

UNIVERSITY *of* WASHINGTON

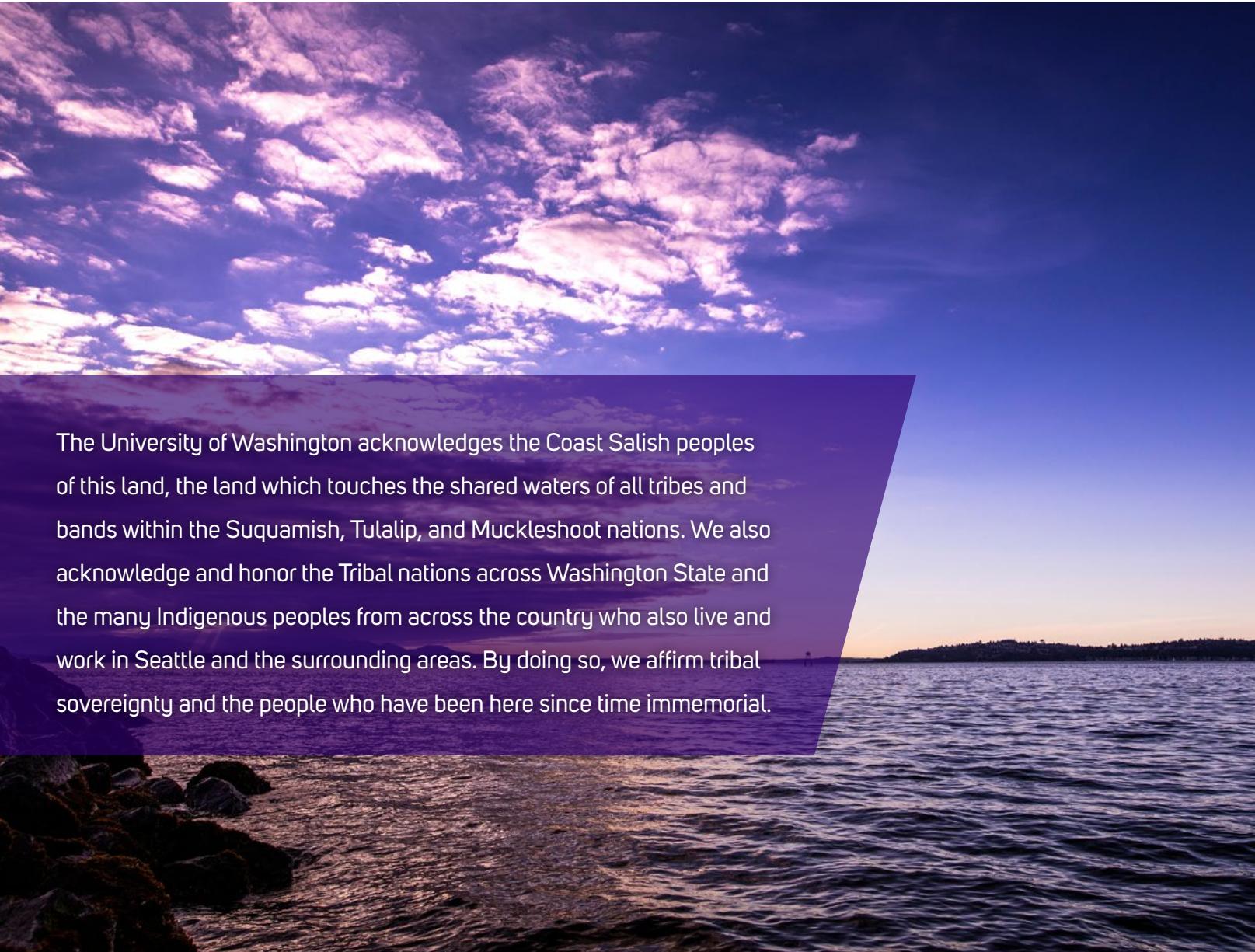
# SUSTAINABILITY ACTION PLAN

2020-2025 WRAP-UP REPORT



W

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



The University of Washington acknowledges the Coast Salish peoples of this land, the land which touches the shared waters of all tribes and bands within the Suquamish, Tulalip, and Muckleshoot nations. We also acknowledge and honor the Tribal nations across Washington State and the many Indigenous peoples from across the country who also live and work in Seattle and the surrounding areas. By doing so, we affirm tribal sovereignty and the people who have been here since time immemorial.



