



Office of Sustainability and Resilience Proposal

ISSUED BY

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Executive Summary

Birmingham residents have the right to live in a city where their health is positively impacted by environmental sustainability and resilience efforts.

Today, sustainability and resilience initiatives across Birmingham are scattered across various departments and lack a comprehensive strategy to improve sustainability and resilience systematically across the city. Cities across the United States have solved this problem and prioritized the health of residents through the implementation of offices focused on sustainability and resilience . Birmingham has an opportunity to adopt a similar approach and become a sustainability and resilience leader across the Southern U.S. This office will serve as a medium to accomplish goals outlined by Mayor Woodfin in the City of Birmingham’s comprehensive plan.

Sustainability and resilience initiatives will support Birmingham’s ability to prepare and plan for, absorb, recover from, and successfully adapt to adverse events; creating a community where residents will thrive for decades to come.

Birmingham should implement an Office of Sustainability and Resilience that prioritizes and coordinates sustainability and resilience efforts across the city.

Comparable Cities

Louisville, Kentucky

Origin

The Louisville Metro Office of Sustainability was founded in 2012 by the Mayor with a mission to promote environmental conservation, the health, wellness and prosperity of residents, and embedding sustainability into the culture of the Louisville community.

Louisville and Birmingham are both a part of *Climate Mayors*, a network of nearly 500 mayors across the U.S. dedicated to accelerating city-led climate action to create a low-emission and climate-resilient future.

Current Structure

In 2019, the office merged with the Office of Advanced Planning to create the Office of Advanced Planning and Sustainability, where it exists today. The sustainability team is composed of a four-person team. Three position types are outlined below.

1. Assistant Director of Office of Advanced Planning and Sustainability (serves as director of sustainability)
2. Sustainability Coordinator (project management focused)
3. Sustainability Specialist (community engagement and outreach, lead on internal programs that engage Metro employees, assist in research and reporting)

Approximate Operating Expenses

The Office of Advanced Planning and Sustainability has an operating budget of around \$900,000. The sustainability team makes up 3 out of 8 staff in the department so they are allocated \$350,000 annually with approximately \$198,000 reserved for three \$66,000 salaries. The remaining \$152,000 is utilized for programs, activities, and administrative functions, including \$100,000 reserved specifically for the [Cool Roof Incentive Program](#). The office also subsidizes a variety of costs and projects with federal grants and will oftentimes tap into Louisville Metro's budget when appropriate for select events.

Recent Activity

- Developing Louisville's [Climate Action and Resilience Plans](#)
- Working towards the achievement of Louisville's [100% Clean Energy Goals](#) per Louisville Metro Council Resolution #R-102-19 through the advancement of energy efficiency and renewable energy.
- Supporting the increase of natural areas and biodiversity in Metro in coordination with other agencies and citizen groups.
- Working to identify, assess, and clean up contamination at former industrial sites, known as [Brownfields](#).

- [Reporting sustainability and climate action progress](#) to third-party agencies such as the Carbon Disclosure Project, Global Covenant of Mayors, and the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED for Cities certification program.
- Leading an internal Metro-wide Green Team to improve efficiency and sustainability within Metro's operations.
- This document contains the budgeting information for the City of Louisville in the 2021-22 fiscal year. It includes the budget allotted to the Office of Advanced Planning and Sustainability. <https://louisvilleky.gov/management-budget/document/2021-2022-louisville-metro-approved-executive-budget-final-webupdatedpdf>

Chattanooga, Tennessee

ORIGINS

In 2008, Mayor Littlefield called for the formation of a Green Committee. In 2012, Mayor Littlefield tasked the city with energy and waste production goals. The current director of sustainability, Erik Smidt, was hired in July 2014. The Office later transitioned from under the Mayor to under the Department of City Planning

The office is committed to the advancement of sustainable projects and solutions through local and national initiatives which conserve resources, protect the environment, and support current and future residents of the City of Chattanooga and the state of Tennessee (<https://connect.chattanooga.gov/sustainability/>).

CURRENT STRUCTURE AND FUTURE PLANS

The office of sustainability is currently housed under the department of city planning. The Director of Sustainability, Erik Smidt, reports to the deputy administrator. The deputy administrator has 4 current employees and is currently looking to hire another green city planner to be responsible for the oversight of internal and external stakeholders.

In regards to internal stakeholders, they would like to have representation across every department in the city. The goal is to have one sustainability representative in key departments. In regards to the external stakeholders, the goal is to have representatives from non-governmental organizations and private sector partners. They are looking to

have quarterly project reports and monthly focus groups in order to get both community and private sector buy-in to initiatives.

