

# Columbia CAAP Update

FOCUS GROUP & INTERVIEW SUMMARY

**DECEMBER 2025**

*This document summarizes stakeholder input collected to inform the CAAP update and is not intended to serve as a record of City decisions, findings, or commitments.*

## Introduction

This document summarizes feedback received through interviews and focus groups with City staff and external stakeholders to inform the update of the City of Columbia’s Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP).

There were five interviews and three focus groups held between November 24 and December 5, 2025. The interviews and focus groups helped identify priorities, challenges, and opportunities related to climate action. An overview of the engagement objectives, structure, and discussion items are provided below, followed by a summary of feedback received through each discussion. Note that the feedback summarized in this document reflects a range of perspectives shared by participants and is intended to inform refinement of the CAAP update; it does not represent City positions, commitments, or final policy decisions.

The feedback summarized here reflects stakeholder input intended to inform refinement of the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan update and does not represent City positions, commitments, or final policy decisions. The City will consider this input alongside technical analysis, equity considerations, and City policy direction to refine draft actions, identify implementation considerations, and support prioritization. Not all feedback will translate directly into final CAAP actions; rather, it will help inform where additional analysis, coordination, or phased implementation may be needed.

## Engagement Objectives

The objectives of the interviews and focus groups were to:

- Review existing work related to the CAAP.
- Share experiences and challenges related to implementing CAAP actions to date.
- Understand priorities and considerations for the next five years of implementation (i.e., which actions to include in the updated CAAP).

## Engagement Structure

The interviews and focus groups were in either virtual or hybrid (virtual + in person) format and included a combination of presentation from the CAAP planning team and interactive discussion. The presentation provided background information relevant to the CAAP update, including an overview of the current CAAP, a summary of climate risks/vulnerabilities, and CAAP implementation progress to-date. Questions focused on understanding attendee’s concerns and priorities regarding climate action in Columbia, with an emphasis on providing feedback on the initial list of proposed actions for inclusion in the CAAP update. An outline of the agenda and discussions questions are provided below.

## Agenda

- **Introductions and Project Overview**
  - Overview of the City's current CAAP and objectives for the CAAP update
- **Baseline Assessment Findings Summary**
  - Climate vulnerability assessment
  - CAAP progress to-date
- **Proposed CAAP Strategies & Actions**
  - Feedback on proposed actions for CAAP update
  - Implementation considerations (if time allowed)

## Discussion Questions

### CITY STAFF INTERVIEWS

1. What has been your or your department's role in implementing the CAAP or supporting the City's climate and resiliency initiatives?
2. Which climate strategies or actions have been you or your department's highest priority? Why?
3. Which actions in the current CAAP have been easiest for the City to implement? Which have been the hardest?
4. What have been the roadblocks or challenges to implementation? What tools or support is needed to overcome these roadblocks?
5. Do you support these proposed CAAP actions? Do you have any concerns? What revisions are needed for you to feel good about the draft list?

### EXTERNAL PARTNER INTERVIEWS & FOCUS GROUPS

1. Complete the sentence with one word: "In 2030, I want Columbia to be a place where \_\_\_\_\_."
2. How have climate impacts such as extreme heat or storms impacted your life or the work of your organization?
3. What issues are important to you and your industry or organization? If you could see one thing included in this climate action and adaptation plan update, what would that be?
4. Do you support these proposed CAAP actions? Do you have any concerns? What revisions are needed for you to feel good about the draft list? Is anything missing?

## Interview Groups

Interviews and focus groups were structured thematically by CAAP focus area. A summary of the interviews and focus groups are provided in the table below.

