Building Energy Policy: Stakeholder Working Group Results and Key Takeaways

Presentation for Climate, City Services, & Infrastructure Committee
6.9.2026

Green Cincinnati Plan Goals

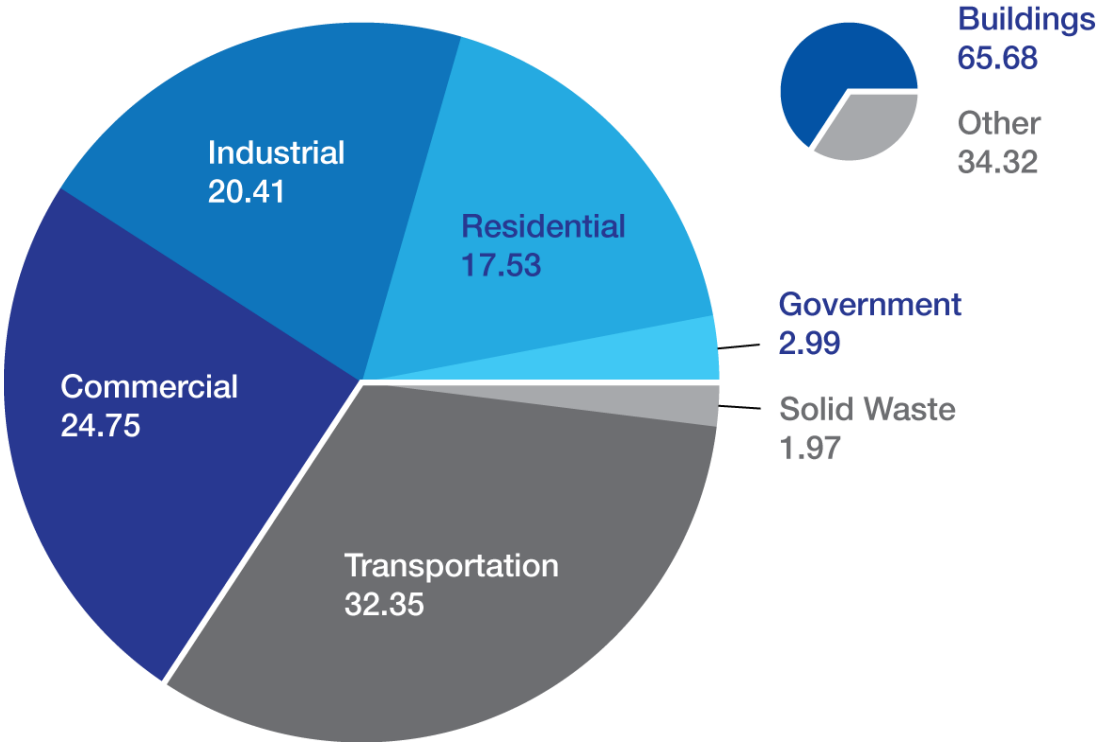
50%

REDUCTION IN CARBON EMISSIONS BY 2030

100%

CARBON NEUTRALITY BY 2050

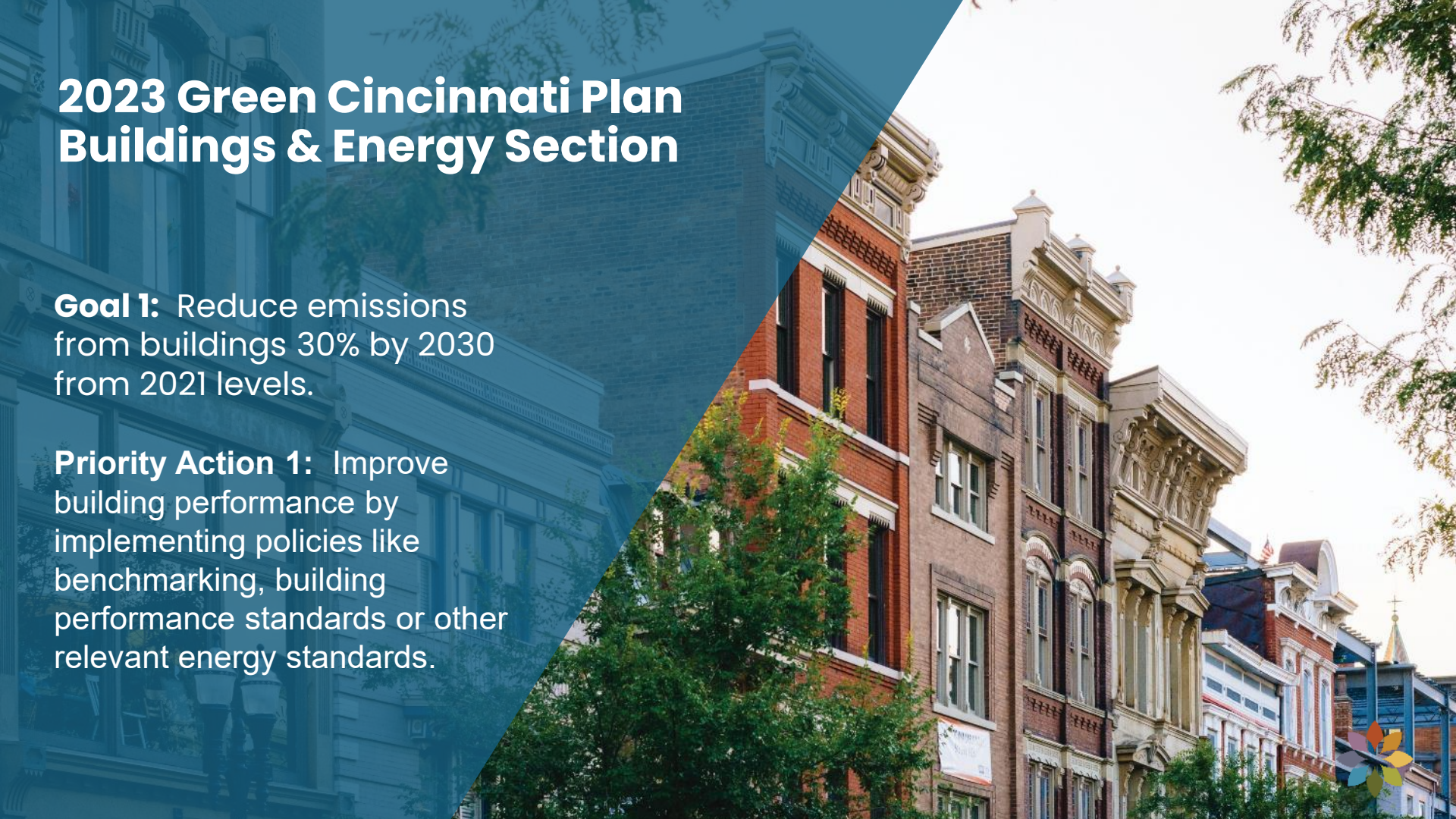
Cincinnati Carbon Profile



2023 Green Cincinnati Plan Buildings & Energy Section

Goal 1: Reduce emissions from buildings 30% by 2030 from 2021 levels.

Priority Action 1: Improve building performance by implementing policies like benchmarking, building performance standards or other relevant energy standards.