Budget 2021:

- The city of Chattanooga allocated a total of \$733,865 to the Department of City Planning. From this sum, the Office of Sustainability received \$72,279.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1x7KFyFNWazxCS8qh3yPbGW3bHXLP_xD7/view

CURRENT INITIATIVES

The office is currently involved in initiatives related to waste diversion, equity and access, sustainable transportation, and reducing energy consumption. The current climate plan has 5 major goals: equity, carbon neutral community, zero waste municipal operation and community, preservation of natural resources, and growing the green economy (<https://connect.chattanooga.gov/sustainability/>).

CHATTANOOGA AND BIRMINGHAM

The purpose in highlighting similarities and the history of air pollution in Chattanooga is to show that Birmingham is able to make strides in sustainability efforts, despite the history of heavy industry and pollution.

Both Chattanooga and Birmingham are part of the Southeast Sustainability Directors Network, as stated in the *City of Birmingham Sustainability Initiatives and Programs* document that outlined the city efforts that showed Mayor Woodfin's commitment to becoming a greener city.

Chattanooga and Birmingham are relatively close in population size, with the population of Chattanooga being 182,113 in 2021 and the population in Birmingham being 197,575 in 2021, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (<https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest/tables/>). In 1961, Chattanooga was the 3rd worst city in the country for particulate pollution. In 1969, Chattanooga was a city of unregulated, heavy industry and was labeled “worst city in the nation for particulate air pollution” by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW). However, in the next few decades they made strides towards becoming a cleaner city. In 1969, they made steps towards reducing emission by approving an Air pollution control ordinance that created the current air pollution control board and bureau. Three years later, all major

sources of pollution within the areas of Chattanooga were labeled in compliance with the previous Air Pollution Ordinance set in 1969 (<https://apcb.org/history/>).

In the coming decades, even as the federal regulations and air quality standards were tightened, the city of Chattanooga continued to meet these requirements.

Asheville, North Carolina

ORIGINS

The city of Asheville's sustainability efforts started with the solo position of Energy Analyst in the Public Works Department (2006) that was eventually elevated to Sustainability Officer within the City Manager's office (2009) to a Office of Sustainability (2011) to a Sustainability Department in (2022). The evolution can be attributed to the Asheville City Council adopting a wider range of environmental goals as well as adopting more aggressive environmental targets. - Bridget Herring, current Asheville Sustainability Director

CURRENT STRUCTURE

The current Sustainability Department of the City of Asheville consists of the following positions: Director, Sustainability Program Manager and Sustainability Coordinator. Further information on position descriptions can be provided upon inquiry to current staff, whom I currently am awaiting response from. Online estimates put the salary for the current Director of Sustainability in Asheville, NC as \$59,996. The Department continues to work with local nonprofit partners, who are publicly listed on their website. The website also features "Sustainability News," "Asheville Community Carbon Footprint," "Related Services," and "Related Projects."

There is currently no public record of the City of Asheville's budget in the year 2006, when the Energy Analyst position was placed in the Public Works Department. In the year 2009-10, when a sustainability officer was appointed, "[Environment and Transportation is the second largest service area in the general fund, representing 17% of the FY 2009-10 general fund budget.](#)" In the 2011-12 FY, the Office of Sustainability was [allocated a budget of \\$77,585](#) in its first year of operation. In the most recent budget reporting ([FY 2022-23](#)), the Department of Sustainability was granted a budget of \$840,512.

BIGGEST INITIATIVES & ACHIEVEMENTS

Completed initiatives in Buildings, Public Facilities, and Street Lighting, Transportation, Water, Solid Waste, Land Use, and Solid Waste can be found here: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GzyhapFEMXfcHJ5BBaGEy3V_GJkY1hVo/view in addition to some future directions.

Current undertakings:

- [4% annual carbon reduction goal for municipal operations](#)
 - [Food policy action plan](#)
 - [50% municipal solid waste reduction goal by 2035](#)
 - [100% renewable energy goal for municipal operations by 2030](#)
 - [Climate Emergency and Emergency Mobilization Effort to Restore a Safe Climate](#)
 - [Municipal Climate Action Plan](#)
 - [Food Waste Reduction Initiative](#)
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- Send a quarterly newsletter to community members who register. Registration link can be found on their website.
 - List business hours, the director's contact information, and the location of the office. This information is readily accessible to all who visit the website.