Hundreds of individuals and organizations have contributed to this effort. View the complete list online at:  
**[sustainability.uw.edu/plan/acknowledgments](http://sustainability.uw.edu/plan/acknowledgments)**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	4
SPOTLIGHT ACHIEVEMENTS .....	6
SUSTAINABILITY ACTION PLAN TARGETS .....	10
I. DOUBLE STUDENT, STAFF, AND FACULTY SUSTAINABILITY ENGAGEMENT BY 2024 .....	10
II. ONE UW-WIDE SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK .....	11
III. DOUBLE SUSTAINABILITY-ORIENTED RESEARCH PROJECTS BY 2025 .....	12
IV. COMPREHENSIVE EQUITABLE PURCHASING TARGETS BY 2022 .....	13
V. 5% LOWER EMISSIONS FROM PROFESSIONAL TRAVEL BY 2025 .....	14
VI. 35% OF FOOD IS FROM LOCAL SOURCES BY 2025 .....	15
VII. 6% DECREASE IN SINGLE-OCCUPANCY COMMUTING RATE PER CAMPUS BY 2028 .....	16
VIII. 15% LOWER ENERGY USAGE INTENSITY BY 2025 .....	17
IX. 10% LESS SOLID WASTE BY 2025 .....	18
X. 45% REDUCTION OF GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS BY 2030 .....	19
WHAT'S NEXT .....	20

## INTRODUCTION



## REVAMPING THE UW SUSTAINABILITY ACTION PLAN

In 2020, the University of Washington launched its first Sustainability Action Plan. The Plan outlined ten measurable targets to guide our work over five years and marked an important milestone in bringing greater alignment and visibility to sustainability efforts across our campuses. It was also our first attempt to prioritize sustainability goals in a transparent and actionable way.

This first plan was developed in the months before the COVID-19 pandemic began. Despite the challenges that followed, we made meaningful progress on sustainability. A key takeaway from this first planning cycle was that progress was strongest when roles were clear, systems were established, and staff capacity was in place. In other cases, promising ideas stalled without the resources or structure to advance them. We also learned that collaboration across departments and disciplines is essential. The most effective initiatives united operations, academics, and student leadership to move efforts forward.

Now, five years later, we are closing out this chapter and preparing to launch our next plan. **This report reflects on what was accomplished through the 2020–2025 plan, challenges along the way, and how we are carrying forward lessons into the next phase of our work.** These insights have informed the next Sustainability Action Plan,

which will guide our work through 2030 in order to achieve UW's long-term sustainability vision.

The new Sustainability Action Plan introduces several important updates compared to the first Plan:

- Focus areas have been added that were not previously covered, such as water conservation, procurement practices, and more.
- We asked our community what sustainability 'success' would look like for UW in 2050 to develop a long-term vision of what we want to achieve.
- Each focus area has five-year actions and targets that align with a longer-term 2050 vision.
- Plan actions are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timebound).

Storytelling will be woven into the new plan to help motivate and inspire students, faculty, and staff to get engaged.

We are grateful to everyone who contributed to the 2020–2025 plan. Your participation is critical to making this a community driven plan, and we look forward to working with students, faculty and staff on implementation across the tri-campus.



## SPOTLIGHT ACHIEVEMENTS

Over the past five years, UW has made significant strides in several areas of sustainability through collaboration, creativity, and shared commitment.



