SUSTAINABILITY ACTION PLAN

FALL 2025

MARIST UNIVERSITY

Executive Summary

As Marist University enters its second century directed by the *Marist 100* strategic plan, this **Sustainability Action Plan** serves as a strategic framework for embedding sustainability into the fabric of campus life. Building on a legacy of environmental stewardship and rooted in the three guiding pillars of *Academic Vibrancy, Student Centrality,* and *Expansive Community,* the plan reflects Marist's enduring commitment to educational excellence, environmental responsibility, social equity, and institutional resilience.

- **Academic Vibrancy** is reflected in the integration of sustainability across disciplines, curricula, and research. The plan supports innovative teaching, interdisciplinary collaboration, and faculty development to foster a learning environment where sustainability is explored with intellectual rigor and creativity.

- **Student Centrality** infuses all aspects of the Sustainability Action Plan, ensuring that students are not only beneficiaries of sustainable practices but also active participants in shaping them. Through hands-on learning, leadership opportunities, and inclusive engagement, the plan empowers students to become sustainability champions both on campus and beyond.

- **Expansive Community** guides the plan's emphasis on collaboration and outreach. By building partnerships with local organizations, global networks, and diverse campus stakeholders, the Sustainability Action Plan positions Marist as a leader in sustainable innovation and community impact.

Together, these pillars ensure that the Sustainability Action Plan is not just a roadmap for operational change, but a transformative vision for Marist's future—one that honors its legacy while advancing a more sustainable, inclusive, and vibrant university community.

Vision and Purpose

The *Marist 100* Strategic Plan lays out a bold and transformative goal: improving the world through education. This action plan affirms that goal and looks to the role of sustainability in achieving such a vision, acknowledging both the challenges and opportunities posed by the environment of the 21st century. It takes seriously the degree of threat posed by complex environmental issues such as climate change, while recognizing the power of innovation to address them. It centers sustainability as a core part of our educational mission, integrating it into academic programs, operational decisions, and campus culture, and in so doing, better preparing students for a lifetime of impact in a rapidly changing world. It also lays out the ways in which investments in sustainable education and practices are a strategic imperative for a financially sustainable future, providing Marist a competitive advantage in the recruitment and retention of talented students, faculty, and staff and making Marist a more operationally efficient institution through the reduction of waste.

Process and Participation

Developed by a 19-member Sustainability Action Planning Committee (SAPC), the plan reflects over a year of broad community engagement, including student, faculty, staff, and alumni input through surveys, events, and working groups. The result is a bold, inclusive, and data-informed framework for action.

Strategic Framework: Four Pillars, Fourteen Goals

1. **Education & Research**
   - Integrate sustainability across the curriculum
   - Expand experiential learning in sustainability
   - Promote sustainability-focused research and innovation
   - Foster a culture of sustainability in academic and student life

2. **Energy, Greenhouse Gases & Transportation**
   - Reduce GHG emissions: commitment to net-zero by 2050
   - Increase renewable energy usage
   - Promote sustainable commuting and transit
   - Monitor and report GHG profile and energy usage

3. **Buildings, Grounds & Lands**
   - Develop and maintain energy-efficient and sustainable building
   - Implement sustainable and eco-friendly grounds management
   - Promote responsible land stewardship and conservation

4. **Food, Water & Waste**
   - Improve food sustainability and conservation
   - Improve water conservation and quality
   - Expand recycling, composting, and waste reduction

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

To drive accountability, the plan recommends adopting the established Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (STARS) metrics across experiential learning, green building, energy use, emissions reduction, and more. The STARS KPIs will guide reporting and enable Marist to measure progress over time within the higher education community.

Resources and Implementation

The plan recommends targeted investments in student engagement, research support, infrastructure, professional development, and staffing support. These recommendations are mindful of the University's need to simultaneously invest in other mission- and *Marist 100*-aligned priorities and are intended to be made in ways that demonstrate fiscal prudence, ensuring that our sustainability efforts are themselves sustainable. A data and reporting framework will ensure transparency and drive continuous improvement.

Looking Ahead

This plan represents only the beginning. Over the next five years, Marist will build the foundation for long-term sustainability leadership—integrating environmental responsibility into institutional identity and daily operations. Progress will be reviewed regularly, and a new planning process will be launched with the next strategic planning cycle.

Introduction

Marist University's location along the banks of the Hudson River has shaped its rich connection to the natural world and environmental history. The river and its surrounding valley have inspired groundbreaking environmental protections that continue to influence national policy, thanks to the efforts of pioneering grassroots organizations. The landmark Storm King Mountain lawsuit launched the modern environmental movement, efforts that continue under the leadership of groups such as Scenic Hudson, Riverkeeper, and Hudson River Sloop Clearwater. Today, the region is renowned for its natural beauty, and its resources provide the Marist community with nourishment, recreation, and opportunities for scientific inquiry. The Hudson River Valley Institute at Marist was established in 2002 to study and interpret the diverse history of the region often referred to as "the landscape that defined America."

This commitment to environmental stewardship extends from the local to the global, as Marist aims to improve the world through education. In its most recent report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reported that "there is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a livable and sustainable future for all." With broad scientific consensus about the causes and consequences of climate change, the report also makes clear that transformational change is still possible. As an institution of higher learning with its own ecological footprint, Marist University has both the resources and responsibility to boldly address this and other environmental challenges. Indeed, research shows that today's students are demanding such action, with 85% reporting that it is either "very important" or "somewhat important" to them that their college prioritize environmental sustainability.[1] Demonstrating a concrete and sustained commitment to sustainability will assist in attracting and retaining students. In recognition of this, the University's strategic plan, *Marist 100,* established environmental stewardship as a key foundational approach underlying the plan's three pillars of Academic Vibrancy, Student Centrality and Expansive Community. When launched in Fall 2023, *Marist 100* committed the university to developing our first comprehensive Sustainability Action Plan within two years.

