Climate Change and King County Cities

The Growth Management Planning Council (GMPC) is scheduled to discuss establishment of a countywide greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction target and measurement framework in May, and to make a recommendation to the King County Council in July. SCA has six members and 4 alternates on the GMPC. This matter comes before the Public Issues Committee (PIC) in order to give policy direction to these representatives.

Background:

In 2013, the King County Council adopted countywide planning policies, which included the following Environmental (EN) policies:

- EN-17 Establish a countywide greenhouse gas reduction target that meets or exceeds the statewide reduction requirement that is stated as the 2050 goal of a 50 percent reduction below 1990 levels.
- EN-18 Establish a greenhouse gas emissions inventory and measurement framework for use by all King County jurisdictions to efficiently and effectively measure progress toward countywide targets established pursuant to policy EN-17.

The GMPC is now tasked with making a recommendation to the King County Council on GHG reduction targets in order to comply with these policies. The discussion at the GMPC will center on what specific GHG reduction target to adopt, and whether to adopt a "stepped" target that includes long-term goals, as well as near- and mid-term goals along the way.

The following GHG emissions reduction goals have been proposed for consideration:
25% below 2007 levels by 2020; 50% below 2007 levels by 2030; 80% below 2007 levels by 2050

Why establish new GHG reduction targets?

Increasing air temperatures, acidifying marine waters, rising sea levels, decreasing snow pack, and decreasing summertime river flows are examples of related changes that have been observed locally. Depending on global GHG emissions, these impacts have the potential to become much more severe. According to best available science, in order to avoid the most devastating impacts of climate change, a consensus has emerged that global temperature increases should be limited to no more that 2^{o} C compared to 1900. Globally, this translates to an approximately 80% GHG emissions reduction by 2050 (compared to 2007), which is somewhat stronger than the current Washington State emissions reduction requirement contained in RCW 70.235.020.

When comparing Washington State and King County, the King County policy of achieving a reduction of 80% below 2007 levels is significantly more ambitious than Washington State's adopted requirement of achieving a reduction of 50% below 1990 levels. *However, it is important to note that the Washington State has adopted a "requirement," while King County is considering an aspirational "target."* It should also be noted that the 80% reduction goal is a collective countywide target, not a city by city target.

What kinds of community-level targets have already been adopted by King County cities?

- 17 of 39 cities adopted the U.S. Mayor's Climate Protection Agreement, which included a target to reduce GHG emissions 7% below 1990 levels by 2012
- Kirkland: 10% below 2005 by 2010, 20% by 2020, and 80% by 2050
- Issaquah: 80% below 2007 by 2050
- Mercer Island: 80% below 2007 by 2050
- Shoreline: 25% below 2007 by 2020, 50% by 2030, and 80% by 2050
- Seattle: Carbon neutrality by 2050

What kinds of actions would it take to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 80 percent by 2050?

In King County and in cities, actions that are being implemented to reduce emissions are focused on the following: transportation and land use, energy and green building, forests and farms, and consumption and materials management.

The particular strategies that a city would implement are dependent on variables such as energy use, location and development history. While each city's pathway would be different, example strategies that have proven effective and would likely be included in many cities' efforts include:

- Sustain and expand transit and implement clean mobility options
- Adopt and implement green building standards
- Partner with utilities to help them transition to increasingly renewable resources, meet demand through efficiency improvements, and phase out fossil fuels
- Implement outreach programs to increase residential and commercial recycling and reuse
- Improve efficiency of and reduce emissions from government buildings and fleets

Implementation of existing federal and state laws will also reduce emissions. The combined impact of federal vehicle efficiency standards, Washington State's Renewable Portfolio Standard, and the Washington State Energy Code will result in significant local GHG emissions reductions. Despite expected population growth, these existing laws would stabilize and could lead to a slight decline in total countywide emissions. While this is good news, analysis also shows that significant local action is necessary to achieve state requirements and more ambitious local targets. An overview of related findings presented to the Public Issues Committee is available here: http://newenergycities.org/march-12-2014-sound-cities-association-briefing.

What specifically will be required of cities after a GHG reduction target is adopted in King County?
Although cities are not required to adopt their own targets, the target will become a part of the countywide planning policies. Cities' comprehensive plans must be consistent with these planning policies. Cities will be encouraged to adopt targets as a part of their comprehensive plan updates that are consistent with the countywide target. The GMPC would provide a menu of strategies that cities would be encouraged to implement to help achieve the countywide GHG emissions reduction target. An overview of sample strategies is attached.

What are the potential costs to cities from adoption of this target?
Some actions would require minimal costs to cities (such as changes to transportation or building policies), some could be done at low costs (for example by partnering with other cities or with utilities), and others may build on existing city programs. Many climate actions reduce energy or resource costs, and are thereby cost-neutral or revenue-generating. At an economy-wide scale there is a growing consensus that the costs of action are far less than the costs of expected climate change impacts if collective action is not taken. (More information on potential resources available to cities to meet targets is being researched, and will be provided.)

How can my city get more involved?
King County-Cities Climate Collaboration (K4C): King County and the cities of Issaquah, Kirkland, Mercer Island, Redmond, Renton, Seattle, Shoreline, Snoqualmie, and Tukwila are collaborating through the King County-Cities Climate Collaboration (K4C). K4C partners pool financial and staff resources to support technical work, public outreach, and grant writing. All cities are welcome to join the K4C**.**
http://www.kingcounty.gov/climate/pledge

Mapping Out Shared Climate Actions: King County Executive Constantine and Mercer Island Mayor Bruce Bassett convened 13 mayors representing more than three-quarters of the county's population in February to begin mapping out specific joint actions to meet an 80 percent by 2050 target. Work continues on a specific package of actions for review and potentially joint recommendation by June.
http://www.kingcounty.gov/environment/climate/other-governments/climate-summit.aspx

Sustainable Cities Roundtable: The Sustainable Cities Roundtable meets monthly, hosted by rotating cities, and provides a forum for local planners and sustainability staff to share expertise, model policies and codes, and proven approaches for reducing GHG emissions.
http://your.kingcounty.gov/solidwaste/greenbuilding/roundtable.asp