### ENERGY TRANSFORMATION

The Energy Transformation Strategy established an initial approach for replacing the century-old steam system on the Seattle campus with modern, electrified, and low-carbon infrastructure. In 2024, UW advanced this work by developing the Energy Renewal Plan (ERP), which details a phased approach to upgrading pipes, converting to hot-water distribution and incorporating carbon-free energy sources. While full implementation will require substantial funding, the new ERP implementation plan provides a clear roadmap for decarbonizing the Seattle campus district energy system.



### STUDENT LEADERSHIP & INNOVATION

Student leadership has been a driving force for progress. Between 2021 and 2025, the [Campus Sustainability Fund](#) awarded more than \$1 million to student-led projects advancing justice, health, accessibility and climate action across all three campuses. Projects included Indigenous plant restoration, which builds ecological resilience and cultural connection; accessible signage at the UW Farm, to support inclusive learning; and campus-wide initiatives to integrate environmental justice education into daily life. These projects show how student-led innovation can amplify institutional commitments and weave sustainability into the UW's culture.

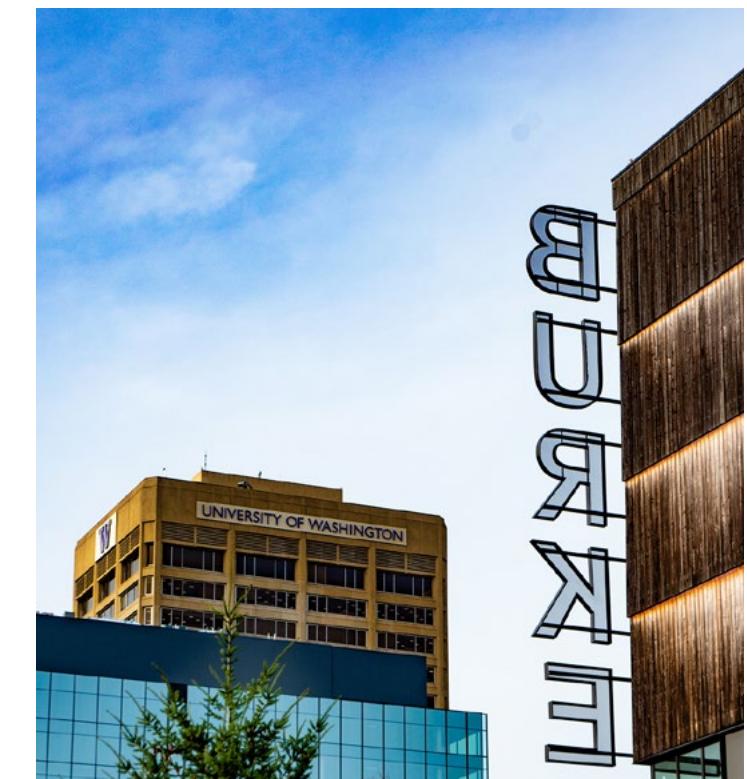


### EXPANDING EQUITABLE TRANSIT

In 2022, the UW expanded fully subsidized U-PASS benefits to more than 22,000 employees. UW was one of the first universities to offer fully subsidized transit passes to students well over a decade ago. With the recent expansion of this program to employees, commuting is now a free and easy alternative to driving alone. Together with investments in active transportation and regional partnerships, the expansion helped reduce drive-alone commuting rates to 13%, one of the lowest among peer institutions. Even as commuting patterns shifted during the pandemic recovery, UW has continued to demonstrate how bold investment in transit benefits both the natural environment and community.

### GREEN BUILDING LEADERSHIP

In July 2024, the University of Washington adopted a new [Green Building Standard](#) (GBS) which establishes requirements for new construction, major and minor renovations, and mechanical system upgrades. The new GBS, for the first time ever, establishes limits for embodied carbon in primary materials, prohibits new fossil fuels and requires a life cycle cost analysis for applicable projects. It also supports equity and well-being, including gender-neutral restrooms, lactation spaces and bike commuter facilities. Supported by practical tools and guidelines, the GBS ensures sustainability is embedded in every level of campus design and positions UW as a leader in climate-aligned construction.