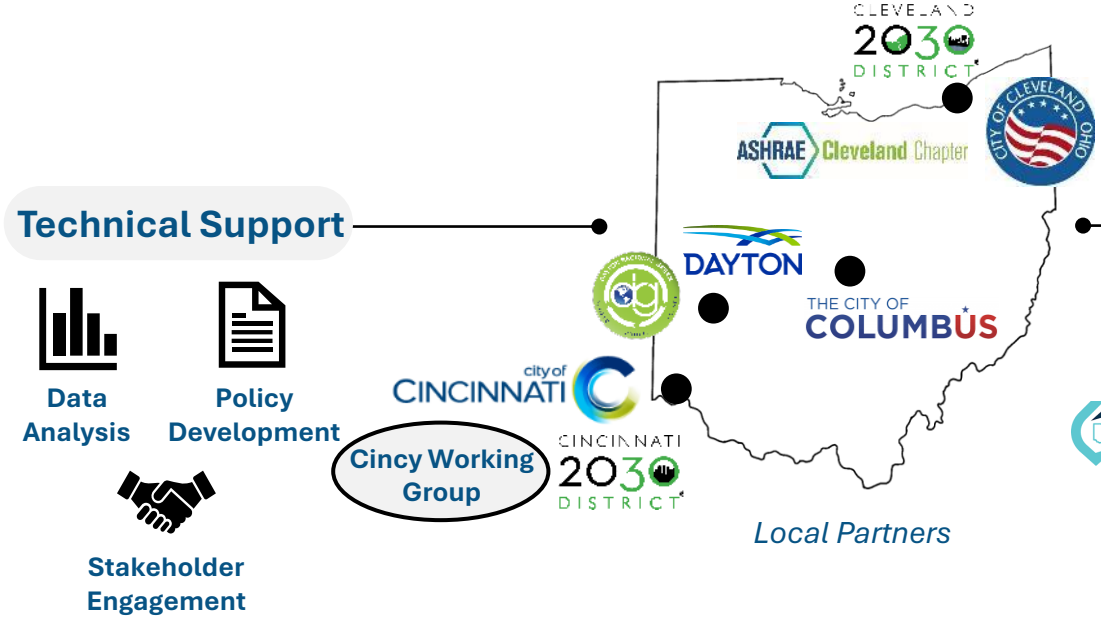


Department of Energy

Resilient and Efficient Codes Implementation Grant

Technical Support

- Data Analysis
- Policy Development
- Stakeholder Engagement



Local Partners

Collaborative Network

University of CINCINNATI

gosustainable energy

Power A Clean Future Ohio
LOCAL COMMUNITIES LEADING THE WAY

Ohio Environmental Council

OHIO AIR QUALITY DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

MEEA
MIDWEST ENERGY EFFICIENCY ALLIANCE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Statewide, Regional and Federal Partners

Goals of RECI Grant

- Engaging building owners and energy professionals
- Collecting input to shape future policies
- Recognizing that policies must work for building owners and the City
- Improving the city's building stock

Building Energy Policy Overview

What is Energy Benchmarking?

Definition: Energy benchmarking is a policy that requires buildings to report their energy usage on an annual basis.

Key Things to Know:

- Addresses existing buildings (typically largest ones)
- Uses metered energy data
- Enables building owners to understand their building's energy performance relative to similar buildings

What is a Building Performance Standard?

Definition: A Building Performance Standard (BPS) is a policy that requires existing buildings to meet a stated energy or emissions target by a specified date.

Key Things to Know:

- Only addresses existing buildings (typically largest ones)
- Specifies a target, but does not prescribe how to meet it
- Offers multiple compliance pathways
- Uses metered energy data, not modeled or estimated (outcome-based)
- Accompanied by technical and financial support programs

Benchmarking is the foundation for future building energy policies

Data | **Action**

Benchmarking

- Collect data
- Compare to peers
- Publicly disclose
- *~3-8% savings*[1]