CONNECTIONS TO BIRMINGHAM

Both Asheville and Birmingham are members of the organization Local Governments for Sustainability (<https://iclei.org/members/>) and Climate Mayors (<https://climatemayors.org/member-cities/>). This could be leveraged as a point of connection and relationship with Asheville in the development of Birmingham's sustainability efforts. This organization also provides grants to local governments in their sustainability efforts. The current Director of Sustainability in Asheville is Bridget Herring (e: bherring@ashevillenc.gov). Their website can be found here, including many documents regarding their initiatives.

<https://www.ashevillenc.gov/departments/sustainability/>

Though Asheville has a smaller population than Birmingham, both cities had a [history of higher non-smoking related pulmonary deaths due to industrial pollution](#). Asheville was also added to the [list of EPA superfund sites in 2012](#). Asheville has taken

great strides toward air quality and have ranked in the [“Top 25 Cleanest U.S. Cities for Year-round Particle Pollution and Cleanest U.S. Cities for Short-term Particle Pollution”](#).

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

The city of Asheville and Buncombe county, in which it resides, host several committees and programs related to sustainability and green practices.

1. The Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency is “ is responsible for regulating all stationary and area sources of air pollution in Buncombe County and the city of Asheville. Regulatory activities include permitting, compliance inspections, and enforcement proceedings. Stationary sources are categorized into three groups: Title V facilities, synthetic minor facilities, and small facilities.”
<https://www.buncombecounty.org/governing/depts/asheville-buncombe-air-quality-agency/agency/default.aspx>
 - a. Annual reports, initiatives, board members, and meeting minutes can be found online.
2. The Blue Horizons Project Community Council is a stakeholder group whose intentions are to mitigate the effects of climate change.
 - a. <https://bluehorizonsproject.com/about-the-project/>
<https://bluehorizonsproject.com/bhp-community-council-call-for-nominations/>

Charleston, South Carolina

ORIGINS & CURRENT STRUCTURE

Charleston’s Office of Sustainability originated within the Department of Planning, Preservation & Sustainability with a singular Director of Sustainability, Katie McKaine. Due to limited support and divergence in interests, the Office of Sustainability relocated to the Mayor’s Office. Since then, the office has expanded to become the Office of Sustainability and Resilience. There is now a larger team which includes a director of sustainability, director of resilience, and a communication liaison between the two. The office began by using an in-house specialist to design a community-data-driven, strategic climate action plan. Within

this plan, there were benchmarks developed with community members to ensure the issues were being addressed through the work of this office.

PRIORITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The sustainability division's main priority is to mitigate the effects of climate change. Their founding climate action plan can be found here: <https://www.charleston-sc.gov/904/Climate-Action-Plan>, which provides a detailed implementation plan, progress report, and emissions goals progress. Most notably, there is an option to request a speaker to go over any of the data or current updates with residents.

The resilience division's main priority is to develop recommendations to manage existing issues that developed as a result of climate change and environmental disaster. Some of their featured initiatives include flood awareness, a hazard mitigation plan, and sea level rise strategy (full list here: <https://www.charleston-sc.gov/1971/Resilience>). This division also collaborates more with other departments such as city planning to promote resilience in development. They host a public Resiliency & Sustainability Advisory Committee to City Council to provide a space for residents to give feedback on initiative ideas.

Objectives of the Office of Sustainability & Resilience

An Office of Sustainability and Resilience would ideally do the following:

1. Create and pursue policy initiatives related to (but not limited to) sustainable transportation, efficient and renewable energy, air quality, water quality, sustainable building practices, waste reduction, climate action, and offsetting carbon emissions.
2. Host accessible public listening sessions to identify areas of need and to update citizens on intended initiatives and accomplishments.
3. Work closely with existing city departments to pursue initiatives relevant to sustainability. This relationship can be maintained through the creation of a bureau with several stakeholders from the following departments: Jefferson County Dept.

of Health, Parks and Recreation, Public Works, Planning and Permits, Transportation, and the Stormwater/hazard mitigation group.

4. Work closely with researchers at nearby universities, colleges, and institutes. Continue to remain engaged with Local Governments for Sustainability and other sustainability partner networks to develop evidence-based sustainable practices.
5. Create accessible educational materials for the public to encourage everyday sustainable practices.
6. Develop and maintain relationships with local environmental non profit organizations through public town halls and regularly scheduled meetings. Furthermore, invest by providing financial and/or technical aid.
7. Develop and maintain transparency with the citizens of Birmingham through a high visibility website, public annual reports, and suggestion boxes available online and in-person.
8. Uphold and regulate all existing and proposed sustainable practices.
9. Conduct annual reviews utilizing agreed upon benchmarks to be shared with city officials, with progress and make a compelling case for a Birmingham city-wide Department of Sustainability. Benchmarks utilized should be clearly outlined in a climate action plan and may include tools such as the LEED assessment program.