Type	Theme	Date	Attendees
<b>City staff interview (1 hr)</b>	Buildings & Energy	Nov 24	3
	Public Health & Resilience	Nov 24	3
<b>External stakeholder interview (1 hr)</b>	Transportation	Nov 25	3
	Community Wellbeing & Engagement	Nov 25	3
	Development	Dec 2	3
<b>Focus group (2 hrs)</b>	Buildings, Energy, Housing, & Development	Dec 5	10
	Transportation & Development	Dec 4	8
	Waste, Health, & Natural Resources	Dec 5	12

# City Departmental Interviews

---

The below summarizes feedback heard during City department staff interviews on November 24, 2025. The summary below reflects themes raised during discussion and does not attribute specific comments or viewpoints to individual participants.

## Buildings & Energy

### DEPARTMENTS REPRESENTED

- Clean Energy Team
- Finance
- Public Works

### FEEDBACK SUMMARY

The interviewees focused on the importance of **early planning, predictable funding, and realistic, achievable actions** to successfully integrate climate upgrades into City processes. Staff noted that rebates and grants have made some actions—such as native plantings, transit fleet updates, and acquiring electric vehicles—easier to implement, but challenges persist around procurement, infrastructure needs, maintenance uncertainties, and balancing city priorities.

Interviewees stressed that **capital project planning should incorporate climate action considerations earlier**, that clearer funding mechanisms (including long-range plans, bonding options, and maintenance budgets) are essential, and that policies perceived as burdensome—such as development restrictions in floodplains—will require thoughtful framing, incentives, and public awareness. **Implementation depends on aligning climate goals with financial feasibility, departmental capacity, and practical constraints** while maintaining flexibility and stakeholder buy-in.

### ACTION FEEDBACK

**Energy Sector Actions:** Interviewees supported the “where feasible” language within actions to address feasibility limitations (e.g., not all buildings can support solar). They requested clarification on roles (e.g., “install” should not imply the City is responsible for owning or installing solar infrastructure).

## Public Health & Resilience

### DEPARTMENTS REPRESENTED

- Neighborhood Services
- Public Health and Human Services
- Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

## FEEDBACK SUMMARY

The interviewees highlighted that **community engagement and public education have been among the easiest CAAP actions to advance**, especially when outreach happens in community spaces and focuses on practical benefits. However, **implementation barriers persist** around inconsistent resident education, difficulty reaching vulnerable populations, and tensions with rental property owners who perceive sustainability requirements as punitive.

Staff emphasized the need for **clearer, more specific, and positively framed action language**—especially on rental energy efficiency—to avoid confusion, distrust, or unintended conflict. Participants noted opportunities to improve access to updated status information to strengthen interdepartmental coordination, as well as the need for additional data (e.g., effectiveness of cooling supports, summer shut-off impacts) to inform future program design.

Participants emphasized the value of clearer **coordination** structures, designated points of contact, improved communication, measurable **targets**, and transparent **tracking** to support effective implementation. The interviewees stated that progress requires clearer goals, improved data, enhanced cross-department collaboration, and more intentional outreach strategies that **connect climate actions to residents' lived experiences and health outcomes**.

## ACTION FEEDBACK

**Health, Safety, & Wellbeing:** Interviewees supported the inclusion of food security in actions and discussed the role of different agencies and partners to support community members—particularly around outreach/education and heat/cooling center availability.

# Community Stakeholder Interviews

The below summarizes feedback heard during community interviews on November 25, 2025, and December 1, 2025.

## Transportation

### ORGANIZATIONS/SECTORS REPRESENTED

- Local Motion
- Transit & Development Engineering
- Source Summit

### FEEDBACK SUMMARY

The interviewees emphasized the importance of **integrating transportation, housing, land use, and public health to address climate issues holistically**, noting that accessible active transportation and denser, connected development are essential for both climate goals and community wellbeing. They stressed the need to **center vulnerable populations**—particularly those facing barriers in transit access—and to ensure the CAAP aligns with other City plans and conveys its implications clearly to Council.

While supportive of most proposed actions, interviewees requested clearer language, flexibility in fleet and transit purchasing decisions, and attention to permit, zoning, and parking policies that can better support infill development and mode shift. **Funding remains a major constraint**, with expanded transit service requiring significant investment and federal/state support.

