A History of Hailey Sustainability

The City of Hailey has committed and taken action to build community sustainability and environmental stewardship for almost 30 years. Many sustainability projects or policies in Hailey today began as a single idea and have been built upon over time. As we learn more about sustainability systems and our community evolves, we can continue to take action to further reduce our community's carbon emissions and environmental impact.

Generally speaking, the City of Hailey organizes its Sustainability Program through 4 focus areas:

- Energy and the Built Environment
- Waste Reduction
- Transportation and Mobility
- Land and Water

These focus areas closely mirror the sections of the Blaine County Climate Action Plan, which lends itself to Hailey's longstanding desire and commitment to collaboration and leveraging local partnerships. The Hailey Sustainability Action Plan is meant in part to activate the established goals and objectives of Blaine County's plan, while also remaining adaptive and flexible to Hailey's unique contexts, capacities, and visions from community members. Additional Topic Areas are proposed for inclusion in the SAP, expanding upon those listed above.

There have been both challenges and successes across the focus areas, but some of the most notable sustainability milestones at the City of Hailey include:

- **1996**: Hailey became the first city in the Wood River Valley to enact curbside recycling, mandated by its franchise agreement with the local rubbish collection company. Since then, recycling and waste management efforts have expanded to include a construction materials recycling program, a public cardboard compactor, public glass drop-off, and a community compost pilot program.
- **2004**: With assistance from an EPA State and Tribal Assistance Grant (STAG), Hailey was the first Wood River Valley city to install water meters, resulting in a water usage drop of almost 25% during the irrigation season. Water rates continue to be set to discourage excessive water use and reward those who practice conservation.
- **2007**: City of Hailey joined ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability and established the City's first carbon emissions baseline and reduction goal (15% reduction from 2005 levels by 2015). Idaho Power's energy source make-up shifted to produce a lower emissions factor after this baseline was established, and by 2011, the greenhouse gas emissions for Hailey energy use and activity had dropped 48% from 2005 levels, far surpassing this "15x15" goal.
- **2010**: Hailey Streets and Public Works Departments began increasing efforts to improve bike and pedestrian infrastructure in areas such as Woodside Boulevard, Croy Street, Myrtle Street, and River Street. Hailey's interconnected bike/pedestrian transit system continues to be highly valued by the community.
- **2011**: Hailey creates its first full-time position dedicated to climate protection projects, working on a three-year grant contract from the US EPA Community Climate Challenge.
- **2017**: Hailey completes the Woodside Treatment Plant Biosolids project. This $6 million project provided infrastructure to remove additional waste from wastewater effluent and create biosolid material that is now used to facilitate local composting efforts at Ohio

Gulch. This project further protects the Bigwood River and reduces the amount of sludge trucked away from the treatment plant.

- **2017**: Leveraging grant funds from the Bureau of Reclamation and Idaho Board of Water Resources, the City of Hailey launches the “Water SMARTY” program, a xeriscape conversion and irrigation efficiency upgrades rebate program for City of Hailey residents. Over 1.5 million gallons of water were conserved due to the program and the actions of citizens.
- **2020**: A single-use plastic ban is put in place for all City-sponsored events and applicants for special events permits.
- **2020**: The Engine Idling Ordinance is passed by the City of Hailey, prohibiting excessive engine idling in public spaces and giving City Staff an enforcement tool to protect local air quality.
- **2021**: Resiliency Coordinator position transitions to a full-time, fully benefited Resilience Planner position, and Hailey also hires a full-time, fully benefited Sustainability and Grants Coordinator position. Shared between Public Works and Community Development Departments, the team continues to serve Hailey today.

Sustainability Focus Areas

As mentioned, the City of Hailey organizes its sustainability efforts through four focus areas. This page describes these focus areas in more detail and provides background information for the focus area that is specific to Hailey. We have also expanded this list to include additional topics that will be addressed within the Sustainability Action Plan (SAP) These focus areas are not listed in any order of priority or effort.

Energy

This sector includes efforts to increase the amount of renewable (“clean”) energy that powers Hailey homes, businesses, City operations, schools, and more. For the intents and purposes of our work, renewable energy includes sources like solar, wind, hydropower, and nuclear. It should be noted that while all-electric power at the building/home level eliminates direct fossil fuel consumption by those users, much of the electricity consumed around the country is created from coal-fired power plants, which are indirectly fossil fuel intensive. Idaho Power Company, which provides electricity for the City of Hailey and most of the state, has an energy portfolio that includes coal-fired electricity, a small amount of solar, and a significant contribution from hydropower. While much less fossil-fuel intensive than coal-fired power or natural gas, hydropower still contains a “carbon cost” as well, both in the dam construction and ongoing influence of hydropower operations on natural river ecosystems. Hydropower in Idaho is a great example of some of the tradeoffs that come with pursuing renewable energy.

