized that zoning that affects new development would not help improve existing housing stock. Many participants would like to see City programs that help property owners (including owner-occupants and landlords) access services, resources, and financing for home energy efficiency improvements and decarbonization. Since energy efficiency improvements can minimize monthly utility costs, this is one area where housing affordability, equity, and climate action clearly overlap.

Comments:

“I think there are potential downsides, specifically related to the costs for sure, and how much time it takes to develop properties. You know, right now we're in this housing crunch“

“Create an easy-access manual of what to do, how to do it, and a list of local "green" businesses for citizens to contact - give them guidance, independence, and agency in making improvements once support/subsidies are available”

Transformation: Lancaster City government and residents pool resources to build new utility-scale renewable energy projects. These include a 0.25 MW solar array on city parkland, a 2 MW solar array on farmland leased outside of the city, and a methane digester at the City's wastewater treatment plant. These ambitious projects generate 5% of the City's total current electricity demand and enough natural gas to provide 5% of the fuel needed for the city's bus fleet.

There was widespread support for renewable energy, but also some significant pushback against utility-scale solar development on farmland or open space. Participants wanted to see solar prioritized on rooftops, parking lots, and other developed areas first. There was strong support to see the City set an example by installing rooftop solar on public buildings and

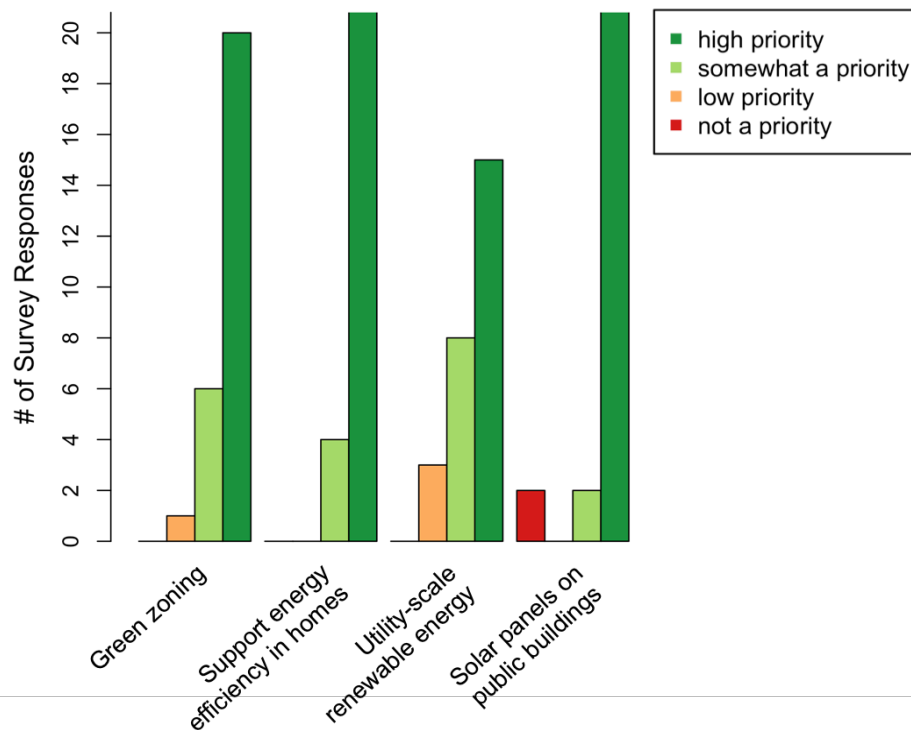
facilities. Many participants also wanted to encourage “agrivoltaic” projects, where farmers graze livestock or produce specialty crops between and beneath arrays of solar panels.

Comments:

“I’d rather use rooftops for solar arrays or figure out how the farmland can have a dual use and grow something.”

“Publicly owned land should be used as a model to others in efficiency and to combat climate change. Parking garages should have solar panels on top levels and include EV charging stations. All downtown core bus shelters could have solar panels and ability to charge nearby bikes. Schools can lead by example too. Don’t just install— teach the children and adults why this is a good thing.”

Figure 3. Follow-up survey responses to Buildings & Energy solutions discussed in the June 7, June 13, and July 7 listening sessions.



GREEN SPACE

Tweak: the City encourages more vegetation on private homes and property through a program that encourages urban gardening. Collectively, residents begin generating over 100,000 lbs of fresh vegetables each year through home gardens and community gardens.

Most participants were very supportive of urban gardening and recognize it as a great way to cultivate community and an environmental ethic among neighbors. Many also wanted to see an emphasis on organic gardening practices and/or gardening with native plants. Some participants were unsure exactly what the City's role should be in encouraging gardens, but they were supportive of more gardens and green space. There was a lot of support for any incentives to increase tree cover or establish new parks and green spaces in the City.

