INTRODUCTION

The Climate Smart Communities (CSC) program is a New York State initiative to help local governments reduce greenhouse gas emissions, prepare for the effects of climate change, and save taxpayer dollars. The CSC program is designed to address 10 focus areas, or "pledge elements," which outline climate mitigation and adaptation strategies. The CSC Regional Coordinator Pilot program was created by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) to offer technical assistance to communities like Albany that have adopted the CSC Pledge. In the Capital District, NYSERDA chose the Capital District Regional Planning Commission (CDRPC) and its consultant, VHB Engineering Surveying and Landscape Architecture, P.C. (VHB), to provide this support as the CSC Regional Coordinator.
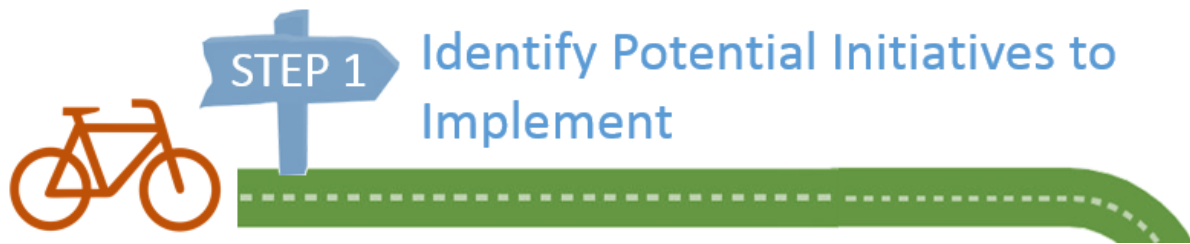
OVERVIEW

The City of Albany is committed to sustainability and has launched multiple plans and programs to guide the City's efforts. Each plan highlights recommended actions and strategies to achieve the City's goals, but the growing list of initiatives makes it challenging to prioritize implementation. The CSC Regional Coordinator developed the *Sustainability Roadmap Prioritization Tool* to better position the City to make decisions about which initiatives should be implemented moving forward. This guidance document outlines the seven steps of the decision making process and is accompanied by the *Sustainability Roadmap Prioritization Tool.*

STEP 1 — Identify Potential Initiatives to Implement

STEP 2 — Evaluate According to Goals and Priorities

STEP 3 — Score Initiatives

STEP 4 — Select Initiatives to Implement

STEP 5 — Plan for Implementation

STEP 6 — Implement Initiatives

STEP 7 — Track and Report Progress

STEP 1 — Identify Potential Initiatives to Implement

The City of Albany recently completed multiple sustainability plans and identified numerous sustainability initiatives through public workshops and stakeholder engagement meetings. With an Energy Master Plan underway and a growing list of recommended initiatives, the City administration needs a system for centralizing potential initiatives and determining which should be implemented first. For the purposes of developing this Sustainability Roadmap, a list of potential initiatives from the following plans and studies were reviewed by City staff and compiled into the Sustainability Roadmap Prioritization Tool for analysis:

- *Albany 2030 Comprehensive Plan*
- *Capital Region Sustainability Plan*
- *City of Albany Electric Vehicle Feasibility Study*
- *City of Albany Climate Action Plan*
- *City of Albany Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment and Adaptation Plan*
- *City of Albany Bike Share Feasibility Study*
- *City of Albany Climate Smart Community Profile* (includes initiatives identified during discussions with City staff)

Evaluate According to Goals and Priorities — STEP 2

A challenge for any local government is to evaluate the initiatives it has identified through its planning efforts and to prioritize them. The City of Albany, like many local governments, has limited resources and has also recently had a change of leadership, which further exacerbates the challenge of determining where the City should focus its resources. This document and the accompanying *Sustainability Roadmap Prioritization Tool* support this process for the City by creating a centralized database of potential initiatives and a rating system that reflects Albany's

current priorities. Eleven Evaluation Criteria were developed by the City and its consultant to provide a framework for evaluating initiatives for their ability to meet those priorities. A priority ranking was also assigned to give more weight to those criteria that are currently most important to the City at this time. Of course, a city's priorities and goals can change over time due to external circumstances or administration changes, so these criteria should be revisited periodically to ensure initiatives are being evaluated and prioritized appropriately.