Building Performance Standards

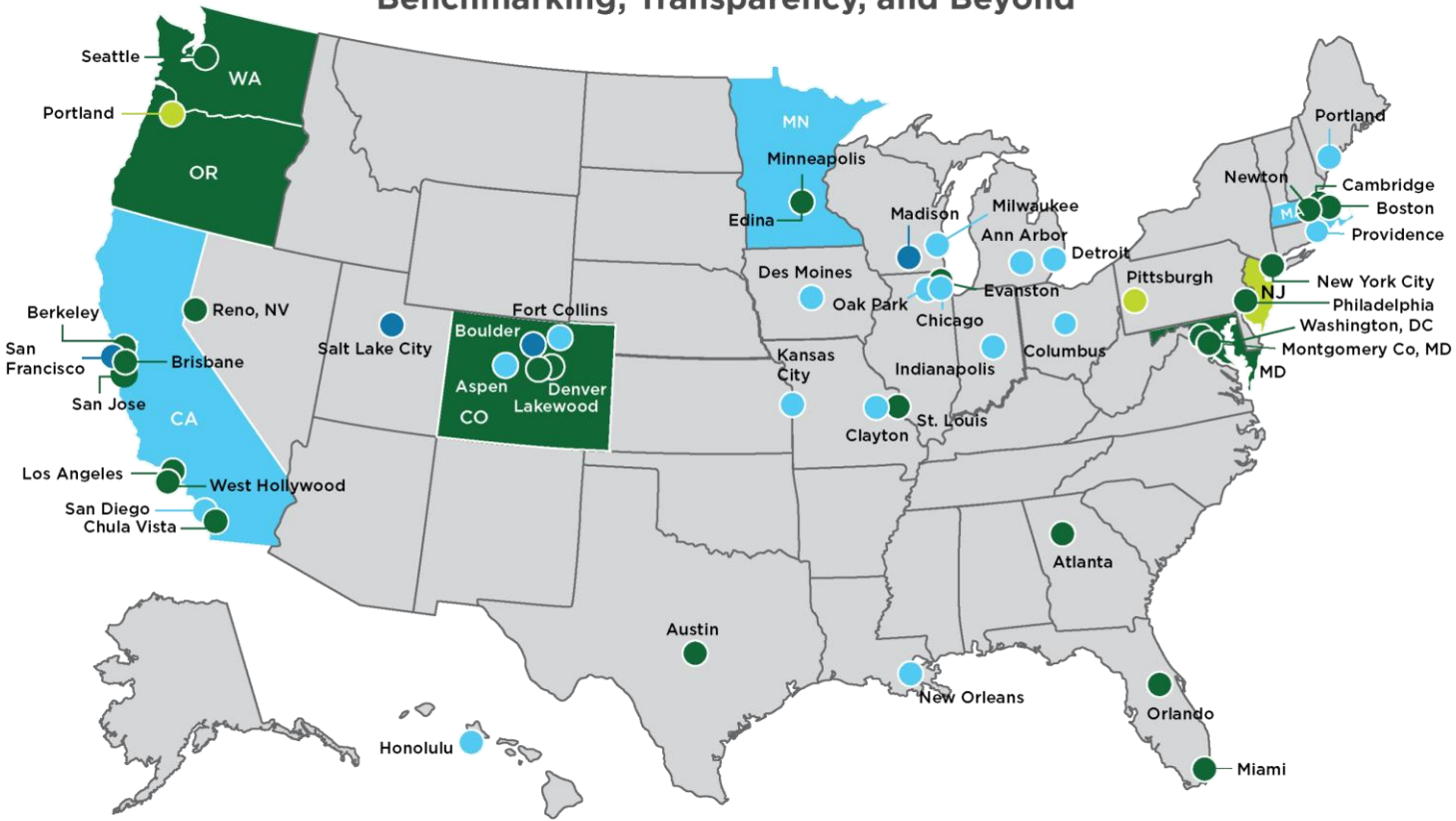
- Set performance target
- Action to meet target
- Technical and financial support for action
- *~25-45% savings*[2,3]

[1]N. Mims, S. R. Schiller, E. Stuart, L. Schwartz, C. Kramer, and R. Faesy, "Evaluation of U.S. Building Energy Benchmarking and Transparency Programs: Attributes, Impacts, and Best Practices," Lawrence Berkeley National Lab. 2017. https://doi.org/10.2172/1393621

[2]A.L. Webb, C. McConnell, Evaluating the feasibility of achieving building performance standards targets, Energy and Buildings. (2023) 112989. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enbuild.2023.112989.

[3]S. Nadel and A. Hinge, "Mandatory building performance standards: A key policy for achieving climate goals," ACEEE, 2020. https://www.aceee.org/white-paper/2020/06/mandatory-building-performance-standards-key-policy-achieving-climate-goals

U.S. City, County, and State Policies for Existing Buildings: Benchmarking, Transparency, and Beyond



- Benchmarking required for public and commercial buildings
- Benchmarking required for public, commercial, and multifamily buildings
- Benchmarking and additional actions required for public and commercial buildings
- Benchmarking and additional actions required for public, commercial, and multifamily buildings

IMT
INSTITUTE FOR MARKET TRANSFORMATION

Many Midwest jurisdictions have already enacted benchmarking and BPS to improve existing buildings

