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December 31, 2025

Dear Chair Vega Pederson and Commissioners,

The Advisory Committee for Sustainability and Innovation (ACSI) advises the Board of County Commissioners and the Office of Sustainability on policies and initiatives that enhance equity, environmental justice, environmental stewardship, and inclusive prosperity. We are informed by our charter, which we updated in 2021 to acknowledge our treaty obligations to Tribal Nations and better align with the County's [Environmental Justice Resolution](#).

Our recommendations in this letter support Multnomah County's efforts to achieve an equitable, healthy, low-carbon community where every person has what they need to thrive.

Our first and most central recommendation is that the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners adopt the Climate Justice Plan (CJP) that will come in front of you in 2026. Consistent with the CJP, Multnomah County should center community priorities as it pursues and prioritizes resources to advance its climate justice and sustainability-related [goals, policies and plans](#).

ACSI members appreciate the strong protective leadership demonstrated by County leaders to manage major threats to the health and safety for inhabitants of our region. We applaud the County's bold 2025 climate justice initiatives:

- The development of the CJP, which was co-created with frontline communities;
- Chair Vega Pederson's August emergency declaration that opened cooling centers during extreme heat;
- The Office of Sustainability's leadership in **doubling of funds** for utility bill assistance grants for low-income community members; and
- The October launch of regional climate and health dashboards that track climate impacts across five key areas that climate change is known to affect and 11 health indicators.

Together these demonstrate a comprehensive, data-driven approach to protecting our most vulnerable residents from climate-related threats.

Your continued leadership on environmental and climate justice, and on a clean and just energy transition, is crucial. The federal government has not only retreated from working towards a just energy transition, but also continues to create barriers to clean energy, and to environmental and climate justice, denying the climate crisis and seeking to penalize even the acknowledgement that differently situated community members experience its impacts differently. In this environment, it is imperative for the Board and for Multnomah County to remain steadfastly committed to this community, with climate justice at the forefront.

We ground the recommendations in our 2025-2026 letter in feedback gathered during the Climate Justice Planning process, as well as in a recognition of the headwinds and community harms in the current moment, with the federal government defunding and actively undermining sustainability and climate justice work, and with state and federal budgetary challenges that are also reflected in the financial health of environmental and community-based organizations. In recognition of the moment, in our letter this year we prioritize amplifying and protecting existing work, and aligning with Commissioner's and community priorities.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In 2025, ACSI convened two subcommittees on a monthly basis that provided space to explore topic areas in depth, and to develop recommendations to be considered by the full advisory committee and the County Board.

The Air Quality, Climate and Energy subcommittee focused on Multnomah County's efforts to advance a clean and just energy transition that reduces our contributions to the climate crisis, and improves the health and safety of people in this community. This subcommittee was guided by the following goals in the draft CJP:

- Every community member has access to affordable clean energy.
- Every community member is safe from the risks posed by fossil fuels and energy infrastructure.
- Every community member breathes clean and healthy air.

The Climate Resilience subcommittee focused on how to enhance the ability of residents to bounce back from any kind of interruption, at the personal, household, neighborhood, and community levels. Resilience touches on several goals contained in the Climate Justice Plan - including, but not limited to the following:

- Every community member is resilient to extreme weather events and other climate threats.
- Every community member has the opportunity to contribute to climate justice.
- Every community member has access to the resources and underlying conditions that promote health and well being

While crafting our recommendations, we also considered related state-level reports and plans, including the Oregon Energy Strategy and the Governor's Executive Order on its implementation (EO 25-29), and the Biennial Oregon Heat Pump Report.

ACSI has organized our recommendations into three strategic categories of actions that would meet the urgent need for climate interventions that both dramatically reduce emissions and can be implemented swiftly throughout the county. These actions support growing community investments, cleaning our air, and advancing energy justice.

## Growing Community Investments

### ***Support and advocate for the creation of an Air Quality Fund***

The County should champion the creation of a fund that requires large polluters to contribute financially, similar to Metro's Reuse Impact Fund or through expanded definitions in Metro's Reuse Impact Fund, enabling local governments to purchase air quality filters and heat pumps for vulnerable community members. This includes supporting potential action by the Oregon Legislature to create a "climate superfund" or other related concepts.

***Impact:*** Creates a sustainable funding stream while keeping people comfortable in their homes and preventing displacement.

### ***Support large, high impact infrastructure upgrades***

The County should pursue and advocate for investments in significant infrastructure such as smart grids, industrial symbiosis projects, and community solar installations. This includes working with community organizations to help identify project opportunities and connect those to project development and financial support.

***Impact:*** Establishes resilient, locally controlled clean energy systems that simultaneously reduce greenhouse gas emissions, lower energy costs for vulnerable households, decrease reliance on fossil fuel infrastructure, and build community wealth through revenue generation that can be reinvested in further climate adaptation and public health programs.