The City's current evaluation criteria include the following:

Implementation Capacity

Estimated Return on Investment (ROI)

Increased Resilience

Reduction of Energy Consumption

Community Health and Quality of Life

Local Job Creation Potential

Environmental Quality

GHG Emissions Reduction Potential

Funding Feasibility

Fulfillment of CSC 10 Pledge Elements

Implementation Timeframe

STEP 3 Score Initiatives

The *Sustainability Roadmap Prioritization Tool* is a mechanism for applying the City's eleven evaluation criteria across all potential initiatives. A rating system was established for each evaluation criterion, which assigns points based on an initiative's impact and a weighted score to escalate initiatives that best align with local priorities. This dynamic tool makes it easy to update

the evaluation criteria rating system, add new initiatives, and replicate the scoring process at any time.

For the purposes of developing this Roadmap, potential initiatives were listed in the "Scoring Matrix" and individually assessed under each of the eleven evaluation criteria (identified in Step 2). Under the "Scoring Matrix" tab, the City can review and adjust initiatives' scores for any of the evaluation criteria. Additional instructions on how to use the "Scoring Matrix" to evaluate initiatives are provided on the "Guidance" tab in the tool.
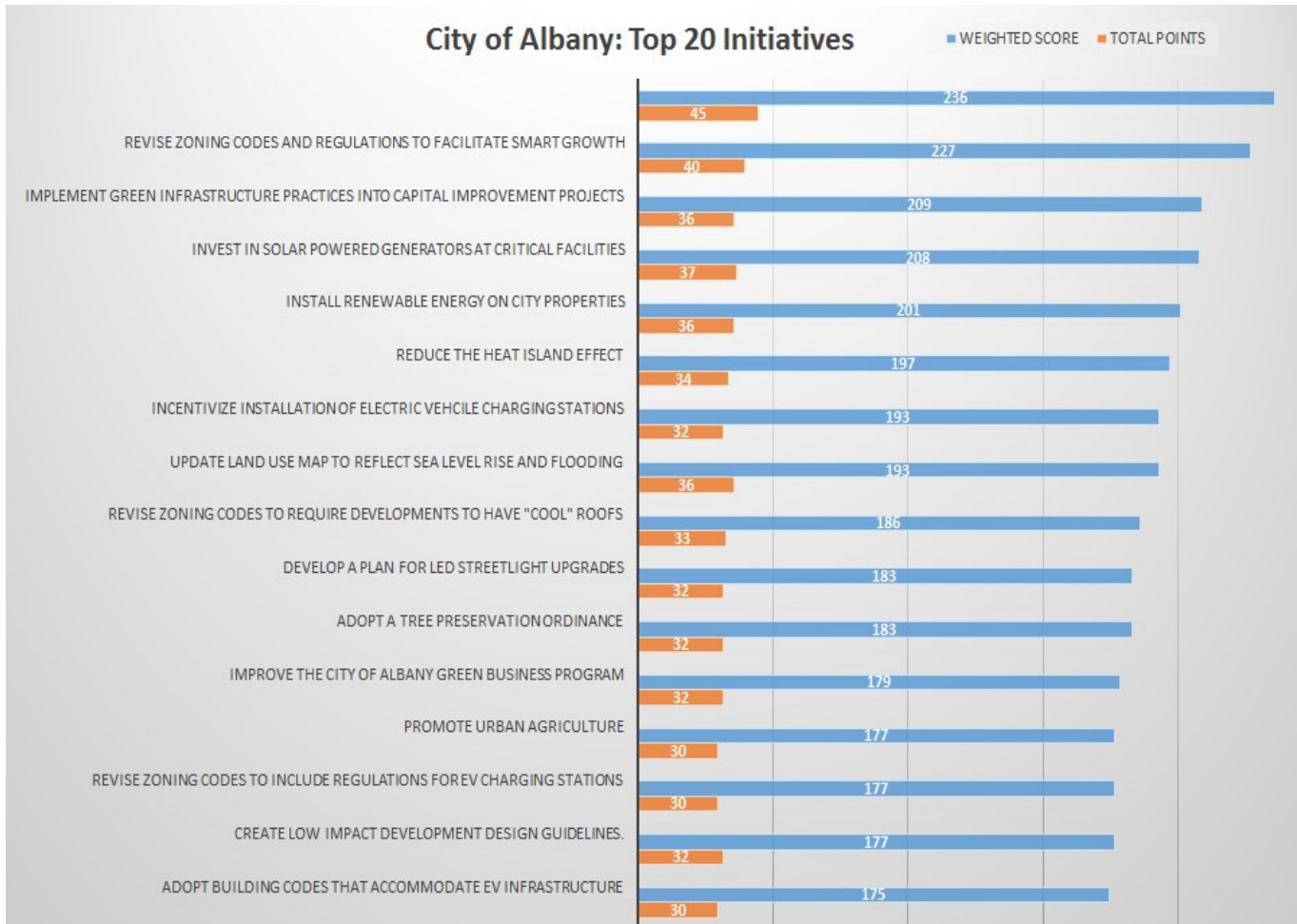