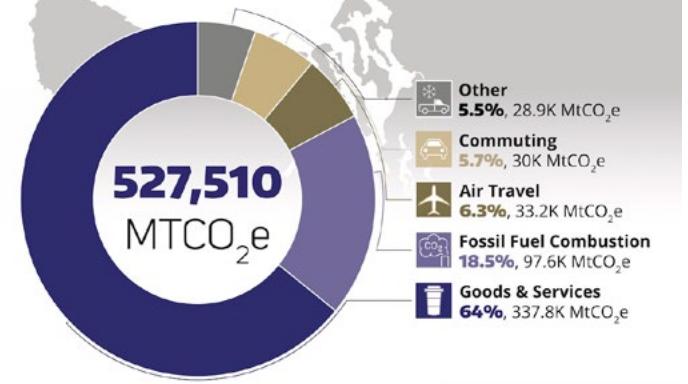
# SPOTLIGHT ACHIEVEMENTS

## BUILDING BETTER BASELINES

UW completed a comprehensive [Greenhouse Gas Inventory](#), which for the first time included Scope 3 emissions such as commuting, air travel, and purchasing. The University also conducted its first [Zero Waste Assessment](#), providing a baseline for landfill, recycling, compost, and reuse streams across all three campuses. Together, these assessments provide a better picture of UW's environmental footprint and the highest-impact areas for change. By pairing measurement with action, UW is positioned to track progress and target resources to maximize impact.



### UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON 2022 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS





## I. DOUBLE STUDENT, STAFF, AND FACULTY SUSTAINABILITY ENGAGEMENT BY 2024

### Status: Partially achieved

Engagement has increased through events, advisory groups, and communications, but how to measure engagement and doubling quantitatively remains a challenge.

#### SUSTAINABILITY PLAN GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Ensure students achieve sustainability literacy



Choose our research conscientiously



Keep equity and inclusion at the center



Keep equity and inclusion at the center

### Progress Made:

- Hosted dozens of events annually, including a [Decarbonization Town Hall](#), Earth Week celebrations, sustainability [webinar series](#), Power Plant tours, student-led career panels and others.
- Launched a student-led Energy Task Force and Sustainability Advisory Board to embed student voices in strategic planning.
- Launched the [Huskies for Equitable Sustainability \(HuES\)](#) group to support interdisciplinary student sustainability projects, organizations and efforts.
- Updated the [sustainability.uw.edu](#) website with new dashboards, tools and storytelling content.
- Expanded the Environmental Stewardship Committee's representation to include a broader segment of the UW tri-campus community.
- 20% increase in website traffic (Jan–June 2024 vs. 2023).
- More than \$1.6 million in Campus Sustainability Fund (CSF) grants were awarded from 2021 to 2025, supporting more than 140 student-led sustainability projects across all three campuses.
- Green Labs white paper developed by undergraduate students (2024).

### Progress Made:

- Convened cross-campus stakeholders to develop and adopt a [shared definition](#) of sustainability (2022).
- Finalized UW-wide [mission and vision statements](#) in 2023, now guiding institutional sustainability communication and planning.
- Explored sustainability course tagging with academic units to support future curriculum integration.
- [UW Medicine](#) convened a committee to address its environmental impact through initiatives in waste diversion, energy and water conservation, sustainable procurement, and greenhouse gas reduction, while also weaving sustainability principles into patient care.

## II. ONE UW-WIDE SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK

### Status: Achieved

This goal was fully met with the development of a formal definition of sustainability in 2022 and the adoption of a sustainability mission and vision in 2023. These foundational tools have been integrated into strategy and communication efforts and are actively guiding SAP development.