Overview of the Office of Sustainability

Key Functions of the Office of Sustainability

Regulatory & Accountability

Responsible for implementing sustainability-related regulations from the federal (i.e. Clean Air Act), state, and local government as well as holding organizations accountable to these regulations.

Monitoring & Evaluation

Responsible for monitoring & evaluating sustainability-related metrics (i.e. air pollution) that impacts the sustainability of Birmingham

Community Engagement

Responsible for educating and promoting to the community sustainability efforts and initiatives as well as implementing community sustainability initiatives.

Key Personnel of the Office of Sustainability & Resilience

1. Director of Sustainability
2. Sustainability Coordinator
3. Sustainability Specialist



Office Implementation Timeline

Implementation Checkpoints

1	Hire a Director of Sustainability
2	Establish the location of the office
3	Create and establish a thorough climate action plan with embedded benchmarks. Drafted by in-house experts, based on the resident's top priorities.
4	Contract someone with grant writing experience to identify and apply for large grants to establish the initial goals of the office.
5	Create an interdepartmental bureau or advisory board, comprised of representatives mentioned in the objectives section.
6	Create a community stakeholder group to provide accountability and feedback on activities of the office.
7	Expand team to include Sustainability Coordinator(s)

Budget

Employee Salaries

The following position annual salaries are based on comparable salaries for positions in other cities. Recommended salaries are set based off of the City of Birmingham Salary Schedule.

- Director of Sustainability - \$67,246.40 Grade 30
- Sustainability Coordinator - \$61,006.40 Grade 28
- Sustainability Specialist - \$55,328 Grade 26

Operational Activities

Allocation for expenses that contribute to daily operations in the Office of Sustainability.

Sustainability & Resiliency Projects

Allocation for expenses that contribute to sustainability & resiliency projects across Birmingham.

Community Events & Initiatives

Allocation for expenses that contribute to sustainability events that specifically engage people in the community.

Recommendations

From the information we have gathered on other cities, we have two recommendations for where the Office of Sustainability should be housed.

Regardless of where the office is housed, we recommend forming an external and internal committee with representatives that will champion sustainability efforts within the city government and the community. Working directly with community stakeholders will also strengthen the relationship and level of transparency held between the community and the city government, which will directly influence community buy-in.

Recommendation 1:

Our first recommendation would be for the Office of Sustainability to be housed under the Mayor's Office.

Advantages:

- Build a strong relationship with the mayor and may have more funding.
- More authority

Disadvantages:

- May not be able to withstand changing administrations. A new administration could get rid of the office.

Recommendation 2:

Our second recommendation would be for the Office of Sustainability to be housed in the Department of Planning and Permits or Department of Public Works.

Advantages:

- More resilient in the case of changing administration

Disadvantages:

- May be more limited in reach as it is harder to assist with sustainability across departments



Appendix A: Example Job Descriptions

Director of SustainabilityEssential Functions

Directs metro government sustainability activities, initiatives program funding. Exercises supervision over subordinate personnel.

Job Responsibilities

- Analyzes data on the effectiveness and efficiency of programs and services and implements corrective actions
- Plans, develops and implements policies and procedures
- Develops program objectives for annual budget, and determines annual goals for program areas
- Directs, develops, and implements a strategic plan for improving sustainability initiatives throughout the city
- Proposes, analyzes, and recommends initiatives for the city
- Fosters, develops, and launches projects in partnership with metro departments and external agencies
- Develops and maintains partnerships to create and promote green jobs
- Develops and disseminates educational material and programs regarding sustainability, green jobs initiatives and eco-friendly practices
- Identifies and secures funding opportunities from external sources for sustainability projects
- Oversees budget and conducts financial analysis on sustainability programs

Minimum Requirements

Ten years of energy, efficiency, green initiative, environmental, or sustainability program implementation experience, including two years of managerial experience.

