



CITY OF
SANTA CRUZ

**CITYWIDE STRATEGIC PLAN
2023 - 2028**



A Message from the Mayor and City Council

Creating a vibrant, healthy, and resilient community for all is more than a simple statement—it is the vision we hold dear for Santa Cruz. We recognize that bringing this vision to life necessitates thorough planning and conscious policy direction. It requires active involvement from our community, collaboration with our partners, and the dedication of our staff to turn vision into meaningful action.

Your City's elected leadership is fully committed to Santa Cruz's Fiscal Year 2024-2029 Strategic Plan, which centers around the priorities identified by our community. The Strategic Plan serves as our compass, guiding us towards a City where everyone can find their happiness. It empowers us to take meaningful steps that enhance the vibrancy of Santa Cruz, promote the well-being of our residents, and ensures our resiliency.

We look forward to working with you, in community and in service, as we realize our plan together.

A Message from the City Manager

With great enthusiasm and anticipation for the journey ahead, I am proud to share our five-year Strategic Plan. This ambitious plan is the culmination of extensive collaboration, incorporating guidance from the City Council, insights from the community, and valuable feedback from our dedicated leadership team and City staff.

Our focus areas highlight the pillars that will shape our collective success - from fiscal sustainability and transparency to a thriving organization - together we will make this vision a reality.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who contributed to this important initiative. Your guidance, input, and feedback have been critical to our success. Collectively, we will transform this vision into a reality, creating a Santa Cruz where all residents can thrive.



City Councilmembers

- Mayor Fred Keeley
- Vice Mayor Renee Golder
- Councilmember Sandy Brown
- Councilmember Sonja Brunner
- Councilmember Shebreh Kalantari-Johnson
- Councilmember Scott Newsome
- Councilmember Martine Watkins

Leadership Team Members

- Matt Huffaker, City Manager
- Laura Schmidt, Assistant City Manager
- Lisa Murphy, Deputy City Manager
- Bonnie Bush, City Clerk
- Lee Butler, Planning and Community Development Director
- Elizabeth Cabell, Finance Director
- Anthony Condotti, City Attorney
- Sara DeLeon, Chief People Officer
- Tony Elliot, Director of Parks and Recreation
- Bernie Escalante, Police Chief
- Bonnie Lipscomb, Economic Development and Housing Director
- Rosemary Menard, Water Director
- Ken Morgan, Director of Information Technology
- Nathan Nguyen, Director of Public Works
- Robert Oatey, Fire Chief
- Yolande Wilburn, Library Director

A well-designed strategic plan is like a reliable roadmap that points out a destination and provides a clear and concise path to reach it.

This strategic plan establishes priority areas of focus for the City over the next five years, highlights specific strategies that will be executed to achieve desired outcomes, and establishes a framework to keep the public updated on the City's progress.

STRATEGIC PLAN OVERVIEW

The Strategic Plan is a living document, featuring a framework that balances the needs of the community and the City's resource capacity.

A citywide Strategic Plan is fundamental to successful work planning. It is a policy document that reflects the policy priorities of the City Council. It informs budgeting and annual staff work plans. After adoption, staff integrates the policy focus areas into its operations and workplans. Staff also reports back regularly to Council on progress.

STRATEGIC PLAN FRAMEWORK



- **The vision** sets the focus for the future. It is an aspirational statement of where the organization wants to be.
- **Focus areas** will guide the direction and focus of the organization for the next several years. They are closely aligned with the vision and state the desired outcomes to be achieved. They help City leaders decide which of the many worthy projects should be done and when, within available resources.
- **Goal statements** elaborate what is to be achieved in each focus area.
- **Strategies** express how the City plans to accomplish its goals. They articulate the means to achieve desired outcomes for each strategic focus area. Strategies generally include broad areas to pursue, rather than individual projects.
- **A workplan** is the blueprint for carrying out the strategic plan. It contains the detailed steps that must be taken to assure that the goals and strategies are achieved. Workplans are developed and used by staff to provide a framework for determining specific timelines, assignments, and resource allocations. They are a management tool to help the organization assure that goals are attained and are well suited to periodic check-in about progress, changes or challenges.

