

Overview

In October, 2019, [Albemarle County's committed](#) to reduce its community-wide net greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 45% by 2030 and by 100% by 2050. Earlier that year, Albemarle's government went through an extensive process to receive community stakeholders' [feedback on which sector-specific climate actions the County should implement](#).

In March, 2020, Albemarle County published its [Climate Action Plan \(CAP\) Phase 1](#) draft ("Albemarle's CAP" or "the CAP", for simplicity). The CAP is largely based on the community's feedback provided in 2019 and presents climate actions in a more contextualized manner, including sector-specific strategies, targets, and a prioritization for actions' implementation.¹

Community engagement is of paramount importance to ensure that Albemarle's CAP is effective and provides the leadership-level ambition that we all expect. This report aims to provide key highlights and suggestions that we hope might be useful for community stakeholders considering to provide their [feedback to the County](#) and willing to engage in other CAP-related advocacy such as endorsing [C3's Letter to the Albemarle Board of Supervisors - Climate Action Plan \(Draft - Phase 1\)](#).

Highlights and Insights

Albemarle's CAP effectively captures most initiatives that a municipal government in the Commonwealth of Virginia can take to achieve GHG emission reduction goals. Consequently, this report focuses on opportunities for better defining sector-specific targets and setting more ambitious timelines for specific climate actions. Our focus also reflects the [Albemarle's official CAP survey](#), as it mainly requests feedback on the CAP's strategies and targets.

POSITIONING SECTOR-SPECIFIC TARGETS FOR SUCCESS

The [International Renewable Energy Agency \(IRENA\) states that one of the most important features of effective targets is that they should be SMART](#) (i.e. Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound). A target can only be an effective guide for decision making and actions implementation if it is possible to know and measure to what extent the target has been achieved. Clarity is essential to ensure that the target can be understood, implemented, and checked by a wide range of government and community stakeholders.

¹ Albemarle's CAP defines five sectors which, represent major sources of net GHG emissions that can be reduced. The sectors are: (T) Transportation and Land Use; (B) Buildings; (R) Renewable Energy Sourcing; (S) Sustainable Materials Management; and (L) Landscape, Natural Resources, and Agriculture.

By adopting the SMART criterion for all sector-specific targets, Albemarle’s CAP could better position the County for successfully reducing its community-wide GHG emissions. As observed by Cville100’s [“Charlottesville Climate Protection: A History”](#), since the 1990s our region has already set several well-intentioned, but non-SMART, environmental goals. It is time for us to move to more effective and result oriented targets.

C3 also believes that, with the objective of effectively guiding climate actions, some sector-specific targets could benefit from a more systemic perspective. Namely, both targets of the “Sustainable Materials Management” sector state the intention of achieving an increased [absolute] amount of recycled and composted materials. However, considering a context where Albemarle’s percentage of recycled and composted materials (as a share of the total disposed/discarded volume) remains stable, both targets could be achieved by an unintended higher generation of aggregate municipal solid waste (MSW) by the County.²

Hence, as currently designed, some sector-specific climate targets could be achieved in a context where the result is a less climate-friendly sector than before. One way of fixing it, for this particular example, would be to consider the implementation of a complementary target that aim to cap the County’s total generation of MSW.

EXPEDITING CLIMATE ACTIONS, EXPLORING LOCAL SYNERGIES

All climate actions included in Albemarle’s CAP were labeled as either “immediately actionable”³, “initiate planning”⁴, or “assess opportunities”⁵. C3 believes that, provided with adequate partnerships and collaborations between the County’s staff and community climate supporters and experts, many of the CAP’s climate actions could be executed in a much more expedite manner and with least possible budgetary impacts (something of utmost importance in contexts of great economic, and social, hardship; such as our present year).

Via climate actions such as T.9.1, T.9.2, B.4.1, B.4.3, B.4.6, R.5.1, R.5.4, S.4.4, and L.5.2 the CAP expressed the County’s intention to generate educational materials and develop a strong outreach to advance climate action in our community. C3 believes that, by effectively exploring all the potential synergies with the work of other organizations, the County could immediately implement most of these actions. For instance, C3’s [Classroom Challenge Guidebook](#), was crafted to provide students, classroom teachers, and administrators with a wealth of information on how to equitably bring climate education to classrooms throughout Albemarle County and allow students new avenues to engage and act on climate.

² A higher [absolute] generation of aggregate MSW would imply, assuming that the same percentage of materials is recycled or composted, in a higher [absolute] amount of recycled and composted materials.

