

Community Energy Plan Benchmarking

City of Holland Internal Review

The SDT worked with the Outdoor Discovery Center to conduct a community comparison to benchmark City of Holland's performance and identify effective strategies. Focus communities, similar to Holland with exemplary performance in sustainability efforts, were analyzed. An internal review was also done that revealed indicators that make Holland unique.



Indicators that make Holland Unique

The benchmarking process identified several comparable communities; however, a number of characteristics were unique to Holland among the focus cities. The most noteworthy of these is the community's higher than average commercial/residential composition. Because of this, progress for the city is proportionally more dependent on improvements within the commercial and industrial sectors. The Holland Board of Public Works also sets the community apart from other focus cities. As a small municipal utility working closely with the city government, HBPW faces a unique set of opportunities and constraints in comparison to investor-owned utilities, power co-ops, and other utility structures.

Holland's Goals and Guiding Documentation

Holland's 2011 Community Energy Plan outlines the city's goal of reducing emissions to 10 metric tons per capita by 2050. This reduction is measured from a 2010 baseline of 24 metric tons per capita. Further guidance is provided by the Holland Board of Public Works' Integrated Resource Plan and the city's sustainability framework.

Council/Mayoral approach

Holland has demonstrated a holistic commitment to the triple bottom line, laying the groundwork for a lower carbon future without losing sight of residents' need for reliable and affordable energy and a competitive environment for the business community. City council's pragmatic, data-driven approach stands out in comparison to several focus cities. Where others have set goals before assessing feasibility and the resources at hand, the city has deployed staff and community task forces to research and report their findings before decisions are made. This facilitates a strategic process that leads to better targets and measurable performance. Holland's planning practices are likely a key contributor to its progress and represent a break from the norm of wishful goal setting with inadequate follow through.

Staff

Holland maintains commensurate sustainability staffing in terms of size and experience relative to the focus cities that were assessed. The new full-time manager position housed within the Community & Neighborhood Services department reflects the organizational structure of similar communities. Holland also benefits from a sustainability-oriented team at the Holland Board of Public Works including an Energy Efficiency Engineer, Community Energy Services Manager, and Conservation Program Specialist. Focusing on a smaller service area and operating as a municipal utility enables these individuals to build stronger relationships and cater to the needs of the community. Conversely, communities with large investor-owned utilities must compete with other customer and stakeholder interests for the focus and attention that they need. In addition to staffing, the city leverages the expertise of over a



dozen local organizations to implement sustainability education and action initiatives. Mirroring other communities, Holland has formed several committees and task forces for various sustainability and energy-related efforts since the Community Energy Plan's inception in 2011.

It is worth noting that interviewees from focus cities stressed that new goals and commitments will require additional staff hours, investment, and community support. If the city council chooses to pursue more ambitious targets and implement new programs it must also address the need for additional investments and opportunities to improve the efficiency of existing resources (e.g. hiring additional assistant city manager with sustainability responsibilities, develop new task forces, additional staffing, contract experts for strategic initiatives, etc.)

Budget/Funding

The City of Holland and Holland Board of Public Works have exhibited a clear ability to secure and manage funds for sustainable development projects. Examples include a recent grant to overhaul the city's recycling program, new purchasing policies that encourage the adoption of hybrid and electric fleet vehicles, and the Holland Energy Fund. To make sustainable, clean energy options more affordable for the community the city and BPW offer a Home Energy Retrofit Program, on-bill financing, Energy Star rebates, EV charging incentives, renewable energy rates, and more.

The number of programs available to residents and businesses set the city apart from communities of its size and characteristics. However, Holland can learn from the efforts of other communities to make its wide range of programs more equitable and accessible to all residents. The majority of new climate and sustainability plans place a strong emphasis on lowering barriers to entry, increasing awareness and education, and engaging underserved parts of the community. Examples of these efforts include neighborhood outreach programs, roundtables with community equity and inclusion leaders, increased options for non-homeowners, improved access for low-income residents, etc.

Progress

Holland's leadership is most notable in its progress and follow through on its carbon reduction target. From its 2010 baseline of 24 metric tons per capita, the city lowered emissions to an estimated 17 tons per capita in 2017. Despite having the highest emissions per capita baseline and an older goal than any of the four focus cities, Holland has achieved one of the largest reductions to date.

Looking forward, estimates from the BPW outline pathways for the city to reach 11.57 metric tons per capita by 2030. This reduction would result in the community nearly reaching its goal of 10 metric tons by per capita 20 years early. Put simply, Holland is on track to outpace many other cities in its journey towards a low-carbon future. Revising the city's targets to match its new projections and demonstrated progress while bolstering strategies that ensure continuous improvement will enable Holland to realize its vision of becoming a world-class community.