Participants saw their roles in implementation as advocating for active transportation, educating leaders and the public, and ensuring equity considerations guide decision-making.

### ACTION FEEDBACK

- Feedback emphasized that Columbia should pursue innovative parking and transit-oriented policies and incentivize infill and density (including reconsidering low-density zoning near campus).
- Interviewees recommended adopting lessons learned from Kansas City's success with accessible multimodal options and ensure City leadership understands how these strategies align with broader plans and goals, particularly to recognize that greater density and affordable housing are essential to reducing sprawl and creating walkable, accessible neighborhoods.

## Community Wellbeing & Engagement

### ORGANIZATIONS/SECTORS REPRESENTED

- Arise
- Daniel Boone Library
- Home Health Providers

### FEEDBACK SUMMARY

Participants stressed that **extreme heat, reliable transportation, and the growing needs of vulnerable populations are central climate issues for their organizations**. Libraries and health services are increasingly functioning as de facto cooling and resource centers, yet limited hours, transportation barriers, and rising demand strain their capacity. Interviewees stressed the importance of **expanding and decentralizing cooling and heating options**—leveraging trusted neighborhood partners, mobile services, and community organizations—to reach people where they are. They also highlighted the critical need for stronger utility assistance, emergency support for families facing shutoffs, and better **coordination across programs addressing energy efficiency, food security, and emergency preparedness**. The interviewees supported the proposed CAAP actions but emphasized enhancing partnerships, improving resource awareness, and ensuring that equity-driven, community-embedded solutions are included in the CAAP.

### ACTION FEEDBACK

Attendees recommended:

- Creating a coordinated 5-year action plan with a liaison to unify cross-department work.
- Strengthening emergency food security planning across all life stages with support from WIC and other health staff.
- Engaging the library as an education partner.
- Expanding and better funding utility assistance and emergency resources for vulnerable households.
- Assessing and tracking cooling and housing needs, including use of buses as climate-controlled shelters.
- Collecting data on summer utility shutoffs to determine whether additional protections are needed as extreme heat events intensify.

## Development

### ORGANIZATIONS/SECTORS REPRESENTED

- Habitat for Humanity
- Developers

## FEEDBACK SUMMARY

The interviewees focused on **affordability, practicality, and the importance of incremental progress** as central issues for their industries. They noted that both households and small businesses are already stretched thin, making **retrofits, reporting requirements, and high-performance energy standards difficult** without strong incentives, technical assistance, or city-led improvements to municipal buildings. Interviewees emphasized that **incentive-based and voluntary** approaches may be more effective in the near term, particularly when paired with technical assistance and cost transparency.

Participants discussed the importance of carefully calibrating standards—such as floodplain regulations, insulation requirements, and metering expectations—to balance resilience goals with housing affordability, land availability, and development feasibility. At the same time, they strongly **supported policies that encourage infill, density, alternative housing types, and reduced car dependence**, emphasizing that small, achievable wins can build momentum for larger climate actions. They want the CAAP update to prioritize fairness, feasibility, and incentives that help lower-income residents, renters, and small property owners participate without undue strain.

## ACTION FEEDBACK

- Interviewees cautioned that the proposed action may be overly restrictive and discourage development.
- Interviewees recommended waiting for updated energy codes and considering alternatives like expanded stream buffers when they are supported by clear flood-risk data to justify protections.

## Focus Groups

The below summarizes feedback heard during focus groups on December 4-5, 2025.

### Buildings, Energy, Housing, and Development

#### ORGANIZATIONS/SECTORS REPRESENTED

- Boone Electric Cooperative
- Mid-MO Sierra Club Chair
- NREL
- Regulatory Assistance Project
- Renew Missouri
- City Utilities
- Missouri Green Banc
- Air and Water Solutions

#### FEEDBACK SUMMARY

Focus group participants discussed how extreme weather events—such as heat waves, cold snaps, storms, and extreme cold—are increasingly **disrupting daily life, transportation, and infrastructure**. These conditions accelerate road damage from freeze–thaw cycles, strain energy systems, and raise concerns about insurance implications from floodplain updates. Additionally, participants shared how flooding has threatened substations, sometimes requiring power shutoffs, while severe storms cause outages and hazardous conditions for crews. Water infrastructure faces strain from irrigation and high demand during hot periods.