#### SUSTAINABILITY PLAN GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Ensure students achieve sustainability literacy



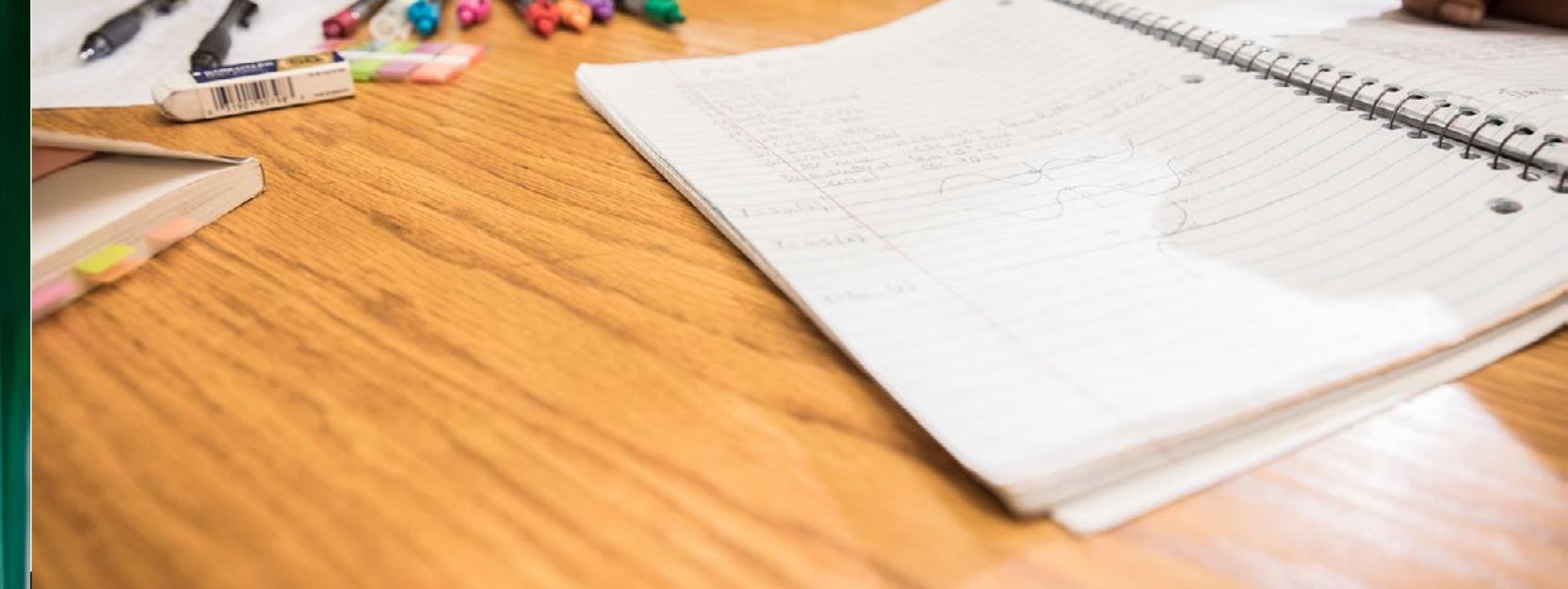
Choose our research conscientiously



Keep equity and inclusion at the center



Keep equity and inclusion at the center



### III. DOUBLE SUSTAINABILITY-ORIENTED RESEARCH PROJECTS BY 2025

#### Status: Not achieved

The target of doubling sustainability-oriented research could not be verified due to the lack of a system-wide baseline or tracking mechanism. It was also difficult to define what counted as "sustainability-oriented" research across disciplines.

This experience showed that focusing on outputs alone was not the correct approach for research- and academic-based targets. In our next plan, we are shifting from measuring research volume to creating more opportunities and ready-to-implement projects that students can join, with clear mechanisms for tracking and reporting their impacts.

#### SUSTAINABILITY PLAN GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Choose our research conscientiously

#### Progress Made:

- No formal inventory was completed for sustainability research projects.

#### Progress Made:

- UW Procurement teams expanded the Supplier Diversity program, emphasizing engagement with small, women-owned, and minority-owned businesses to increase opportunity and transparency. Expanded the pool of diverse and historically disadvantaged suppliers from 16 to 19 between 2022 and 2024.
- UW Procurement teams incorporated a sustainability and/or supplier diversity questionnaire into many procurement solicitations, in addition to cost, performance, and product requirements.
- Mandatory sustainability requirements (Pass/Fail) were included in solicitations for specific products, ensuring sustainability considerations directly influence purchasing decisions.
- Based on the 2022 UW Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions Inventory Report, the creation and delivery of goods and services purchased for the tri-campus resulted in approximately 338,000 MtCO<sub>2</sub>e, which is 64% of the University's total emissions.