Built Environment

The built environment refers to all the different buildings and structures in Hailey. Even more important than having buildings run on renewable or clean energy is to design and construct buildings to use as little energy as possible. Energy efficiency is achieved through strong insulation, limiting air leaks around windows and doors, orienting the building to maximize natural light, and installing high-efficiency appliances like electric heat pumps and induction stove-tops. **2023 rulemaking within the Idaho State Legislature removed local**

governments' ability to require and enforce energy efficiency measures that go beyond the 2018 International Energy Conservation Code – which is not particularly aggressive when it comes to energy efficiency and energy savings. This type of lawmaking is referred to as "preemption". Preemption prevents the City of Hailey from requiring solar panels on all new commercial buildings, for example. Preemption also prevents the City of Hailey from requiring certain building inspections that test for efficiency at time of construction. Before 2023, the City of Hailey required an inspection called a "blower door test" for all new construction. This test measures the amount of air leakage occurring between the interior and exterior of a building. Air leakage can be addressed at any point in a building's life cycle, but it is exceptionally easier to address before the construction is fully complete and the building is occupied. The more air that leaks from a building, the harder the building's heating/cooling system has to work to maintain the correct temperature.

Tools that the City of Hailey does have, to address renewable energy, energy efficiency and the built environment:

- Incentives (Builder provides "x", City provides "y")
- The Planned Unit Development (PUD) process – waivers or density bonuses granted in exchange for certain sustainability measures (similar to incentives, but acting as a formalized, existing process)
- Grants, rebates, and other kinds of disbursements of funding to willing participants, for certain upgrades

The Advisory Committee will play a critical role in uncovering new tools that the City of Hailey can use to advance a cleaner and less energy-intensive landscape. This is especially important to address, given that residential and commercial energy use is the highest source of greenhouse gas emissions for Hailey.

Waste Reduction

This sector includes efforts to reduce the amount of waste that Hailey generates and ultimately sends to the landfill, Milner Butte, located 100 miles away in Burley. Waste from the Wood River Valley is trucked to Milner Butte each day, multiple times a day. The landfill is operated by Southern Idaho Solid Waste (SISW). SISW is an active and engaged partner for waste management in the Wood River Valley, and they are ambitiously exploring emerging technologies to help reduce landfill growth and emissions impact. This includes methane recapture to power landfill facilities, co-location of wind energy projects at Milner Butte, and single-stream material recovery facilities ("Dirty MRF" – it's worth looking up some videos of how this works. We're not quite there yet, but SISW is working towards it).

For now, the Blaine County Recycle Center at Ohio Gulch accepts a wide variety of items and materials and diverts them from ending up in the landfill. This includes everything from exterior paint and batteries to more traditional materials like metal and cardboard. Building Material and Thrift also has a growing presence at Ohio Gulch, where they provide free drop off for building materials, appliances, and other hard-to-manage items/materials that often get tossed in a dumpster when demolition or construction is occurring. Composting efforts continue to grow in Hailey as well, as demonstrated by the success of the Community Compost Pilot Program. A construction materials recycling requirement is in place for projects in Hailey with an active building permit, although enforcement remains a challenge. Deeper, more systemic changes

with our consumption of single-use materials will be critical for making significant improvements in this area.

Transportation (and Mobility)

The Hailey community values safe, walkable neighborhoods, as well as an interconnected system of bike and foot paths. These values support sustainable transportation by nature. Continuing to enhance Hailey's bike and pedestrian infrastructure remains a top priority for both City Staff and community members. Increasing access to and use of public transit (through Mountain Rides Transportation Authority) and electric vehicles are also addressed through this topic area.

However, not all individuals can realistically swap out all vehicle trips for biking or walking trips (this is often referred to as "mode shift"), nor does every individual or household have access to EVs and charging infrastructure, or a nearby bus stop. Vehicles will continue to be needed for both performing certain jobs and accessing locations of employment that are not near public transit, or within walking or biking distance of start and end points of trips (often referred to as the "last mile"); families with young children and/or the elderly may not feel that biking, walking, or public transit is accessible. One unique consideration for Hailey is just how much our community enjoys recreation. We have been fortunate (in some ways) to see the development of more trails in and around Hailey in recent years, although many vehicle trips are still taken to access points to north. Trail development in Hailey presents yet another sustainability tradeoff to grapple with: the opportunity for less driving to access recreation, and greater equity in access to recreation for the South Valley community, versus the habitat disrupted through trail construction, and the ongoing encroachment of humans into wildlife habitat.