**Transit systems face unique challenges:** heat reduces comfort and accessibility at bus stops, while electric buses lose range in high temperatures, requiring larger fleets and higher costs. Missouri’s state energy plan is being updated to address capacity challenges, and other states are exploring cost-sharing for new infrastructure like nuclear power. **Building codes are evolving to improve resilience** but extreme temperatures increase energy needs to manage higher heating and cooling needs.

**Energy affordability** emerged as a top concern and priority for focus group participants. Participants shared how extreme temperatures drive up utility bills, and many households fall into a “gap group”—ineligible for weatherization programs yet unable to afford upgrades. Weatherization and energy upgrades have become prohibitively expensive, with heat pump costs doubling in recent years. Incentives and rebates rarely cover full costs, especially when paired with insulation requirements. Participants suggested **early replacement incentives**, to address the issue that most HVAC replacements occur during emergencies, locking residents into inefficient systems. Rental housing compounds these issues, as landlords often choose cheap electric-resistance heating, leaving tenants with high bills. Participants discussed the pros and cons of mandates and incentives, discussing concerns that mandates could eliminate incentive eligibility.

Participants supported continuing Solarize Columbia and **advancing renewable energy goals**. Stronger **integration between CAAP and the business community** is needed, along with clarity on data center impacts. Financing remains a barrier, with calls for accessible low-cost capital and better visibility into market-building strategies. Columbia's Integrated Resource Plan will shape 20–40-year decisions, making community priorities critical.

Extreme weather is also leading to behavioral shifts: **fewer people biking or attending outdoor events during extreme heat**. Organizations also feel the impact: Sierra Club avoids summer outings due to heat and ticks, while the Missouri Green Banc faces urgency as climate disasters raise insurance costs and financing needs.

Participants discussed several priorities for the CAAP update, including **benchmarking transportation emissions, promoting energy efficiency, and addressing waste and recycling challenges**. Transit is viewed as critical for economic mobility and quality of life, but success depends on sufficient funding, reliability, and integration with land use and housing policies. Feedback on draft actions highlighted the need to consolidate overlapping items, clarify code interactions, and **balance energy efficiency with housing affordability**.

**Funding strategies for transit expansion remain a major concern**, alongside calls for improved data collection, alignment with MoDOT safety goals, and exploration of EV infrastructure demand. Participants encouraged aligning proposed actions with upcoming energy code updates and clearly communicating cost and affordability implications as changes are considered.

## ACTION FEEDBACK

- Participants suggested Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) installation actions are ongoing rather than new, noting rollout delays without rate increases and the need for education to overcome resistance.
- Participants requested clarity on solar-ready requirements and renewable targets, while battery storage remains cost-prohibitive.
- Housing actions should separate rental and new construction strategies, with rental improvements voluntary at first. Participants discussed the financial benefits of deep weatherization improvements versus lighter-touch efficiency upgrades. They suggested reframing programs like PACE and Pay-As-You-Save. Participants noted that rental energy standards are a long-term consideration and emphasized the importance of addressing affordability and implementation feasibility.
- Additional feedback included expanding education related to refrigerant management.
- Participants requested the integration of equity into actions, expanded utility bill assistance, integrated affordability across CAAP sections and consolidation of similar actions.

