

# Executive Summary

## Portland's Sustainable Consumption and Production Strategy at a glance

The climate crisis dominates the headlines with dire warnings for the future. Severe weather events, heat-related mortality, wildfires, water scarcity, collapse of the global food system<sup>i</sup> and higher sea levels are spreading across the globe. Without intervention, millions of people will die<sup>ii</sup> and billions more will be permanently displaced.<sup>iii</sup>

This crisis calls for countries around the world to drastically reduce carbon emissions. Because some countries have historically generated more emissions than others, action must be equitable, address proportional responsibility for the climate crisis, and seek opportunities for people around the world to thrive in a low-carbon future. This will require a "just transition."<sup>iv</sup>

Helping to shape and inform this transition is the goal of the [Sustainable Consumption & Production Report \(SC&PR\)](#). This document begins to articulate how Portland's Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS) will lead the City's efforts to reach this goal in several new ways:

- The SC&PR outlines key strategies to reduce emissions from the consumption of goods and services locally and help meet other goals, such as advancing equity, improving community resilience and increasing well-being.
- The Report outlines a new path forward for local governance. It seeks to explore how the City can shift measure of success away from traditional models of economic growth to measurements of equitable consumption and community well-being, all while acknowledging and dismantling historic injustice and oppression.
- It reframes expectations around end-of-life materials management that is aligned with the [State of Oregon Materials Management 2050 vision](#).<sup>v</sup>
- Lastly, the SC&PR uses a climate, equity and justice lens. These priorities have been specifically articulated by Portland City Council through Mayor Ted Wheeler's fiscal year [\(FY\) 2020–21 budget](#), the [COVID-19 Response Values Framework](#) and [2020 Climate Emergency Declaration](#).

## New ways of thinking

This SC&PR marks a departure from previous ways of approaching sustainability. It is informed by the latest research that challenges assumptions about how to reduce carbon emissions embodied in the things we consume (food, goods, materials, etc.) by creating opportunities for and improving the well-being of all members of society. These new ways of thinking are summarized below and, when considered together, can help our community and businesses thrive.

- **Consumption-based emissions are double emissions produced locally.** Traditional climate policies and planning have failed to reduce emissions from consumption of food, goods and materials; those emissions are unaccounted for in traditional sector-based goals. Some sector-based reductions are likely due to outsourcing local production and the consumption of more imports. More is needed to achieve sustainable production, such as circular and regenerative practices, extended producer responsibility, localized and resourceful material supply chains, abandoning planned obsolescence with durable and longer-lasting products, and fewer advertising and lifestyle fashion trends that push consumers to buy more than they need.
- **Use Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) to understand the global impacts of consumption.** There are significant lifecycle emissions that are hidden within many products. These emissions are referred to as “embodied carbon” and are produced from upstream lifecycle phases, such as sourcing raw materials, manufacturing, and supply chain transportation, before a consumer purchases the product. A full LCA includes all the embodied carbon in a product plus the downstream emissions produced from use and disposal of the product, sometimes referred to as “cradle to grave.”
- **With more information, households and businesses can take action to reduce global emissions.** For Portland to meet its emission reduction goals, individuals, businesses, other organizations and governments will need to meet their needs by reducing over-consumption and choosing products and services with lower emissions across the entire lifecycle. This includes making informed choices about which products and services to buy, as well as utilizing opportunities to rent, share, fix and reuse goods.
- **Government has a role in shifting systems that drive unsustainable consumption.** Government has a key role in shaping the systems and conditions within which consumers and producers make decisions. It has a long history of regulating markets and transforming systems to achieve strategic outcomes for the public good.
- **Overconsumption is particularly prevalent in urban environments and requires local government leadership.** Local governments play a key role in establishing many of the choices available to consumers, and land use planning is one of the most direct mechanisms, by influencing the conditions within which urban areas develop.
- **More consumption has not led to individual happiness and well-being.** Lately, more research has challenged the modern economics myth that higher consumption increases happiness and well-being. Research has found that happiness is better derived from investments in experiences rather than material goods.<sup>vi</sup>
- **Economic growth does not necessarily lead to happiness or improved quality of life.** Although, prior to the most recent recession, GDP and personal consumption in the United States increased year over year since 2010,<sup>vii</sup> the promises of economic growth to deliver happiness, quality of life and reduced income inequality<sup>viii</sup> were not realized in the past decade. The United Nation’s 2019 annual World Happiness Report found that U.S. residents are the unhappiest they have been in years.<sup>ix</sup> While economic growth is very important, it provides declining returns in quality of life and well-being after a certain threshold.
- **Local outcomes from economic growth.** While the Portland GDP has climbed 33% from 2000 levels<sup>x</sup> (not accounting for the current COVID-19 recession), growth has not benefitted all people equally. Income inequality in Oregon has reached record highs.<sup>xi</sup> During the last decade, while the economy boomed, the Multnomah County poverty rate was about 16%.<sup>xii</sup> Housing

affordability remains a critical issue, and health and mental well-being are in decline. Clearly the benefits of economic growth are not experienced equally across the community.

## **BPS Workplan Strategies by category**

The following section outlines BPS's Workplan strategies to reduce consumption-based emissions for FY 2021–22 and FY 2022–23. Actions are outlined in detail in the workplan and were selected because they were within BPS' control, are feasible in economically constrained times, and will help the local community — in particular Black, Indigenous and other communities of color — to achieve economic recovery and build resilience. These strategies were vetted with implementation teams and in some cases modified to reflect new insights and approaches.

### **Food and beverage**

1. Reduce consumption of carbon-intensive foods, particularly red meat and dairy.
2. Prevent the wasting of food.
3. Collaborate with BIPOC and low-income communities to increase food access, food security and ownership of farming and production.

### **Goods and Services**

4. Increase participation in reuse, repair and share services.
5. Increase adoption of low-carbon business practices for both government and private sector.
6. Reduce the sale and use of high-impact products.
7. Reduce community exposure to toxics, prioritizing outcomes for BIPOC community.
8. Increase digital inclusion and expand internet access.
9. Improve end-of-life requirements for high impact goods.

### **Construction and land use**

10. Increase use of low-embodied carbon materials in new construction.
11. Preserve existing buildings and promote adaptive reuse and low-embodied-carbon tenant improvements.
12. Increase housing density and availability of smaller housing units.
13. Prevent the wasting of building materials.

### **Economic Progress**

14. Shift how economic progress is defined to better reflect community resilience, well-being, and environmental limitations.

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## About City of Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability

The Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS) develops creative and practical solutions to enhance Portland's livability, preserve distinctive places, and plan for a resilient future.



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- <sup>iii</sup> Friedlander, B. (2017) *Rising seas could result in 2 billion refugees by 2100*. Cornell University. Retrieved June 17, 2021 from <https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2017/06/rising-seas-could-result-2-billion-refugees-2100>.
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