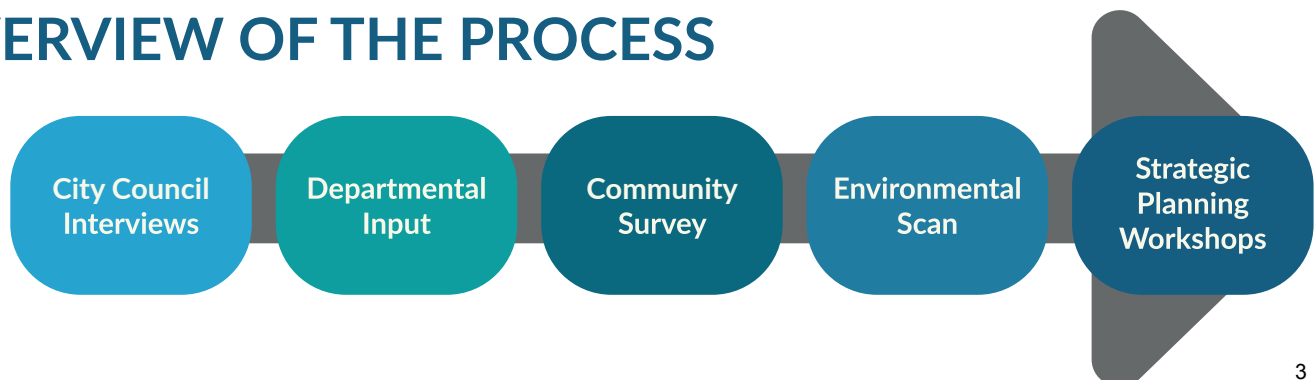


STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS OVERVIEW

This strategic plan is the culmination of many activities. An overview of the process is outlined below.

- **Council Interviews.** Council members and the Mayor participated in individual interviews as a starting point for the process.
- **Department Director Engagement.** Department heads provided input on the draft focus areas, goal statements and strategies through a questionnaire and then participated in a workshop held January 31, 2023 to review information gathered in the process.
- **Community Survey.** 275 community members responded to a survey to provide input regarding strategic plan priorities for the City of Santa Cruz. The survey was deployed from December 15, 2022 to January 9, 2023 in both English and Spanish via the City’s social media channels. The compiled responses informed the City Council workshop held April 18, 2023.
- **Environmental Scan.** An environmental scan is a document that provides an overview of factors (internal and external) that impact the community and the organization to set the context for the strategic plan and inform the discussion about goals and strategies.
- **Strategic Planning Workshop.** A City Council workshop was held April 18, 2023 to establish vision, goals, and strategies for the strategic plan.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS

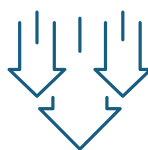


STRENGTHS, CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND THREATS

Proposed strategic areas of focus were informed by the strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats identified through engagement activities. The major themes are presented below.

STRENGTHS

- Natural environment; mild climate
- Beautiful place to live
- Passionate, engaged community
- Committed employees
- Parks and open spaces
- Reputation for being welcoming of diversity
- Climate action and sustainability programs
- Teamwork amongst City staff
- Thriving arts community



CHALLENGES

- Rising home prices, lack of affordable housing
- Impacts of homelessness, including environmental damage
- Workforce stability
- Recruiting and retaining talent
- Critical infrastructure needs
- Limitation of resources
- Pressure of policy demands
- Transition to Council districts
- Unsustainable service level expectations
- Budget not fiscally sustainable ("unfunded mandates")

OPPORTUNITIES

- Clean and safe parks and open space
- New governance structure (e.g., directly elected Mayor)
- Increased collaboration between the City, County, and University
- Expanded community engagement to bring in more voices
- Support for housing creation for low- and moderate-income households, including workforce housing
- Downtown Plan Expansion
- Investment in community beautification projects
- Support for workforce development and attracting higher-paid jobs



THREATS

- Water supply security for the community
- Distrust in government narrative
- Climate change vulnerability
- Lawsuits
- Mental health and substance abuse crises
- Impacts of unanticipated weather events; emergencies
- Developing a reputation as unsafe or unclean



OUR VISION

A VIBRANT, HEALTHY, AND RESILIENT
COMMUNITY FOR ALL



FOCUS AREAS AND STRATEGIES

Seven multi-year focus areas have been established. These identify intended outcomes to be achieved through an associated set of strategies.



Fiscal Sustainability and Transparency

Ensure that the city is on a strong financial trajectory, through planful investments and revenue development.



Strong Business Communities and a Vibrant Downtown

Cultivate a thriving downtown and local businesses citywide to support economic health and vitality.



Housing

Create and preserve housing for all with a focus on affordable and workforce housing.



Homelessness Response

Working with the County and community partners, move toward positive outcomes in homelessness response, safety and health, balancing the interests of persons who are unhoused and housed, and the business community.



Public Safety and Community Well-Being

Provide public safety services that support well-being and healthy communities.



Natural and Built Infrastructure

Invest in sustainable, climate-adapted infrastructure and community assets in both the natural and built environment.



Thriving Organization

Advance a high-performing organization where employees are empowered to deliver outstanding services to the community.



Fiscal Sustainability and Transparency

Ensure that the city is on a strong financial trajectory, through planful investments and revenue development

Strategies

- Identify creative and expanded revenue approaches that provide sufficient resources and facilities to deliver services and programs that reflect the uniqueness of Santa Cruz
- Identify and adopt short- and long-term service priorities and fund them within available resources
- Develop financing strategies for capital investments and deferred infrastructure needs as identified in the long-range financial plan
- Evaluate cost recovery levels and identify fees that need to be updated
- Create community participation opportunities and training to increase understanding of the City's financial standing and transparent fiscal decision making
- Modernize financial management software to streamline and automate the City's processes, help identify patterns and data trends, and improve accuracy
- Leverage grant funding and advocate for resources at the state and federal levels





Strong Business Communities and a Vibrant Downtown

Cultivate a thriving downtown and local businesses citywide to support economic health and vitality.