³ “Immediately actionable” actions can be implemented immediately and are expected to produce a return on investment in a relatively short period.

⁴ Actions labeled as “initiate planning” are activities whose planning can begin now but whose implementation may take time or whose return on investment may be evident in the medium term.

⁵ Actions labeled as “assess opportunities” require further research in order to plan and implement.

EQUITY

C3 believes that the promotion of equity is a necessary and desirable component of any realistic, effective, and long-standing CAP. Rightfully, the County has included equity as a key component throughout its entire CAP by stating that equity factors should be considered when receiving community feedback on new programs, determining access to the benefits of the County's climate actions, and evaluating upon which populations the financial burden of the implementation will fall.

C3 believes that the alleviation of the high energy burden⁶ experienced by some of our community members should be among our top climate efforts. As a first step, we have been analyzing neighborhood-level data to develop a better understanding of energy equity in our community and identify its main drivers of energy burden. Transportation equity, coupled with the promotion of cleaner vehicles, will also be key for reducing overall GHG emission.

Currently, however, Albemarle's CAP does not set any specific strategy or target for guiding the implementation of climate actions in an equitable way. C3 believes that the CAP should include specific equity commitments by requiring that "historically economically disadvantaged communities"⁷ represent a certain percentage of the County's benefited and engaged residents.

GHG INVENTORIES

The County has conducted community-wide [GHG inventories for the years 2000, 2006, and 2008](#). These inventories included UVA emissions. Since UVA is now conducting its own GHG inventories:

- Is the County expecting to adjust the GHG emissions level estimated on its baseline year (2008) to exclude UVA's emissions?
- If yes, would it affect the current baseline level for the County's 2030 emissions reduction target?

Albemarle's CAP states that the consumption of locally made products would help the County achieve lower GHG emission levels while fostering a healthy local economy. Although C3 agrees with this statement, it remains a question how the County expects to account for this reduced GHG emissions, associated with a less complex supply chain, considering that its baseline emissions do not include supply chain emissions (i.e. [scope 3 emissions](#)).

Last, but clearly not least, it is not clear: how often will the County perform GHG inventories? At C3 we believe that municipal governments willing to lead on climate should commit to conducting a full GHG Inventory every two years.

⁶ Share of a household income designated for paying its energy bills.

⁷ A community with a majority of population of color or a low-income geographic area.

Advocacy Opportunities for Expediting Specific Actions

While we are grateful for the County's work on climate, we believe that by incorporating the following recommendations, alongside those included in [C3's Letter to the Albemarle Board of Supervisors - Climate Action Plan \(Draft - Phase 1\)](#), the County could improve the present Climate Action Plan draft - Phase 1 and better positioned implementing its Phase 2.

C3 considers that designing and implementing mechanisms to finance climate action, in a way that is widely accessible and economically attractive to Albemarle's businesses and residents (especially those from "historically economically disadvantaged communities"), should be a high priority for Albemarle's CAP. Currently, the only CAP's action that addresses this topic (B.5.2) is classified as "assess opportunities". With the support from community experts, the County can act much more expediently.

C3 understands that municipal governments willing to lead on climate should start gathering and publishing community-wide building energy use data annually, with separated values for each of the main energy consumption sectors (residential, commercial, governmental, and industrial). For this reason, C3 believes that action B.4.4 requires "immediate action" rather than "assessment of opportunities".

C3 applauds the County's desire to require new developments to provide EV charging stations (action T.3.1). We consider that this action should be elevated to immediately actionable and should be coupled with a [minimum requirement of EV charging stations](#) on County-owned parking lots.

C3 believes that the prioritization labels associated with each of Albemarle's CAP actions do not provide a clear idea of what expected timeline is associated with them. A more time-specific labelling would allow more well-thought community engagement and advocacy. A possible definition would be:

- "Immediately actionable": less than 1 year from CAP's approval;
- "Initiate planning" 1 to 2 years from CAP's approval;
- "Assess opportunities" as 2-5 years from CAP's approval.

Final Remarks

C3 understands that the County has stated that its CAP Phase 1 is meant to be relatively broad and that its CAP Phase 2, which currently does not have an expected release date, is expected to include more evaluation and be more specific. Nevertheless, we believe in the importance of reiterating our community's desire for a robust and effective CAP.

If you have comments about the content of this report please contact us at policy@theclimatecollaborative.org. We would love to hear your thoughts. Additionally, if you haven't already, [sign-on our letter with policy recommendations](#) for municipal governments in Charlottesville, Virginia area.