



County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors

Agenda Item Submittal

From: County Administrative Office

Subject: Strategic Plan Community Indicators

Meeting Date: February 11, 2025

Formal Title: Consider update and presentation on Strategic Plan Community Indicators, and take related actions

Recommended Actions

1. Accept and file update and presentation on Strategic Plan Community Indicators; and
2. Direct the County Administrative Office to integrate indicator targets as one deliverable of the Strategic Plan refresh.

Executive Summary

In November 2019, the Board of Supervisors (Board) identified 25 population indicators to track the County's progress in achieving the vision, mission, and goals of the 2018-2024 Strategic Plan. Through feedback from staff, community stakeholders, and the County's ongoing commitment to equity, we have refined the approach to community indicators to strengthen their relevance, alignment, and impact.

The proposed set of eight indicators aligns with Board-approved initiatives, and simplifies reporting to foster accountability and collective action. The revised indicators emphasize:

- Clarity and alignment with Board-approved initiatives (e.g., Housing for Health Partnership, Climate Action and Adaptation Plan, Master Plan on Aging, etc.).
- Stronger collaboration with County partners to ensure shared accountability and measurable outcomes.
- A focus on equity and narrative storytelling to uplift historically underrepresented voices and showcase community assets.

This update provides an overview of the transition to the new proposed indicators, and how they will inform the Strategic Plan refresh.

Discussion

Background on Community Indicators

In November 2019, the Board identified 25 population indicators (Attachment A) to track the County's progress on the 2018-2024 Strategic Plan. These indicators were allocated across the following five focus areas:

- Comprehensive Health & Safety
- Attainable Housing
- Reliable Transportation
- Sustainable Environment
- Dynamic Economy

These measures provided valuable insights into County priorities. For example, as reported to the Board in August 2024, progress has been made in reducing the homeless population, due in part to aligned contributions through the Housing for Health Partnership. This initiative demonstrates the power of shared accountability and collaboration in achieving systemic change.

Staff have identified areas for improvement in the indicator framework, including:

- Overlapping and duplicative measures across multiple County reports and initiatives.
- A need for stronger alignment with Board-approved strategic efforts to maximize impact.
- A greater emphasis on equity to ensure the experiences of historically marginalized populations are included.

Proposed Revisions to Community Indicators

Research on decision-making and behavioral science shows that when people are presented with too many choices or measures, they can become overwhelmed, leading to decision fatigue, lack of focus, and diminished impact. In the context of strategic planning, an excessive number of indicators can dilute attention and make it difficult for County staff, partners, and the community to prioritize actions that drive meaningful change.

By simplifying and refining the set of indicators, the County can create greater clarity, ensure stronger alignment with Board-approved initiatives, and enhance accountability. A more focused approach allows policymakers to track progress more effectively, allocate resources strategically, and ensure that all stakeholders understand their role in achieving shared goals. With fewer, well-aligned indicators, County agencies, community organizations, and residents can work in concert toward measurable and sustainable improvements.

The eight proposed indicators align with Board-approved initiatives, and simplify reporting to foster accountability and collective action. The updated indicators will align with key County plans, reports, and partnerships, including:

Table 1: Strategic Plan Community Indicators

| Strategic Plan Focus Area | Indicator | Initiative Alignment |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Health and Wellness | Adults who have had a routine checkup | Community Health Improvement Plan |
| Safe and Just Community | Successful return to community | Community Corrections Partnership |
| Attainable Housing and Shelter | Housing units added | Housing for a Healthy Santa Cruz County |
| Reliable Transportation | Pavement Condition Index | Capital Improvement Plan |
| Dynamic Economy | Families living below 200% poverty level | Santa Cruz County State of the Workforce Report |
| Thriving Families (new) | Strong Start Score | First Five Annual Report |

| Strategic Plan Focus Area | Indicator | Initiative Alignment |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Sustainable Environment | Greenhouse Gas Emissions | Climate Action and Adaptation Plan |
| County Demographics | Population by age | Master Plan on Aging |

By selecting one key indicator per Strategic Plan focus area as shown in Table 1, the County ensures that each measure is directly aligned to a Board-approved initiative or policy. For example, rather than tracking multiple housing-related measures separately, the "Housing units added" indicator is now directly aligned with the Housing for a Healthy Santa Cruz County initiative, ensuring that all efforts to expand housing stock are evaluated through a shared, measurable goal. This approach allows County staff and partners to focus on meaningful contributions to housing availability, and encourages partners and the community to learn more by engaging with an initiative or policy directly. By taking this same targeted, initiative-driven approach across all focus areas, the County is making it easier for stakeholders to see how their work contributes to larger strategic goals, leading to greater coordination, more actionable insights, and stronger collective impact.

Additionally, extensive stakeholder engagement—including discussions with the Circle on Anti-Racism, Economic, and Social Justice, the County's Data and Equity Committee, initiative and policy leaders, and community partners—has emphasized the importance of simplifying the indicators and using data and narrative to create alignment and impact.

Next Steps and Strategic Plan Refresh

The next step in this process is to gather feedback from the Board on these proposed indicators, ensuring they reflect the County's priorities and effectively address the challenges we face. Board input will help determine whether these measures capture the full scope of the County's work or if there are key areas that need to be adjusted or expanded. Once the indicators are finalized, they will be integrated into the Strategic Plan refresh, providing a clear framework for tracking progress and aligning efforts across County departments and community partners.

Additionally, through ongoing community outreach, staff will work to validate these indicators with residents and stakeholders, ensuring they resonate with lived experiences and reflect community priorities. The final step will be to move beyond measurement by setting targets, allowing the County to track progress over time, drive meaningful action, and create accountability for achieving results.

Financial Impact

There is no financial impact from the recommended action.

Strategic Initiatives

Equity Framework - Plans, Policies & Budgets, Communications & Education,
Community Voices & Partnership
Operational Plan - Operational Excellence
Climate Action - Government Operations

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Recommended By:

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Artificial Intelligence Acknowledgment:

ChatGPT 4o, an Artificial Intelligence (AI) large language model tool, significantly contributed to the development of this agenda item, including Staff Report, in compliance with the County of Santa Cruz AI Appropriate Use Policy.