## ***Bolster Resilience Through Partnerships with Community-Based Organizations***

The County should strengthen collaborations with organizations currently working on climate resilience hubs, clean and just energy transition, air quality, and climate initiatives, as well as with groups interested in advancing work that intersects with County and Climate Justice Plan goals. As part of this effort, the County should work with public, private and community partners to identify opportunities to develop community solar and other distributed energy resources.

***Impact:*** Amplifies community voice, leverages existing community expertise, and builds trust. Identifying community energy opportunities can guide / influence state level legislation and policy implementation, and expand resilient, clean energy resources to underserved areas.

## **Cleaning Our Air**

### ***Establish clean air goals or standards for communities and homes***

Grounded in the Climate Justice Plan and coordinated with other local governments, the County should develop comprehensive clean air standards that include indoor air quality. These standards should be paired with direct links to resources for improving air quality.

***Impact:*** Establishes measurable benchmarks for reducing respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular disease, and premature deaths while simultaneously addressing the disproportionate burden of poor air quality on low income communities and communities of color.

### ***Expand educational resources and funding for wood burning alternatives***

As federal Environmental Protection Agency resources diminish; the County should strengthen educational outreach about wood burning impacts and expand funding sources for heat pumps and woodstove changeout programs.

**Impact:** Reduces indoor and outdoor air pollution from wood smoke, which disproportionately harms low income communities and individuals with respiratory conditions, while ensuring equitable access to clean, efficient heating that improves air quality, reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and supports long term respiratory health across the county.

### **Advancing Energy Justice**

#### ***Continue allocating staff capacity to mitigate energy burden***

The County should maintain dedicated staff resources to undergird the imperative for affordable household energy and advocate for programs and initiatives that 1) reduce energy burden in our community, 2) keep residents connected to energy services, 3) support community members' ability to repay any utility debt, and 4) emphasize addressing barriers around serving renters.

**Impact:** Improves household stability by preventing the snowballing crises that occur when families must choose between paying utility bills and affording food, medicine, or rent, ultimately reducing preventable health conditions, homelessness, and displacement while building community resilience against climate related energy disruptions.

#### ***Create an energy affordability public information plan***

The County should develop a comprehensive information dissemination strategy that includes: updating 311 with key energy resource information and providing energy resource guides to SUN Schools, health clinics, libraries, early learning programs, and other community gathering hubs where residents already seek support. The County should proactively share information about energy efficiency programs with key audiences, including providing retrofit information to landlords who can implement improvements that benefit vulnerable renters.

**Impact:** See impact above.

#### ***Support City of Portland implementation of CHSEB standards***

Following the recent submission of Climate and Health Standards for Existing Buildings (CHSEB) standards to City Council, the County should demonstrate support for this community-led initiative that would advance indoor air quality, safe indoor temperatures, energy burden and housing stability.

**Impact:** Protects vulnerable populations from wildfire smoke and air pollution while reducing respiratory illnesses and health disparities in communities most impacted by poor air quality.

### ***Review Resilience Resources***

Early in 2026, ACSI will release a Resilience Hub Issue Brief that includes an introduction to community-serving resilience and strategies that support local developments. The Issue Brief will include local case studies from the Kijani Collective and Portland Community College. Multnomah County should incorporate the findings of this document broadly into its work, and convene, connect and support development of government, community, and joint climate resilience projects.

***Impact:*** Articulating the County's role in resilience hub planning and supporting best practices will accelerate community impact and learning. Engaging with nascent and established resilience hub efforts can help connect residents to County services, and strengthen the ability of the County to respond during a broad range of emergencies, including major weather events, toxic releases, fires or a seismic emergency.

## **CLOSING**

Our recommendations in this letter are intended to support the County's longstanding role as a local government that aims to center climate and environmental justice in its sustainability work, in accordance with its mission "to improve the well-being of those in Multnomah County by providing accessible, high-quality, and innovative public services that create stability, enhance opportunities, and reduce disparities."

Adopting the Climate Justice Plan is a central recommendation in our letter because it reaffirms the County's commitment centering solutions co-created with frontline communities while working to serve all Multnomah County residents. This commitment from the County is key at a time when the federal government is not only moving away from climate action and environmental justice but actively opposing it. Your leadership today is key.

Committee members who participated throughout the development of the Climate Justice Plan heard from the public about the importance of accountability throughout the life cycle of the Plan and its initiatives. Members of this advisory committee are prepared to serve in a trusted and critical liaison role between County staff and community members and we look forward to working with the Board and staff to articulate ACSI's role in 2026.

We acknowledge that, although ACSI strives to be an inclusive and diverse advisory body, we are far from representing the entirety of the county, especially those who may be most impacted by environmental injustice and systematic disenfranchisement. We urge the County to continue to increase engagement with community groups, especially BIPOC, low income, and youth individuals.

We thank the Commission for taking the time to carefully consider our recommendations, and look forward to working with you in the months to come.

Sincerely,  
Members of ACSI