### IV. COMPREHENSIVE EQUITABLE PURCHASING TARGETS BY 2022

#### Status: In progress

While UW has elevated supplier diversity practices and introduced sustainability considerations into procurement, the University has not yet established formal, comprehensive equitable purchasing targets. This highlights the need for measurable goals that connect supplier diversity and sustainability with UW's broader climate and equity commitments.

#### SUSTAINABILITY PLAN GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Keep equity and inclusion at the center



## V. 5% LOWER EMISSIONS FROM PROFESSIONAL TRAVEL BY 2025

### Status: Not achieved

UW now has the data and governance structure needed to address air travel emissions, however the Faculty Senate voted not to pass the proposed resolution to address emissions from UW sponsored air travel.

### Progress Made:

- Included professional travel (air travel) for the first time in the 2022 GHG Inventory, establishing a baseline. In 2022, professional air travel accounted for 6.29% of UW's total emissions, or roughly 33,000 metric tons CO<sub>2</sub>e. This level represented a 47.7% reduction from 2019 due to pandemic-related travel restrictions.
- Formed a Professional Travel Emission Policy Committee with strong faculty leadership.
- Developed a resolution calling for the UW to address greenhouse emissions from air travel, which was voted on at the Faculty Senate.

### SUSTAINABILITY PLAN GUIDING PRINCIPLES



## VI. 35% OF FOOD IS FROM LOCAL SOURCES BY 2025

### Status: On track

Housing & Food Services is sourcing 33.5% of food locally and is well-positioned to reach the 35% target by 2025. This reflects strong recovery efforts following pandemic-related disruptions, including re-establishing a cross-departmental food systems working group. Looking ahead, the work in this area will likely focus on enhancing existing programs that address food security and nutrition, as well as developing an organizational strategy to address issues such as food waste, food access, climate impacts, and equity.

### SUSTAINABILITY PLAN GUIDING PRINCIPLES





## VII. 6% DECREASE IN SINGLE-OCCUPANCY COMMUTING RATE PER CAMPUS BY 2028

### Status: On track

UW has made significant investments in transit access, most notably by expanding the fully subsidized U-PASS to employees. Single-occupancy commuting has slightly increased post-pandemic (16.6% in 2024 vs. 13% in 2022). This reflects broader regional challenges, including fluctuating transit service and hybrid work patterns. Meeting the 2028 target of 12% will require more education and community engagement on the benefits of transit, enhancements to biking and pedestrian infrastructure, and close collaboration with transit agencies.

### SUSTAINABILITY PLAN GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Keep equity and inclusion at the center



Use resources responsibly



Decarbonize

### Progress Made:

- Provided fully subsidized U-PASS to over 22,000 employees.
- Expanded secure bike storage and improved Burke-Gilman Trail safety.
- Reached a historic 13% drive-alone (SOV) rate in 2022, the lowest ever recorded at UW and among the lowest nationally for a major university.
- Adjusted the target in 2022 to reflect campus-specific baselines.

### Progress Made:

- Hired AEI to develop an implementation plan to transition the Seattle Campus Power Plant off fossil fuels. The published plan is a key step in reducing UW's energy use and advancing decarbonization.
- Increased annual energy efficiency budget from \$500,000 to \$1.5 million; goal to reach \$3 million.
- Purchased EnergyCAP software as a single platform for UW Seattle to centralize energy, emissions, and water data.
- Expanded building energy metering to track and optimize building energy use.
- Adopted new Green Building Standard in 2024, which ensures all construction and renovation projects maximize energy and water efficiency, reduce carbon emissions, and align with principles of equity, ecological harmony and health and well-being.
- UW Bothell reduced electricity use by over 1 million kWh in 2023.
- Campus energy use intensity (EUI) increased 22%, rising from 94.7 kBtu per square foot per year in July 2021 to 115.6 in August 2025.
- The Power Plant Reliability Project upgraded campus boilers and achieved a reduction of over 10,000 metric tons CO<sub>2</sub>e annually, which represents nearly a 12% cut in the Power Plant's emissions.
- Metering improvements included installation of deduct meters on building cooling towers (e.g., Burke Museum, Paccar Hall) and steam condensate efficiency meters in 18 buildings.