Comments:

"[The City should] organize gatherings among neighbors where neighbors meet each other and learn about house- or block-level projects they can do or participate in, like rain gardens, permeable sidewalks, community gardens, solar coops, etc. Make climate considerations and measures a regular part of arts and community events. People need to be reinforced in their awareness that the crisis is real and to see what they can do or what others are doing about it."

Transformation: Recognizing that land planning issues extend far beyond one municipality, the City of Lancaster develops a partnership with surrounding municipalities to address regional land use issues. The partnering municipalities adopt a regional land use plan that enforces an aggressive urban growth boundary to limit sprawl. The program aims to push development into already urbanized areas to save farmland and reduce stormwater pollution.

Most participants supported the idea of regional coordination and growth boundaries but were also keenly aware of the steep political challenges involved. Several participants had years of experience living and working in the region, and they recounted past failures or setbacks in trying to coordinate development at the County scale. Several suggested that transferable development rights could be used to implement regional coordination, but many recognized that the City has limitations in how much it can do to influence development decisions across the County.

Several participants made the suggestion that any activities that strengthen connections between the City and outlying municipalities could help increase the potential for regional cooperation in the future. Some participants suggested that supporting community

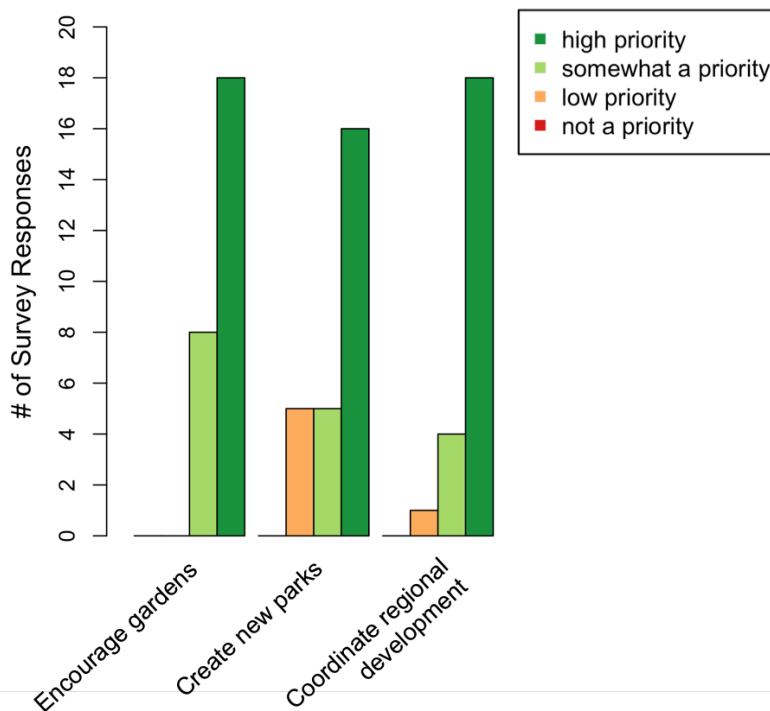
organizations that serve City and county residents would help foster regional cooperation. Others pointed out that improving regional public transportation linkages would also necessarily require improved cooperation among County municipalities.

Comments

“Can't see how the growth boundaries can happen given the lack of commitment of the surrounding suburban municipalities. The City has passed up many instances when it could have demanded this in exchange for water and sewer extensions into the 'burbs. Now, what carrots or sticks do we have to encourage and require of the townships?”

“This one seems the most impactful and while hard, the one worth doing.”

Figure 4. Follow-up survey responses to Green Space solutions discussed in the June 7, June 13, and July 7 listening sessions.