Mandatory Benchmarking Ordinances
- Ann Arbor, MI
- Chicago, IL
- Clayton, MO
- Columbus, OH
- Des Moines, IA
- Detroit, MI
- Edina, MN
- Indianapolis and Marion County, IN
- Kansas City, MO
- Madison, WI
- Milwaukee, WI
- Minneapolis, MN
- Oak Park, IL
- St. Louis, MO

BPS and Benchmarking Ordinances
- Evanston, IL
- St. Louis, MO

Voluntary Benchmarking Program
- Grand Rapids, MI

**Stripes indicate statewide benchmarking*

MAP: https://www.mwalliance.org/building-efficiency/building-performance-standards

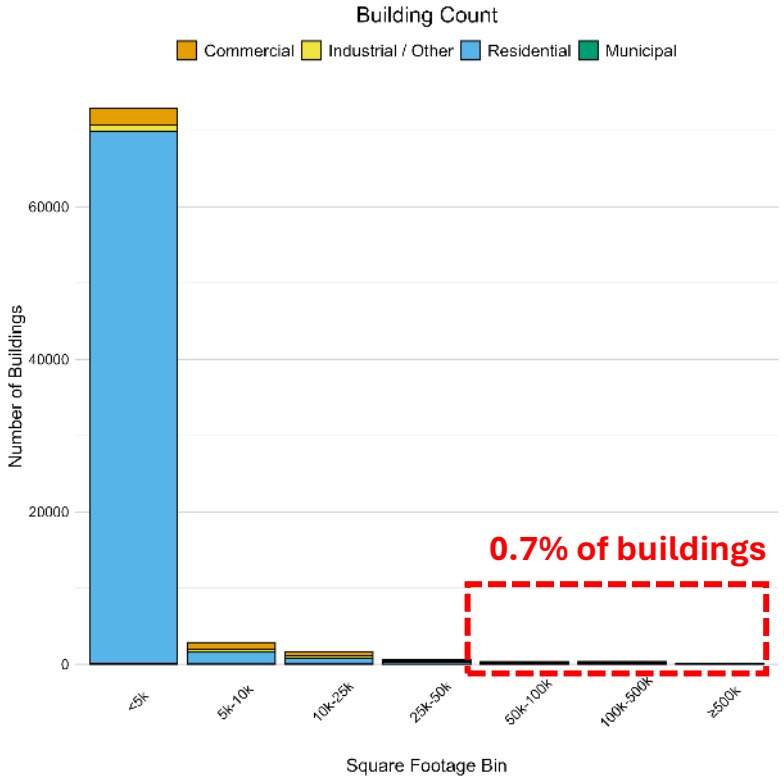
Building Energy Policy Benefits*

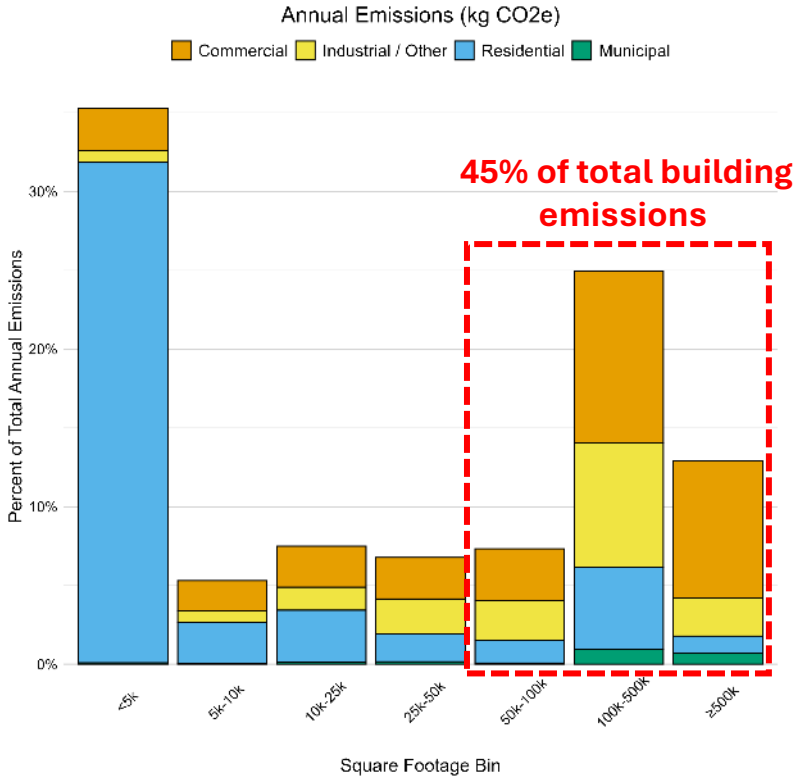
- Measuring and gaining awareness of a building's energy use leads to a reduction in energy use.
- Tenants are increasingly willing to pay more for energy efficient spaces.
- Tenants are more likely to rent and remain in energy efficient spaces
- High-performing buildings are safer investments for lenders.
- Competitive advantages of efficient buildings translate into higher overall value in the market place and higher sales prices.
- Government can gain a better understanding of its jurisdictions' building stock.
- Assist in development of long-term strategy for grid, generation, and energy storage.