Once all of the initiatives have been evaluated and given a score, the *Prioritization Tool* will generate the highest scoring actions in the "Top 20 Initiatives" tab. This list represents those initiatives which have received the highest weighted score based on the evaluation criteria. These are the initiatives that should be prioritized for implementation. If 20 seems like too many, start with 10, or even 5. It's up to you! The following is a snapshot showing the top 15 initiatives according to this preliminary ranking.

Please note: while the *Prioritization Tool* has provided a somewhat objective framework for evaluating and prioritizing initiatives, there will always be some level of subjectivity to any sustainability planning process. If a particular initiative ranks high, but it may not be feasible in the near-term, that's ok. The *Prioritization Tool* serves as a database for all sustainability initiatives that have been identified by the City and its stakeholders. An initiative that is not feasible or cost-effective now may become so at a later time due to changes in resources, technology, costs or incentives. And conversely, there may be initiatives that the City wants to move forward with immediately even though it did not score as well against the criteria. Some level of subjective decision-making will still be required by the City staff and leadership.

City of Albany: Top 20 Initiatives

■ WEIGHTED SCORE ■ TOTAL POINTS

Initiative	Weighted Score	Total Points
REVISE ZONING CODES AND REGULATIONS TO FACILITATE SMART GROWTH	236	45
IMPLEMENT GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PRACTICES INTO CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS	227	40
INVEST IN SOLAR POWERED GENERATORS AT CRITICAL FACILITIES	209	36
INSTALL RENEWABLE ENERGY ON CITY PROPERTIES	208	37
REDUCE THE HEAT ISLAND EFFECT	201	36
INCENTIVIZE INSTALLATION OF ELECTRIC VEHCILE CHARGING STATIONS	197	34
UPDATE LAND USE MAP TO REFLECT SEA LEVEL RISE AND FLOODING	193	32
REVISE ZONING CODES TO REQUIRE DEVELOPMENTS TO HAVE "COOL" ROOFS	193	36
DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LED STREETLIGHT UPGRADES	186	33
ADOPT A TREE PRESERVATION ORDINANCE	183	32
IMPROVE THE CITY OF ALBANY GREEN BUSINESS PROGRAM	183	32
PROMOTE URBAN AGRICULTURE	179	32
REVISE ZONING CODES TO INCLUDE REGULATIONS FOR EV CHARGING STATIONS	177	30
CREATE LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT DESIGN GUIDELINES.	177	30
ADOPT BUILDING CODES THAT ACCOMMODATE EV INFRASTRUCTURE	177	32
	175	30

STEP 5 — Plan for Implementation

Once the initiatives have been prioritized, the City will need to develop implementation plans for each. The City should, first and foremost, identify who is the most appropriate person, department, or entity to lead the implementation. Recently, the City of Albany's Common Council adopted Local Law B – 2013, which replaced the Conservation Advisory Commission with a Sustainability Advisory Committee (SAC).