## Transportation & Development

### ORGANIZATIONS/SECTORS REPRESENTED

- Boone County
- City of Columbia - Community Development
- MODOT
- REDI
- Transit
- Local Motion
- Mizzou

### FEEDBACK SUMMARY

**Utilities, infrastructure, and households are under growing stress from extreme weather events—such as heat waves, flooding, and severe storms.** Rising temperatures increase energy demand, strain equipment, and complicated repairs, while flooding threatens substations and water systems. MODOT expressed concern that the freeze-thaw cycle increases road damage, but state tracking is limited. Storms create outages and hazardous conditions for crews, and higher irrigation needs during extreme heat events further burden water infrastructure.

**Extreme heat creates unique challenges for the public transit system.** Buses have served as de facto cooling centers, but electric buses lose range during extreme heat, requiring additional vehicle investment. Unshaded bus stops can disincentivize riders from using the system and participants recommended **adding shade to increase comfort and safety**. Participants identified sustainable funding as a key consideration for expanding transit service and improving frequency to support ridership and reduce VMT. Participants also discussed the need for **internal benchmarking of transportation emissions**, noting trends such as declining vehicle miles traveled and less carbon-intensive electricity.

**Heat-sensitive individuals must adjust daily routines**, and outages limit access to cooling and essential services. Low-income households face more energy insecurity, often forced to choose between utilities and basic needs.

At the organizational level, **climate risks impact insurance costs, food security, and housing affordability**, prompting groups like the Green Banc to seek urgent financing solutions. Missouri's energy planning and emerging policy ideas—such as spreading infrastructure costs across ratepayers—reflect the growing economic implications of climate change.

Focus group participants identified **energy affordability as a top priority for the CAAP update**, noting that **extreme temperatures and rising utility bills disproportionately affect vulnerable households**. Weatherization and energy upgrades remain costly, with heat pump prices doubling and incentives failing to offset expenses, especially for renters in inefficient housing. Participants supported continued renewable energy efforts, stronger integration with the business community, and clear financing strategies to expand access to low-cost capital. They also shared interest in tools for neighbor-to-neighbor energy comparisons to encourage **behavior change**, as well as

strategies to **reduce residential emissions**, improve energy efficiency, and address persistent waste and recycling challenges.

Participant feedback on proposed actions emphasized **transparency, prioritization, and separating rental from new construction requirements**. Concerns included slow rollout of **advanced metering infrastructure**, affordability impacts of energy codes, and the need for **voluntary approaches to rental standards**. Participants also centered **equity considerations suggesting** expanded utility assistance, clearer evaluation of cost-effectiveness, and inclusive policies that balance efficiency with housing affordability.

## ACTION FEEDBACK

- Feedback on draft CAAP actions included consolidating duplicate items, adding missing language (e.g., ADUs in Transportation Action #7), rephrasing some actions (Transit Action #2 should be reframed to “align and identify”), and celebrating completed actions.
- Land use discussions focused on transit-oriented development (TOD), infill, and zoning updates, alongside reforms such as reduced parking minimums downtown and shared parking models. Participants stressed clarifying CAAP’s interaction with existing codes and balancing energy efficiency with housing affordability and developer feasibility.
- Participants shared interest in clearer communication and a community engagement strategy. Recommendations included surveys to identify barriers to transit, walking, and biking, and emphasized understanding of workforce transportation needs, especially for individuals re-entering the community after justice involvement.
- Participants emphasized that safety and mobility actions should align with MoDOT practices, clarify funding for bike and sidewalk facilities, and better integrate dedicated bicycle funds into street projects.
- Participants explained that EV infrastructure is currently a lower priority, though interest exists in gauging demand through polling. MoDOT is expanding fast-charging corridors, with a preference for co-location near amenities.
- Housing and energy code changes raised concerns about affordability and development feasibility, with calls for a partnership approach and caution against adding new requirements too quickly.