## VIII. 15% LOWER ENERGY USAGE INTENSITY BY 2025

### Status: Not achieved

The target was not met. Campus energy use intensity (EUI) increased 22% from 2021 to 2025, despite UW Seattle reducing Power Plant emissions by 12% through expanded conservation and efficiency efforts. Continued work will focus on lowering electricity use and advancing decarbonization guided by the Energy Renewal Plan.

### SUSTAINABILITY PLAN GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Use resources responsibly



## IX. 10% LESS SOLID WASTE

### Status: Not achieved

UW diverted over 50% of its waste in 2023, surpassing national averages and reflecting strong recycling, composting, and reuse programs. However, total non-hazardous waste generation reached 11,624 metric tons, showing no decline from the 2019 baseline. Landfill and incineration tonnage also rose about 20%, against a goal of a 10% reduction by 2025. These results highlight the need to shift from managing waste after it is created to reduce waste at the source, which will be a priority in the next Sustainability Action Plan.

### Progress Made:

- Converted eight Seattle academic buildings to single-stream recycling with centralized compost collection and improved signage.
- Piloted a reusable cup program at Alaska Airlines Arena.
- Piloted donation drives to promote reuse of furniture and other items during residence hall move-outs.
- Released UW's first [Zero Waste Assessment Report](#), establishing a baseline for waste generation and diversion.
- Launched contamination-prevention outreach campaigns in residence halls to improve recycling and compost quality.
- UW Bothell installed smart sensors to optimize waste collection routes.
- Tacoma explored waste reduction strategies through student-led living lab projects.
- The "Give & Go" move-out pilot at Bothell diverted 800+ pounds of material in its first year.
- Seattle campus 2023 Data:
  - 50.2% diversion rate (2,501 tons recycled, 1,896 tons composted, 1,444 tons reused).
  - 5,783 metric tons sent to landfill or incineration.
  - About 348 pounds of waste per person (students + employees).

### SUSTAINABILITY PLAN GUIDING PRINCIPLES



## X. 45% REDUCTION OF GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS BY 2030

### Status: In progress

While UW has made significant strides in reducing energy consumption and emissions across the tri-campus, total greenhouse gas emissions have increased since 2005. Accelerating emissions reductions is dependent on UW's ability to invest in decarbonizing the Seattle Power Plant, expanding sustainable procurement strategies, and advancing systemic changes in commuting and professional travel.

