



# Staff Report

**DATE:** February 22, 2023  
**TO:** Summit County Council  
**SUBJECT:** Summit County's Strategic Objectives and the 2023 Workplan

**ISSUING DEPARTMENT:** Summit County Administration  
Economic Development and Housing

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**ACTION:** Informational: "Indicators & Community Benchmarks"

## Introduction:

In a work session at the January 4, 2023, Council meeting, Councilmembers identified the public policy areas on which they wanted to focus discussion at the January 20th strategic planning retreat. In addition to a desire to continue work on the Council's current strategic objectives – **Growth Management and Regional Planning; Local Housing Choice; Transportation and Traffic Congestion;** and **Environmental Stewardship** – Councilmembers indicated additional concepts they wanted to explore.

More specifically, Councilmember Canice Harte described a longer-term strategic planning effort with a dashboard to communicate progress on that plan to the public. Councilmembers Malena Stevens and Tonja Hanson proposed objectives around communications and public engagement and social issues important to the community, such as childcare, senior housing, and others.

Staff met to discuss the approach to these subject areas and how best to facilitate a discussion among the Council that addressed everyone's preferences. This resulted in a framework, called "community indicators and benchmarks" that staff is proposing for the overall approach to the County's annual work plan rather than listing it as a separate strategic objective.

What community benchmarking does is provide data, linkages, performance indicators, and measurable metrics to social determinants and public policy areas that give staff and the community clear direction on how the County will affect conditions in specific areas, such as the environment, growth and development, the economy, and health and community.

This approach also allows the County to track progress made in those areas by establishing clear benchmarks outlined in policy briefs for each subject area. Staff believes this framework addresses Councilmember Harte's desire to be more strategic in our approach to issues and provides a dashboard for the public, as well as addresses Councilmember Steven's desire to focus on community and social issues, Councilmember Hanson's desire to improve communications and engagement with the public, and Councilmember Armstrong's desire to address social and community issues in a less nebulous, more data driven way.

The community benchmarking concept and examples are provided in more detail below. At this meeting, staff will also present a proposed 2023 work plan based on discussions from the January 20 retreat and demonstrate how community benchmarking could be applied to it.

### **Community Indicators**

Indicators are bits of information that highlight what is happening in a larger system. They are small windows that together provide a glimpse of the "big picture."

Indicators can provide feedback on the overall health of a given community in the same way that engine gauges such as oil pressure, engine temperature and battery charge help to inform whether an engine is working properly and give some initial direction as to where to look to improve performance or resolve a problem.

Similarly, community indicators can illustrate how a community's "engine" is performing (**neutral trend, improving trend, declining trend, or insufficient data**).

Indicators may also inspire changes in behavior and/or improve community vision. For example, if a local newspaper starts publishing stories regarding the three most dangerous intersections within a community, some members of the community may avoid using those intersections. Furthermore, local government may work to improve the safety and function of those intersections.

### **Criteria for Indicators**

Indicators are as varied as the types of systems they monitor. However, there are certain characteristics that effective indicators have in common.

- **Relevant.** The indicator should help community members measure something about the system that the community deems to be important.
- **Reflect Community Values.** The crucial role of indicators is communication. Quality indicators should resonate with the intended audience.
- **Attractive to Local Media.** The indicators should be of value to the local press who in turn can monitor, analyze, and publicize the trends within a given community.

### **Data Requirements**

Indicator data should include the following attributes.

1. **Readily available.** If data are not readily available, a practical method of data collection and/or measurement should be created.
2. **Defensible.** The local government should provide understandable rationales for using a specific indicator and for drawing general conclusions from the data.
3. **Reliable.** The community must be able to trust what the indicator illustrates. For example, if an automobile gas gauge indicates the fuel tank is half full when in reality the tank is half empty, at some point the driver will run out of gas.
4. **Leading.** Indicators should provide the community with enough information while there is still time to avert an unfortunate outcome.
5. **Policy-relevant.** Does the indicator have relevance for policy decisions made on behalf of the community's stakeholders?
6. **Linkages.** Indicators may also help a region to better understand community linkages— the ways in which different parts of a community's social, economic, and environmental systems relate to each other.

Most of a community's systems are linked together in complex chains of cause-and-effect. Consider this scenario: if pedestrian access to schools is considered "unsafe", parents are less likely to let their children walk to school and are more likely to drive them. Increased driving will lead to increased congestion and potentially reduced air quality.

### **The County's Strategic Planning Process**

To be successful in their purpose, performance indicators should be used to improve and guide change in the decision-making and policy development process. Towards that end, the County will need to decide what indicators are important, what data should be collected/measured, which department(s) will be responsible for gathering the data, and how often the data will be published (annually, semi-annually, quarterly, etc.).

### **POTENTIAL DATA POINTS**

#### **Growth Management and Regional Planning**

- Population Growth
- Employment Growth
- Household Growth
- Jobs-Housing Balance
- Growth by Age Cohort
- Net Migration
- Net Natural Increase

#### **Economic Vitality**

- Unemployment
- Underemployment
- Economic Diversity Index
- Fiscal Impact Analysis
- Wage Growth
- Number of Start-ups
- Sales Tax Revenues
- Shovel-ready Building Sites
- Vacant Storefronts
- People Living in Poverty
- Per Capita Tax Burden
- Living Wage

- Cost of Living Index
- Minority Owned Companies
- Gross Regional Product

### **Local Housing Choice**

- Housing Affordability Index
- Home Prices/Availability
- Rent Prices/Availability
- Number of Deed Restricted Housing Units
- Number of ADUs Permitted
- Short-term Rentals
- Vacant Land Inventory
- Affordable Housing Needs
- % of Housing Units Owner Occupied
- % of Housing Units Renter Occupied
- % of Housing Units Vacant