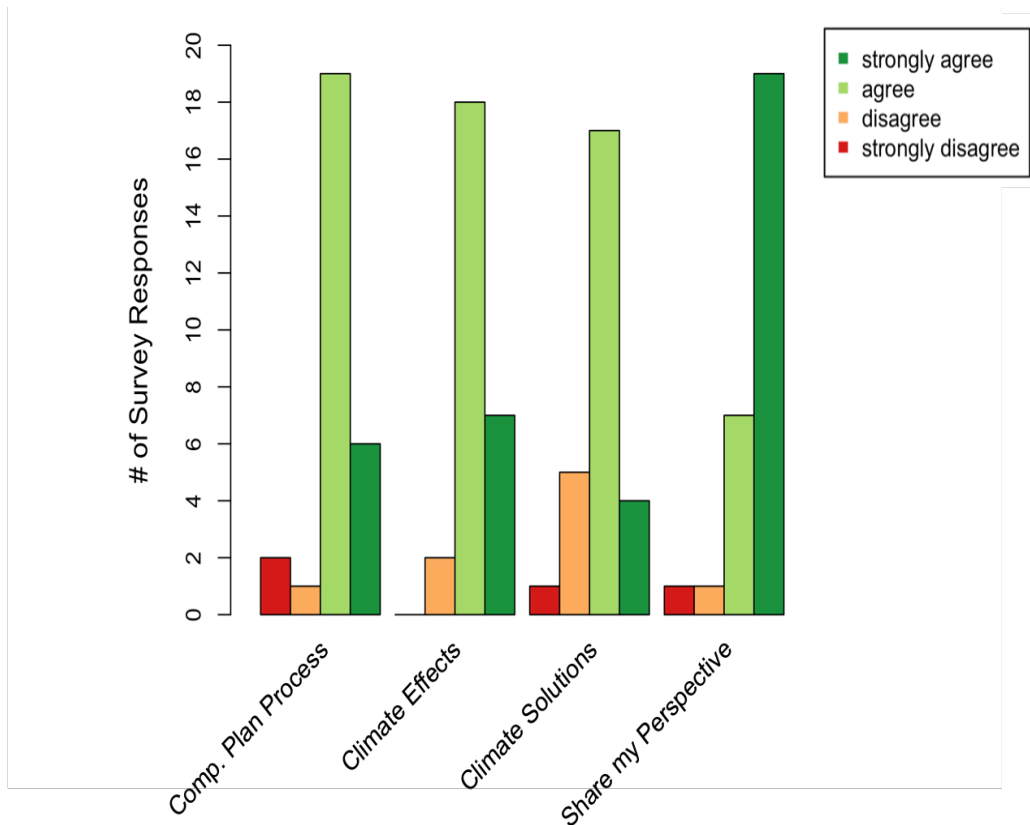


GENERAL FEEDBACK

Across all events, survey respondents generally expressed a favorable opinion of the sessions and appreciated the City’s role in organizing the sessions. Most participants felt the events helped them better understand the Comprehensive Plan process, the likely impacts of climate change on our region, and the types of climate solutions we have at our proposal. There was

very strong agreement that the event gave participants the opportunity to share their perspectives.

Figure 5. Follow-up survey responses indicating degree of agreement to the statements: i.) This event helped me understand the City’s Comprehensive Plan Process, ii.) This event helped me better understand how climate change is likely to affect Lancaster, iii) This event helped me better understand the solutions Lancaster can implement to address climate change, iv)I had an opportunity to share my ideas and perspectives at this event.



EQUITY & CLIMATE JUSTICE

Climate change will likely be a multiplier of existing inequalities in any community. Throughout the series of listening sessions, participants raised a number of suggestions for how equity concerns can be incorporated into the City’s climate action plan.

Most frequently, participants recognized that changes to building codes, zoning, and regional planning have important implications for housing costs. While participants were generally supportive of greener building codes, they expressed concerns that policies that require property developers to meet stricter energy efficiency standards could raise the cost of new housing and also create upward pressure on rents throughout the city. Participants pointed to a need to develop affordable housing strategies in parallel with green building strategies.

Participants also repeatedly encouraged the City to build public education and community building into climate strategies, so that more residents can find opportunities to contribute to climate solutions. Several participants also encouraged the City to continue to work hard to include diverse voices in climate action and the Comprehensive Plan process.

“Everything starts with a well educated community. Investing in education around climate change for our students, as they will be our leaders , to me is essential to addressing climate change.”

“I think the sort of community conversation is vitally important - making those interactive conversations more common, more accessible, and more diverse would better help to represent the community and broaden our collective perspective on any issue, whether climate action, housing, public transit, justice and equity, etc. - It was a really lovely forum and I'm eager to see more of this happening in our community.”

Interpretation

Although we likely attracted a self-selected population of people already engaged on climate issues, participants were clearly passionate about climate action and wanted to see policies and investments to cut emissions and adapt to changing weather. There is a significant constituency in the City that sees climate action as an urgent priority.

Participants were somewhat more skeptical of solutions that would require significant public spending on infrastructure investments, including developing a Bus Rapid Transport system or building utility scale solar arrays on outlying farmland. Many participants would prefer to see more moderate options pursued first, such as improvements to existing bus service or investments in rooftop solar on public buildings.

Where public investments are made, many participants would appreciate due diligence from the City and stakeholders in carefully reviewing lessons learned from other cities. Residents may also need help to better understand tradeoffs and justifications for public investments. For instance, while prioritizing rooftop solar and protecting farmland makes practical sense, many residents also wanted to see a major transition to renewable energy. Although a significant amount of electricity can be generated from rooftop solar, meeting local demand for electricity with renewables will likely require some investments in farmland solar and other utility-scale projects.

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Appendices

- Appendix A: Slide deck for introductory overview presentation, English version.
- Appendix B: Slide deck for introductory overview presentation, Spanish version.
- Appendix C: Demographic data for attendees from June 7, June 13, and July 7 sessions.
- Appendix D: Responses to online follow up survey.
- Appendix E: Comments and responses from listening sessions, surveys, and Engage Lancaster feedback, scored by recurrent theme.
- Appendix F: Listening session transcripts.
- Appendix G: Recorded presentation and discussion for June 7.
- Appendix H: Recorded presentation and discussion for June 13.
- Appendix I: Recorded presentation and discussion for July 7.