One goal of the SAP is to identify strategies that address these unique realities. While we won't be able to eliminate every single-passenger vehicle trip in Hailey, or transition every vehicle to an EV, where are creative opportunities to switch out *some* of these trips with a more sustainable option? How can we encourage gradual changes in daily patterns and support for sustainable transportation systems, the outcomes of which can stack up significantly over time?

Land and Water

The final sector of Hailey's current sustainability efforts falls within land and water conservation. This topic is highly related to other fields of practice like Land Use, Housing, and even Economic Development. Development standards in the Hailey Municipal Code require developers to balance the construction of new buildings with the preservation and maintenance of park space, as a certain percentage of land or in-lieu funds must be provided for public parks with any new development. The City of Hailey continues to uphold the powerful precedent set by Blaine County's Hillside Overlay Ordinance, which has prohibited development on hillsides and along canyon walls since the 1980s. Hailey also continues a growth pattern that is consistent with the Blaine County Comprehensive Plan, directing growth and density into city cores and downtown areas, instead of continuing sprawl into most canyons and infringing upon agricultural lands.

The Land and Water focus area also covers Hailey's tree population and tree stewardship programming. Street trees in the downtown area must be selected from an arborist-approved species list, and the Public Works Department continues to implement new and improved standard conditions for planting, ensuring maximum tree health and longevity. The Hailey Tree Committee is an appointed citizen committee that was established in 2008, with the

responsibility to promote sound arboricultural practices and tree diversity and to promote public education of proper tree care practices.

Drought-tolerant landscaping, tiered utility billing for water consumption, and time of day/day of week irrigation requirements are the most widely applied code-based tools for water conservation in Hailey. The City of Hailey has also seen recent success in negotiating turf limits for new residential developments on large lots, as well as high efficiency irrigation systems. Water conservation continues to be an area of great public interest in the Hailey community, as demonstrated by surveys in the 2024 Comprehensive Plan Update. City staff are working to leverage partnerships and continue pursuing grant funding to help the community conserve water for current and future community members.

Hailey is ultimately limited in both land and water resources. As the community grows, and the climate trends toward warmer summers and less snowy winters, the Hailey community must remain diligent, creative, and responsive to changing conditions. More proactive measures to conserve the land and water resources we currently have will be necessary to ensure quality of life for future generations. Supporting yard conversion to xeriscape landscaping, placing turf restrictions on new residential development, promoting infill development rather than more sprawl, and ensuring our parks remain healthy and accessible to all are some of the ways that the City of Hailey can help conserve land and water into the future.

New horizons with the SAP: “Nature-based Solutions”

Nature-based solutions are a new topic area for Hailey’s larger approach to sustainability, to be included in the SAP. This topic area speaks toward a connected yet distinct offshoot of the typical practices of sustainability. We can refer to this offshoot as **resilience.** Resilience encompasses the actions, strategies, systems, and even cultures that enable individuals and/or groups (at all scales, depending on the specific situation) to respond to and recover from impacts of climate change. A community with strong resilience is able to respond to and recover from these impacts more quickly, with less negative, long-term consequences for people and the environment, and with less disruption to typical “life”.

One example of resilience that many people living in the intermountain west are familiar with is the practice of “Firewise”. Removing dead or diseased trees and vegetation around your home, thinning stands of trees, trimming low branches, and removing flammable building materials from the home’s exterior are all Firewise strategies. By removing these fuel sources, homeowners are making it less likely that a potential wildfire could encroach upon their home and cause it to catch fire. As the climate changes and we experience potentially more drought and higher temperatures, the odds of wildfire activity and severity increase. Applying Firewise strategies on a home – and especially across an entire community of homes – will mitigate risk of wildfire damage and acute disruption to ecosystems, livelihoods, and human health. A community with more uptake of Firewise strategies across the landscape will be more resilient than a community without these strategies in place.

Nature-based solutions also apply this concept of resilience, using ecosystem services and nature itself to improve a community’s ability to withstand the impacts of climate change. One simple example of a nature-based solution is a bioswale. Bioswales are open-channel shaped areas, often placed around stormwater drains, planted with vegetation and natural ground

cover, such as mulch. These areas absorb water and slow down runoff, when compared to asphalt or pavement surfaces that are typically around storm drains. Bioswales filter a portion of pollutants found in typical streetscape runoff, decreasing input needs and energy required for wastewater treatment. By slowing down runoff and absorbing more water, bioswales also mitigate impacts from large flooding events. When communities develop a system of bioswales and other natural runoff management tools (often referred to as “green stormwater infrastructure”), the community builds its resilience to rain on snow events and flooding – both of which are anticipated climate change impacts in Hailey’s future. Utilizing natural materials and processes to increase resilience is the essence of nature-based solutions.