### **Transportation and Traffic Congestion**

- Mobility Choice to Work (%)
- Number of Licensed Vehicles Per Capita
- Number of Licensed EVs or Hybrid Vehicles Per Capita
- **Vehicle Miles Traveled**
- Transit Use
- Fuel Consumption Per Capita
- Cycling Use (Electric Bike Share)
- Traffic Accidents
- Time/Distance Analysis
- Mobility Choice to School
- Imported and Exported Labor
- Trip Generation
- Traffic Volumes

### **Environmental Stewardship**

- Renewable Energy Use Per Capita
- Nonrenewable Energy Use Per Capita
- Local Farm Production
- Solid Waste Generated & Recycled Per Capita

- Water Consumption per Capita
- Air Quality
- Impervious Surfaces
- Energy Use per Dollar of Income
- Open Space
- Linear Feet of New Trails

### **Youth & Education**

- High School Graduation Rates
- Volunteer Involvement in Schools
- Juvenile Crime Rates
- Youth Involvement in Community Service
- Childcare Availability and Affordability
- Literacy Rates
- Higher Education Participation Rates
- “Trades” Participation Rates
- Internships (high school)

### **Health And Community**

- Hospitalizations (Asthma, Cancer and/or Heart)
- Longevity
- Obesity Rates
- Voter Participation
- Minority Leadership
- The Silver Tsunami (Senior Focus)
- Library & Community Center Use
- Public Participation in the Arts
- “Neighborliness” (survey data)
- Perceived Quality of Life (survey data)
- Special Needs Populations
- Women in Leadership
- Community Celebrations
- Crime Rates: Property & Violent
- Emergency Service Calls
- Deferred Maintenance of County Owned Facilities

Once the County Council selects the data points of highest priority, various staff should be assigned to prepare a brief that includes an interpretation of the metrics selected as illustrated in the sample brief below.

### **Sample Brief**

#### **Example Only**

#### **Data Point: Vehicle Miles Traveled**

##### **Description**

The longer the distance people drive to work, the further the community moves away from sustainability. An increase in the number of miles traveled by workers reflects growing dependence upon non-renewable natural resources, an increased amount of time allocated to a stressful activity and the declining ability to work, live, and participate within a neighborhood of their choice.

Fossil fuel vehicle use creates air and water pollution as well as traffic congestion. Roads take up valuable land, reduce wildlife habitat and deprive the human community of open space. A decrease in vehicle miles traveled would reflect reduced travel distances, more walking and biking, and wider use of public transportation and carpools.

##### **Definition**

The Summit County Transportation Department will calculate **Distance/Direction Analysis** (Home to Work) using the US Census Bureau's [Onthemap](#) tool from 2002 to the most current available year. Evaluation will include analysis on the following:

- Less than 10 miles
- 10 to 24 miles
- 25 to 50 miles
- Greater than 50 miles

##### **Interpretation**

- In 2019, the share of employees driving less than 10 miles was 40.5%. In 2002, 47.4% of employees drove less than 10 miles.
- In 2019, the share of employees driving between 10 to 24 miles was 31.9%. In 2002, 35.8% of employees drove between 10 to 24 miles.

- In 2019, the share of employees driving between 25 to 50 miles was 19.4%. In 2002, 12.2% of employees drove between 25 to 50 miles.
- In 2019, the share of employees driving 50 + miles were 8.2%. In 2002, 4.6% of employees drove 50 + miles.

### **Evaluation**

Recent trends indicate an increased trend and dependence on automobile travel. Since 2002, the percentage of employees driving 50+ miles from home to work has increased 78.2%. Conversely, the percentage of employees driving less than 10 miles to work has decreased 14.6%.

In the long run, major changes in land use, vehicle technology, employment patterns, and the quality and accessibility of public transportation will be necessary to move closer to sustainability.

### **Linkages**

Vehicle use and fossil fuel consumption are linked to the excessive use of nonrenewable resources, pollution, loss of wildlife habitat, decreased social health and a declining sense of community. Specifically, fossil fuel consumption contributes to increased greenhouse gas production and climate change. These impacts could be reduced by switching transportation modes toward mass transit, walking and bicycling, as well as integrating electric vehicles. A healthier job to housing balance would also reduce sprawl and discourage vehicle use.

From the prepared briefs, County Council will direct staff to acquire, maintain and publish the metrics and conclusions as part of the County's strategic planning effort. It is recommended that these areas of focus be prepared prior to the County's annual budgeting process.

### **Community Benchmarks**

A benchmark is simply a targeted level of service that is used as a comparative measure for performance.

Community benchmarks are also evolving as methods for measuring program results and comparing performance across communities or regions. Some communities issue report cards on progress, published in the local newspaper, that include comparisons with peer communities.



It should be noted that no two communities are alike. As such, a measure of caution should be utilized when using community comparisons.

For example, an individual may wish to improve upon their running time. In most cases, doing so does not require that person to outrun Usain Bolt in the 100M dash. The benchmark is the person's individual baseline – and a percentage increase or decrease to that initial number is what matters most.

While a benchmark has a community comparing its processes, products and operations with other communities, a performance indicator measures how well a community performs against their strategic goals.

### **Recommendation/Conclusion**

It is staff's recommendation that tracking and integrating several indicators into the County's Strategic Plan will assist leadership with setting future agendas and better align the County's human and financial resources necessary to achieve impact. These indicators could in turn be developed into community benchmarks for comparison purposes and also be used to develop online dashboard reports.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

1. Presentation: Community Benchmarks & Indicators