The Sustainability Advisory Committee (SAC) was established as follows:

- Comprised of 15 members, including:
  - Five Mayoral appointees
  - Five Common Council appointees
  - Five municipal representatives representing key City departments – Commissioner of the Department of General Services, Commissioner of Development and Planning, Commissioner of the Water Department, City Engineer, and head of the Police Traffic Safety Unit.
- Has the authority to create sub-committees to focus on specific sustainability topics, such as: Energy, Equity, Transportation, Water, Waste, Food Systems

The SAC is critical to moving the City from planning to action. Inclusion of both municipal representatives and experts from the community will give the SAC the insight, resources, and expertise needed implement priority initiatives.

The prioritized initiatives should be assigned to the relevant SAC sub-committees. The sub-committees should then, with support from the Office of Energy and Sustainability, develop implementation plans for the initiatives that consider the following details:

- Who are the key partners to implement this initiative?
- How much will it cost? (initial costs and ongoing costs)
- How will this initiative be funded or financed?
- Will this initiative require any legislative action or policy change?
- What is the level of effort required for City staff or other stakeholders to implement this? Will additional staff need to be hired?
- How can we best quantify and/or articulate the benefits of implementing this initiative?
- What is the overall timeframe for implementing this initiative? What are the key milestones?
- Are there any industry guidelines, resources, or case studies from which we can gain insight?

It is helpful to document the answers to these questions in a matrix that can serve as the official Implementation Plan. An example implementation matrix is provided in Table 1, which outlines the type of information needed to carry out each action.

Table 1: Example Implementation Matrix

Name of Initiative	Brief Description	Best Practice Examples	Implement-ation Lead	Key Partner (s)	Funding Source (s)	Time to Implement (Short, Mid, Long Term)	Estimated Capital Cost	Estimated Ongoing Costs	Staffing Needed	Metric(s)
Identify the initiative.	*Describe the initiative.*	*Provide examples of similar initiatives that were successfully implemented.*	*Who will lead?*	*Who can partner with us?*	*Is funding available?*	*How long will it take to complete?*	*What is the cost of implementation?*	*What are the operational costs?*	*What staffing resources will this require?*	*How will we measure progress?*

The SAC structure ensures a level of responsibility for implementing their specific initiatives. Their accountability to the Common Council and to the community, especially given municipal staff representation, will be a motivating factor in moving these initiatives from ideas into action. The SAC sub-committees also bring additional expertise and capacity to the implementation process that would not exist if being implemented by a single individual or department within City government.

The City's Office of Energy and Sustainability is also in a good position to support implementation and ensure that the SAC is making necessary progress according to its implementation plans. The Office can serve as a liaison between the sub-committees and relevant City representatives, technical consultants, or community contacts.

STEP 7 — Track and Report Progress

The City and the SAC should identify one or more key metrics that can be used to report progress in the future. The metrics should be:

- Easy to understand,
- Based on data that is easy to collect, and
- Reflective of the underlying goal or intent of the initiative

For example, if the City were to begin a program that incentivizes residential energy efficiency audits, there are three metrics that could be used to assess progress:

1. Number of residents that submitted energy audit applications
2. Number of residents that participated in energy audits
3. Number of residents that completed energy efficiency upgrades

It is important to note that metrics should be as specific to the initiative as possible. However, there will likely be instances where a single metric will apply to multiple initiatives. In such instances, the progress made may not be attributable to one single initiative, but instead to a number of initiatives combined. Common metrics that would fall into this category include vehicle miles traveled (VMT), greenhouse gas emissions, criteria air pollutant emissions, recycling rate, municipal solid waste tonnage, among others.

The SAC and the Office of Energy and Sustainability should define a timeframe for which it reports back on progress on these key metrics. Developing an annual progress report will keep the Mayor and Common Council informed about key initiatives, project opportunities and challenges, and facilitate budgeting discussions.

And finally…your work is not done! Once you have implemented a set of initiatives, it is important to take a look at the progress being made and to identify areas of improvement. This is the time to revisit initiatives that have been identified in the past and perhaps evaluate them once again using the *Prioritization Tool*. The City and its partners will also continue to identify new opportunities that should be evaluated. The *Sustainability Roadmap Prioritization Tool* should be continually used to evaluate the City's priorities and to select the most appropriate initiatives to implement. As new initiatives are identified, return to the beginning of the process and follow the same steps for continuous improvement in creating a more sustainable Albany.