### SUSTAINABILITY PLAN GUIDING PRINCIPLES



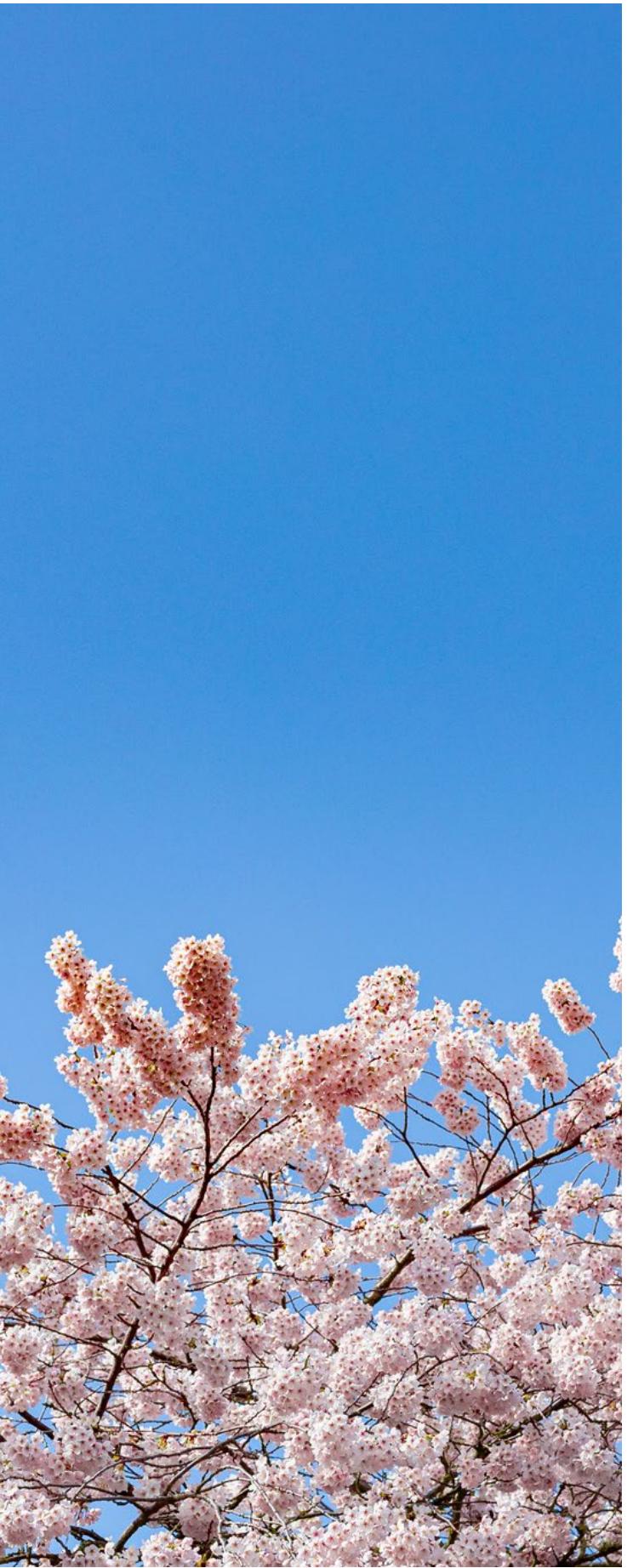
## WHAT'S NEXT?

Over the past year, the UW community has come together to shape the next Sustainability Action Plan through bold visioning, and broad engagement. This collective effort is creating a strong foundation for a plan that reflects our shared priorities and long-term commitments. Since late 2024, we've:

- **Hosted 2050 Visioning Workshops across all three campuses and UW Medicine**, where students, faculty and staff explored what a thriving, sustainable future could look like at UW by mid-century, engaging over 650 students, faculty, staff and community partners in this strategic planning process.
- **Convened eight topic-based working groups to focus on key areas of sustainability.** These groups met regularly throughout spring and summer 2025 to identify goals, shape action ideas and recommend strategies that can drive progress by 2030 and beyond.
- **Input from the working groups and community engagement sessions is being used to shape a cohesive draft of the plan.** UW Sustainability and our tri-campus partners will host a community open house this fall to provide a 'tour' of the near-final draft of the new SAP. Students, faculty, staff, and partners will be invited to hear updates and share additional feedback before the plan is finalized in early 2026.

This process is grounded in partnership and powered by the UW community. Your voice continues to shape what comes next.

Learn more and stay involved at [sustainability.uw.edu/plan/update](https://sustainability.uw.edu/plan/update).



## **SUSTAINABILITY IS IN OUR NATURE**

Sustainability efforts are ongoing at the UW. **UW Sustainability** is a central resource office for information regarding activities, projects, initiatives, campus engagements and programs.

Visit **sustainability.uw.edu** to stay up to date.

We welcome your comments and feedback.

Please send inquiries to:

**sustainability@uw.edu**

The online version of this and future Sustainability Action Plan documents, as well as any updates to elements of this plan will be posted at **sustainability.uw.edu/plan**.