Sustainability Coordinator

Essential Functions

- Oversees implementation of City Sustainability Plan through coordination and oversight of programs, projects, and staff
- Interprets and explains policies and programs related to sustainability to the public and agencies
- Monitors expenditures and makes recommendations for budgets of sustainability programs and projects

- Researches and makes recommendations regarding policies for mitigating city's impact on climate change

Job Responsibilities

- Manages programs, projects, and staff to implement the city sustainability plan
- Works with and manages staff and consultants on research projects
- Develops policies, procedures and makes recommendations regarding the urban heat island effect
- Coordinates sustainability projects with metro departments and external agencies and their programs
- Coordinates sustainability efforts with long range planning activities and public engagement
- Oversees and produces updates to the city sustainability plan annually
- Meets regularly with community stakeholder groups
- Researches sustainability best practices
- Identifies and applies for grant funding related to sustainability initiatives and mitigating climate change

Minimum Requirements

Three years of energy efficiency, green initiative, environmental, or sustainability program planning and implementation experience.

Sustainability Specialist

Essential Functions

- Gathers and analyzes data relative to sustainability topics, and presents conclusions
- Assists sustainability coordinator in implementation of city sustainability plan through project coordination, program functions, and public engagement
- Performs basic administrative functions for sustainability programs
- Attends public and stakeholder meetings related to sustainability, climate change, and related topics

Job Responsibilities

- Conducts general research, keeping up to date with trends and analysis
- Assists with coordination of cross-functional teams implementing sustainability projects within city departments and external agencies
- Identifies external funding to supplement work related to sustainability, climate change, and mitigating the effects of the urban heat island
- Researches and recommends sustainability best practices, programs, and industry trends
- Researches and prepares grants relative to sustainability

Minimum Requirements

Two years of energy efficiency, green initiative, environmental, or sustainability program planning experience

Appendix B: Example Budget

Budget Summary

	2019-20 Actual	2020-21 Actual	2021-22 Original Budget	2021-22 Amended Budget	2021-22 Estimate	2022-23 Adopted
EXPENDITURES						
Salaries & Wages	140,782	188,308	190,018	190,018	190,000	243,256
Benefits	53,916	91,808	81,942	81,942	83,336	96,543
Operating Costs	204,902	264,464	507,500	524,000	406,000	583,213
Capital Outlay	-	956,181	-	-	-	-
Total	399,599	1,500,761	779,460	795,960	679,336	923,012
POSITIONS						
Total	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00

- Can be found here:

https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.ashevillenc.gov/departments/finance/city-budget/&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1676558130733401&usg=AOvVaw3gHiKdN_LaNMTopf7chMPZ

Appendix C: Community Concerns

Community buy-in was very important to establishing this plan. We communicated with several local non-profit organizations which work directly with community members. Collaboration yielded a list of priorities that have been identified by community members in relation to the functioning of the Office of Sustainability and Resilience. It should be noted that this list is not exhaustive, nor does it encompass all parts of Birmingham. We have identified that further outreach and buy-in should be dedicated to areas of Birmingham including Western neighborhoods such as Ensley, Fairfield, Midfield, West Jefferson, etc.

Abby Brown, **Coosa Riverkeeper**: <https://coosariver.org/>

Nelson Brooke & Charlie Schribner, **Black Warrior Riverkeeper**:
<https://blackwarriorriver.org/>

Beth Stewart, **Cahaba River Society**: <https://cahabariversociety.org/>

Michael Hansen & Perry Dowell, **Greater-Birmingham Alliance to Stop Pollution**:
<https://gaspgroup.org/>

Identified Priority List:

- PFAs/Contaminated drinking water
 - Flooding & stormwater impacts
 - Removal of lead service lines
- Regulations/Best Management Practices (BMPs) of city demolition projects to prevent the spread of lead/dust
 - Drinking water affordability
 - Sewage affordability
- Addressing failures of sewer and septic tank infrastructure due to lack of maintenance/education on installation and the environmental effects that follow
 - Equitable access to nature; trails and parks in urban areas
 - Air monitoring and accessible data
- Implementation of Clean Air Act and air quality improvement measures
- Increased accountability on the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM)
 - Increased recycling options

- Repurposing/reimagining buildings instead of tearing them down/building elsewhere

Appendix D: Acknowledgements

In the course of working on this proposal, we sought out experts who provided valuable insight into the work being done in Birmingham, both by the City and in the communities. As mentioned, in addition to Birmingham, we reached out to Sustainability Directors in other cities to provide knowledge on the inception of their offices and current initiatives in their cities.

We want to thank these individuals for their continued support and guidance.

Michael Hansen - Executive Director - GASP mhansen@gaspgroup.org

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Erik Schmidt - Director of Sustainability - City of Chattanooga eschmidt@chattanooga.gov

Katie McKaine - Director of Sustainability - City of Charleston

Bridget Herring - Director Of Sustainability - City of Asheville

Sumedha Rao - Sustainability Coordinator - City of Louisville

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