Strategies

- Support and expand Santa Cruz's diverse and robust businesses
- Promote Downtown as a safe, youth and family-friendly center for commerce, housing, and transportation
- Implement the Downtown Plan Expansion, including a permanent arena for the Santa Cruz Warriors
- Grow events and cultural activities in the downtown, wharf and other commercial areas (i.e., midtown, westside, lower Seabright, Harvey West industrial area) to attract residents and visitors
- Activate City programs and other efforts to enhance and enliven Downtown, including along the river, and other commercial areas (for example, placemaking attractions like pop-ups, outdoor dining, public art, beautification programs)
- Invest in public and green spaces to create a welcoming, safe and attractive place to spend time





Housing

Create and preserve housing for all with a focus on affordable and workforce housing.

Strategies

- Support diversity in housing types and affordability levels to accommodate present and future housing needs of Santa Cruz residents
- Implement policies and programs that promote fair housing and equitable access to housing opportunities
- Certify and implement the Housing Element to increase housing production and enable increased funding eligibility
- Leverage partnerships, government resources and private financing to create affordable and transitional housing projects in the community
- Support housing production for permanent supportive housing and low-, very low-, and extremely-low income housing
- Ensure development is adequately balanced with increasing demand on city services





Homelessness Response

Working with the County and community partners, move toward positive outcomes in homelessness response, safety and health, balancing the interests of persons who are unhoused and housed, and the business community.

Strategies

- Reduce the presence and social and environmental impacts of encampments in the City
- Seek funding for capital investment for homelessness response
- Support efforts that increase personal responsibility as an element of program outcomes
- Contribute to the development of temporary shelter and interim housing in a manner that supports rehousing people
- Collaborate with our community partners to create a regional approach to homelessness
- Identify and leverage existing county resources and funding to connect individuals with resources
- Provide services for people at risk of eviction to prevent homelessness
- Maintain and update the Homelessness Response Action Plan, with specific focus on developing service delivery and accountability metrics
- Provide outreach services for people living outdoors and in vehicles so they can be connected to housing and support services
- Advocate with the state and federal government for improved mental health and substance use disorder support





Public Safety and Community Well-Being

Provide public safety services that support well-being and healthy communities.

Strategies

- Ensure opportunities for people of all ages to stay active, keep connected, and contribute to the community's economic, social, and cultural life
- Collaborate with stakeholders and allied agencies to find areas for increased alignment and accountability
- Evaluate and potentially establish an Integrated Health Response Team for the City
- Conduct a standards of coverage study for Fire to identify issues and needs
- Determine feasibility and funding of a regional public safety training center
- Identify opportunities for fire shared services and facilities with neighboring agencies
- Evaluate opportunities to utilize new technology, including replacement of aging radio/communication infrastructure, to enhance public safety effectiveness and efficiency
- Seek community input to better define an updated view of public safety
- Create opportunities for pro-social youth activities
- Identify and create opportunities to support and expand childcare





Natural and Built Infrastructure

Invest in sustainable, climate-adapted infrastructure and community assets in both the natural and built environment.

Strategies

- Address deferred maintenance of critical infrastructure (i.e., water facilities and resources, wharf, streets, parks and open space)
- Maintain the quality of parks and other natural amenities for enjoyment of residents and visitors
- Invest in technologies to preserve, protect, and enhance current and future infrastructure
- Maintain and further develop a skilled and trained workforce that can plan, develop, implement and operate climate adapted infrastructure projects, facilities and community assets
- Improve public transportation infrastructure to increase equitable access to sustainable travel options
- Identify and prioritize needed capital investments to support climate adaptation and achieve sustainability goals
- Continue aggressively identifying and pursuing grant, public-private, and low-interest loan financing programs, including becoming educated on how to best plan and structure projects to be grant-eligible





Thriving Organization

Advance a high-performing organization where employees are empowered to deliver outstanding services to the community.

Strategies

- Foster a positive workplace culture where all employees are valued, included, listened to, and supported
- Increase employee engagement and recognition to ensure employees are productive and feel connected
- Address recruitment and retention challenges
- Drive diversity, equity and inclusion efforts to strengthen sense of belonging among City staff
- Create opportunities for training and professional growth for employees at all levels
- Work with regional agencies (Cabrillo College, Santa Cruz City Schools, etc.) and employers to develop a more direct workforce development and recruitment pipeline for the City
- Invest in tools, policies, and training to prioritize staff safety
- Continuously improve and modernize City service delivery



CONCLUSION

This Strategic Plan is designed to guide the work and future of the City of Santa Cruz. The plan articulates the vision for the City and establishes a set of focus areas and strategies to guide the work of the City of Santa Cruz over the next several years.

An accompanying bi-annual strategic plan status report will update City Council and the public on progress related to the focus areas.

The Strategic Plan reflects the guidance and input of the City Council, results of a community survey, and feedback from City executive staff and managers.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this important initiative and everyone who will help make the vision a reality.





CITY OF SANTA CRUZ
809 Center Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95060