Institute for Market Transformation. "The Benefits of Benchmarking Building Performance." December 2015. https://imt.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/PCC_Benefits_of_Benchmarking.pdf

Building Data

Cincinnati's largest buildings are few in number but account for almost half of total building emissions





Policy scenarios analyzed: Example buildings

Scenario Type	Scenario Label	Office	Multifamily	Historic	Municipal*
Baseline	Baseline ≥ 100k ft^2	*The Hixon Building* 133,000 ft^2 	*Walnut Hills Apartments* 125,934 ft^2 	*Cincinnati Music Hall* 225,000 ft^2 	*Cincinnati City Hall* 176,180 ft^2 
Floor area	≥ 50k ft^2	*Hyde Park Center* 60,000 ft^2 	*The Roanoke* 61,746 ft^2 	*Hanke Building* 60,596 ft^2 	*Police Ops Center* 53,006 ft^2 
	≥ 500k ft^2	*Procter & Gamble HQ* 836,000 ft^2 	*Current at the Banks* 510,579 ft^2 	*Union Terminal* ~500,000 ft^2 	*Convention Center* 875,730 ft^2 

*Municipal buildings ≥ 10k ft^2 and < 50k ft^2 include recreation centers and fire/police stations.

Stakeholder Engagement Process and Takeaways

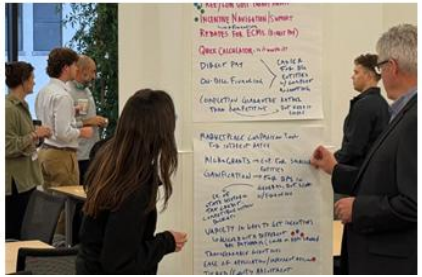
Stakeholder Working Group

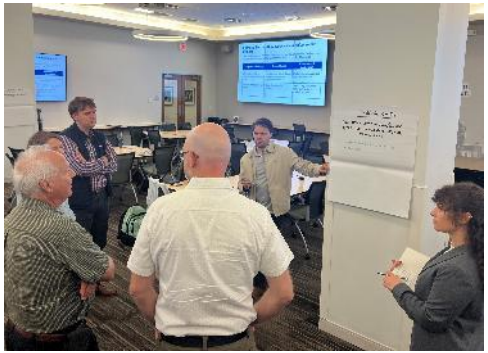
Convened by the University of Cincinnati over the summer to provide feedback on building energy policies

Over 50 participants

Meeting topics included:

- Components of a policy
- Incentives
- Alternate Compliance Pathways
- Enforcement





Stakeholder Input

- Climate goals cannot be achieved without strategies to reduce emissions from commercial buildings
- Energy costs are core concern for residents, business operations and competition
- Building operators want low-cost and low-friction ways to reduce costs and emissions
- Some building owners understand their energy usage well, many operators are not tracking energy use closely

Key themes from working group meetings

Large buildings are complex

- Long-term capital cycles
- Multiple meters that must be aggregated

Multiple compliance pathways are needed

- Policies must recognize that buildings are different

Incentives drive success

- Free or subsidized energy audits
- Enhance programs to support building energy policies