## Waste, Health, and Natural Resources

### ORGANIZATIONS/SECTORS REPRESENTED

- CCUA
- Boone County Stormwater
- AmeriCorps
- Missouri Conservation Corps
- Columbia Audubon Society President

- Solid Waste District
- City Utilities
- City of Columbia, Sustainability
- City of Columbia, Neighborhood Services
- Civil Engineer
- Commercial Grounds Maintenance

## FEEDBACK SUMMARY

Focus group participants also discussed the impacts of extreme weather events on individuals, organizations, and the environment. A tornado destroyed the regional Materials Recovery Facility (MRF), significantly disrupting recycling services for the city and surrounding counties. Heat and rainfall variability are straining the tree canopy, while **aging infrastructure—such as storm lines, sanitary systems, and water mains—shows vulnerabilities under flooding and extreme temperatures**. Participants discussed how heat accelerates wear on surfaces like CDL testing areas, and that **unpredictable weather complicates planning for environmental projects and events**.

Public health and environmental risks are also increasing. Extended warmth and illegal tire dumping have worsened tick and mosquito populations, raising concerns about vector-borne diseases. Outdoor work is becoming unsafe, with organizations changing volunteer and work opportunities as interest and ability to work outside in the summer decreases. **Extreme heat discourages outdoor activities, impacting gardening, farming, and volunteer efforts**. Heavy rains flood basement apartments, often occupied by lower-income residents, while heat limits workforce capacity for environmental stewardship. However, **prairie restoration projects demonstrate co-benefits** such as cooler temperatures, reduced runoff, and improved biodiversity.

Participants shared how they want the CAAP update to **prioritize tree planting and preservation, native landscaping, and development practices that reduce heat islands**. They also shared desires for better communication about the recycling program and expanding waste diversion programs. Participant priorities included water quality, green infrastructure, and housing affordability.

Feedback on proposed actions emphasizes **stable funding for health and safety programs, incentives for rental energy upgrades, and clearer zoning standards**. Overarching themes include funding constraints, the interconnectedness of climate vulnerability and affordability, and the need for inclusive, transparent policies that align environmental goals with community well-being.

Participants shared interest that the CAAP update **prioritize tree planting and preservation, improve communication of natural resource metrics, restrict invasive species, and promote native landscaping citywide**. They recommended development practices should preserve mature trees and topsoil, incentivize native plantings, and prevent heat island expansion. Education and outreach are essential, including workshops and school programs on recycling and native plants.

## ACTION FEEDBACK

Participants want a realistic, transparent, and user-centered plan that aligns environmental goals with affordability and community well-being. Sector-specific feedback included:

- **Health and safety:** Participants suggested identifying stable funding to support these actions, collecting baseline data on vulnerabilities, and integrating energy incentives with zoning reforms.
- **Waste:** Feedback on these actions including support to rebuild the MRF, as well as interest in clarifying glass recycling options and making recycling user-friendly and transparent. Participants recognized a new MRF depends on council support. Participants also supported a permanent hazardous waste facility and clear recycling strategies.
- **Natural resources:** Participants supported strengthening tree preservation standards, adding water quality protections, and addressing maintenance challenges for native areas. Other recommendations include proactive hazardous tree removal, updated FEMA floodplain data, greening underserved areas without displacement. Additional action recommendations addressed water quality and green infrastructure including watershed protection, greenspace buffers, and bioretention ponds—paired with maintenance plans.

## Conclusion & Next Steps

---

The interviews and focus groups summarized in this document provided a range of perspectives on how climate impacts are already affecting Columbia's residents, infrastructure, and organizations, and how the City can continue to strengthen climate action and adaptation efforts. While participants raised concerns related to cost, capacity, data availability, and implementation timing, there was broad support for advancing climate and resilience goals in ways that protect public health, support affordability, and enhance community wellbeing.

Participants consistently emphasized the interconnected nature of climate, housing, transportation, energy, and economic security, and highlighted the importance of thoughtful sequencing, clear communication, and coordination across departments and partners. Many expressed interest in phased, incentive-based, and partnership-driven approaches that balance ambition with feasibility, particularly for actions that intersect with housing affordability, development, and cost-of-living considerations.

The City will continue to engage stakeholders and the broader community as the CAAP update progresses, with opportunities for review and feedback prior to final adoption.