

MEMORANDUM

TO: The City of Flagstaff Planning and Zoning Commission

CC: Alaxandra Pucciarelli, Interim Planning Director; City of Flagstaff

FROM: Sara Dechter, Comprehensive Planning Manager and Jenny Niemann, Climate and Energy Specialist, City of Flagstaff

DATE: September 23, 2021

RE: Citizen Review Session: Carbon Neutrality Major Plan Amendment



STAFF RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Open a Citizen Review Session, take public comments, and discuss.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The City of Flagstaff is proposing a Major Plan Amendment on climate change and climate action to the Flagstaff 2030 Regional Plan. The proposed amendment will revise pages IV-11, IV-12, and X-19 of the Flagstaff Regional Plan 2030: Place Matters (Regional Plan).

A Citizen Review Work Session is required for this amendment because the amendment is for a factual update based on a change in other policy or regulations. In this case, the amendment is based on the Flagstaff Carbon Neutrality Plan adopted on June 15, 2021.

INFORMATION:

This review session is to discuss the proposed new pages in the Flagstaff Regional Plan 2030. Revisions will align the Regional Plan Climate Change and Adaptation pages with the City's climate action work and the 2021 Carbon Neutrality Plan.

What is a major plan amendment?

“The Flagstaff Regional Plan is a dynamic document that can be updated, revised, and improved over time to respond to emerging issues, new ideas, and changing conditions.”

The State and the City of Flagstaff outline specific requirements of major plan amendments. These are outlined in Chapter III of the Regional Plan and the Flagstaff City Code, Title 11, General Plans and Subdivisions. This text amendment is a major amendment because it adds or deletes a goal or policy in any chapter of the Plan.

Why is this change necessary?

This text amendment will update the Flagstaff Regional Plan 2030's discussion of climate change and climate action to align with the City of Flagstaff's climate action goals. The climate action work of the City has evolved rapidly since the 2014 adoption of the Regional Plan, creating a gap between the guidance provided in the Regional Plan and the City's declared climate goals and the ambition of its climate actions.

This gap is exemplified in the Regional Plan's discussion of greenhouse gas reduction targets:

- The Flagstaff Regional Plan 2030 climate change and adaptation section set a goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions: Goal E&C.2.: reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- In 2018, City Council set a goal to reduce community greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050.
- In 2020, City Council declared a climate emergency and set a goal to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030, effectively reducing emissions to net-zero. The achievement of this goal will be guided by the Carbon Neutrality Plan, which was adopted by the Flagstaff City Council on June 15, 2021.

While these goal statements all support City action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and do not conflict with one another, there is a significant gap between the ambition and requisite actions of these goal statements. This gap reflects the growth in the urgency of climate action, both globally and locally.

This amendment will restore alignment between the Regional Plan and the City's climate goals, clarifying the carbon neutrality goal and the types of climate action the City will take. This will reduce confusion, increase transparency, and support decision-makers when making decisions based on the City's climate action goals.

What are the benefits of this change?

This amendment to align the Regional Plan and the City's well-established climate action goals will provide several benefits to the community. First, formally recognizing the climate action efforts of the City of Flagstaff and its partners will increase understanding within the Flagstaff community. This amendment will help readers of the Regional Plan understand the extent of the City's climate goals, how the City is taking climate action, and where to look for detailed information on the implementation of the Regional Plan goals.

This amendment will also increase transparency. Since the 2018 adoption of the Flagstaff Climate Action and Adaptation Plan, the City of Flagstaff has endeavored to incorporate climate change concerns and climate action into its decision-making processes. However, the broad nature of the Regional Plan greenhouse gas emissions reduction goal does not specify the

extent of emissions reductions needed. In the development review process, staff and other decision-makers do not have strong climate action goals and policies to refer to for guidance in decision-making. Meanwhile, applicants may provide details on the environmental features or climate benefits of their projects. Strengthening the Regional Plan's climate action goals and policies will clarify the importance of climate action and provide both applicants and decision-makers with a more current reflection of the City's climate change and climate action priorities.

Project timeline

This application was approved by the Inter-Division Staff on July 29, 2021, with conditions to add content related to stormwater and make a clarification in the Transportation Chapter (Chapter X) related to road connectivity. Both of these conditions have been met by the proposed amendment presented at the Citizen Review Session.

The City of Flagstaff hosted a public review period from July 13, 2021, until September 13, 2021. Information was provided to the community through printed advertisements, multiple events, an online website, social media postings, Sustainability Commission meetings, and newsletter updates. Residents were provided the following opportunities for engagement:

- One in-person Open House: Wednesday, August 25th from 5:00 to 7:00 pm, Murdoch Community Center (203 E. Brannen Ave, Flagstaff, AZ 86001)
- Two online information sessions via Zoom:
 - Tuesday July 20th, from 5:30 to 6:30 pm.
 - Thursday September 9th, from 6:00 to 7:00 pm.
- A Flagstaff Community Forum online comment board, available at <https://www.opentownhall.com/10937>
- Email, mail, or phone calls to Jenny Niemann, Climate and Energy Specialist.

As the result of public comment received, staff has made changes to the **narrative** section of the Climate Change and Adaptation section, on pages IV-11 and IV-12. The revisions clarify the type of investments and actions under each category of climate action: mitigation, adaptation, and equity. The text has been changed to remove a broad list of climate actions, and instead reference the seven target areas of carbon neutrality actions, as specified by the Flagstaff Carbon Neutrality Plan. This amendment should reduce confusion and better align the text with the City's established areas of focus. Minor text revisions were made to other areas of the narrative to provide more understandable and clear language. The proposed goals and policies were not amended.