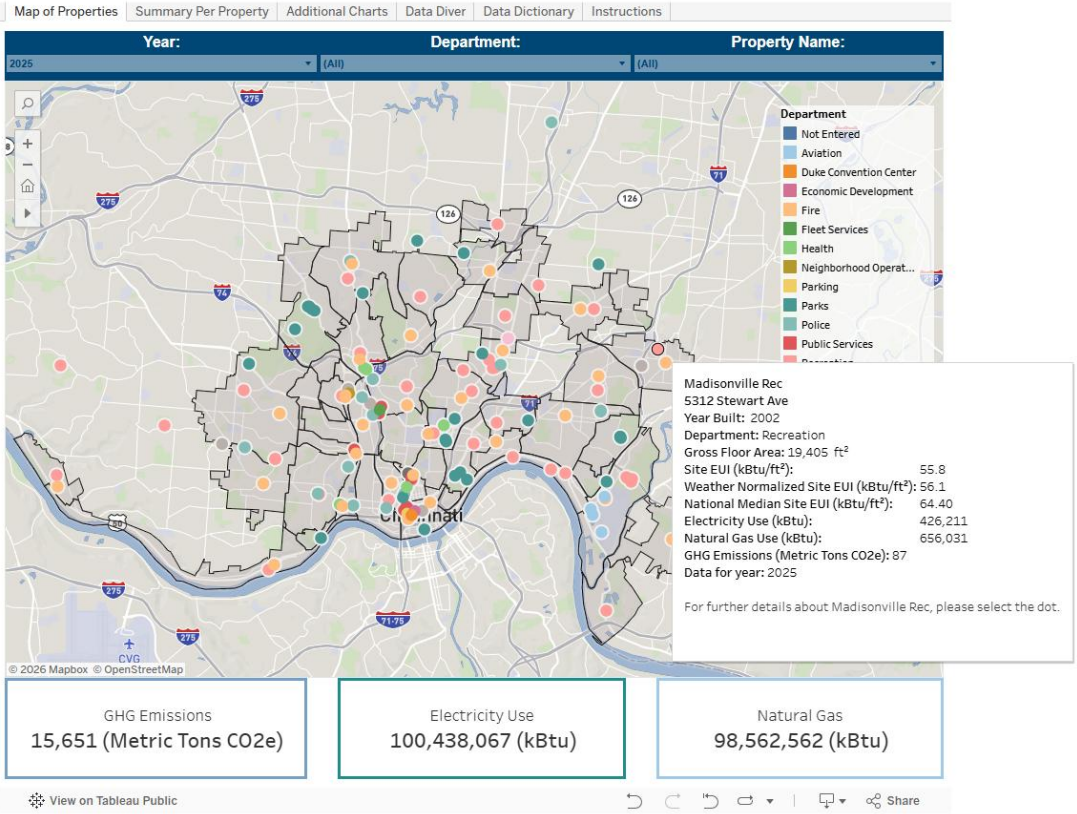
Ease of use is key

- Data submission and reporting
- Clearly defining the program, targets, and pathways

Key Takeaways

- Energy Benchmarking is a good first step to understand building stock & inform future policies
  - Start with municipal buildings and buildings 100,000 ft^2 and larger, consider 50,000 ft^2 in the future
- Additional stakeholder engagement would strengthen building performance standards consideration
  - Goal – develop BPS components & process with building operators and design professionals

CINCINNATI ENERGY BENCHMARKING



Potential Next Steps

Potential Next Steps to a Building Energy Policy

Energy Benchmarking Ordinance

Establish an energy benchmarking program requiring buildings over 100,000 square feet to report annual energy use

1

Form a Technical Committee

Create a technical committee to conduct outreach and develop recommendations for a building energy policy

2

Building Energy Performance Ordinance

Use the recommendations presented by the technical committee to develop the final building energy policy

3

Conclusions

- Energy Benchmarking is a foundational step to advance climate goals
- Data will inform energy affordability strategies and policy incentives
- RECI Team will continue to evaluate building energy policies in Ohio cities

Questions?