1 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. AR6 Synthesis report. 2023. www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr

The process of creating this plan has afforded the Marist community the opportunity to recognize our many and varied efforts to promote sustainability over the years. Since 2007, the Campus Sustainability Advisory Committee—under the guidance of students, staff and faculty—has recommended sustainability initiatives related to research and education, campus operations, and community stewardship. Each year, the committee hosts an Earth Week celebration and other activities related to environmental awareness, recycling, and local clean-up efforts. The campus physical plant has worked to improve efficiency and conservation through actions including adaptive reuse of existing structures during construction, solar installation on select buildings, conversion of light fixtures to LED technology, conversion to heat pumps when gas boilers are due for replacement, and the planting of drought-resistant native species. Throughout the 2019–2020 academic year, a group of Sustainability Fellows formed to innovate and promote sustainability across the curriculum. One outcome of this endeavor was the development of a new, interdisciplinary Environmental Studies major, which complements the existing Environmental Science and Policy curriculum. Despite these important activities, sustainability efforts on campus remain siloed and lack long-term vision. There is much more that we can achieve with coordinated, purposeful action aimed at specific goals. This plan outlines ways to both broaden and deepen the university's commitment to sustainability, recognizing that "Marist has a moral obligation to responsibly steward its natural environment" *(Marist 100).*

Doing so means integrating sustainability as a mindset across university activities and operations. This plan serves as a first step towards intentional, coordinated sustainability planning at Marist. It celebrates our achievements to date, while recognizing that the task of responsible environmental stewardship is never over and will require regular updating and renewed commitment. To achieve this vision, Marist will ensure that environmental sustainability is central to all considerations about future planning and investments in physical and technological infrastructure. The University is also committed to exploring academic and co-curricular intersections that engage students, faculty, and staff with sustainability and climate change. This framework will help the University make prudent decisions, reduce its impact on the environment, and bring sustainability considerations to the forefront of problem solving and decision making. The plan that follows directs such efforts over the short and long term, creating a blueprint for comprehensive action. While the challenges facing the globe are significant, they also present opportunities. As Marist University enters its second century, this plan illustrates that the institution is prepared to embrace these opportunities and lead with purpose.

Sustainability at Marist

While this plan marks the first time Marist has implemented university-wide guidelines for advancing sustainability, it is by no means our first effort. The University has been committed to sustainability since introducing its Environmental Science and Policy degree in the 1972-1973 academic year. Over the years, we have launched numerous initiatives to conserve resources and minimize our environmental impact. The timeline below highlights some of our most recent and significant actions.

1997	13-acre Fern Tor nature preserve land purchased
2007	Campus Sustainability Advisory Committee established
2007	Composting program established in dining hall
2011	First vegetative roof installed on the Hancock building
2015	First LED lighting and occupancy sensors installed in Lowell Thomas building
2016	First stormwater bioswale at the site of the Allied Health building
2016	Inaugural campus e-waste recycling event collected more than 15,000 lbs.
2017	Marist Ethical Fashion Initiative established by students
2022	First Electric Vehicle (ev) purchased
2022	Student Government Association Sustainability Vice President and Student Sustainability Board created
2023	Interdisciplinary Environmental Studies major launched
2023	Solar panel installation on Midrise residence hall
2023	EV charging stations installed
2024	Sustainability Action Planning Committee formed
2025	Sustainability Action Plan launched

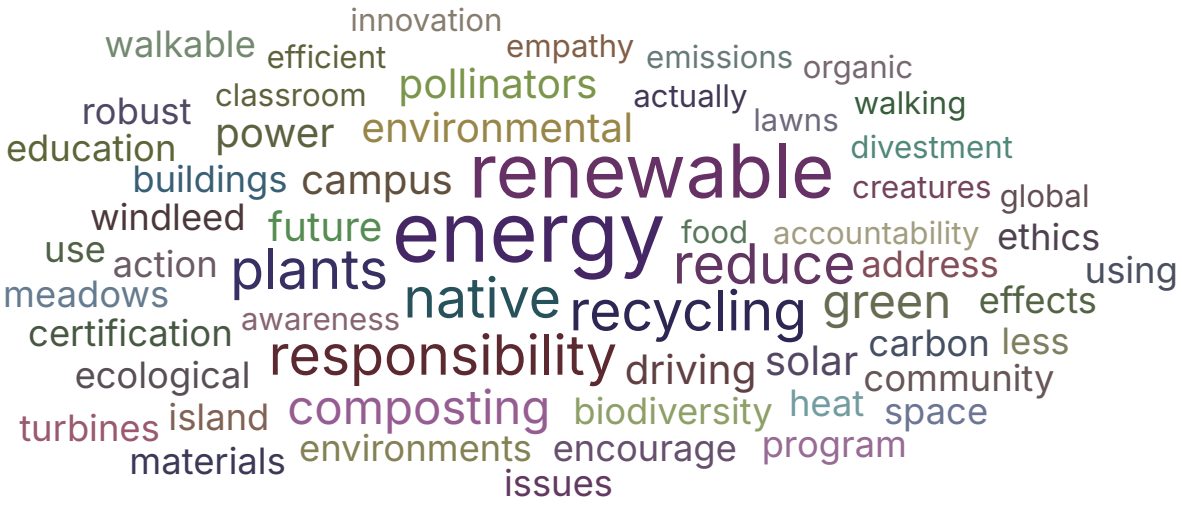
The Sustainability Action Planning Committee

Building upon this strong foundation, SAPC convened in Fall 2024. The committee was made up of 19 members, including students, faculty and staff. This diverse group includes representation from every school within the university as well as key operational areas including the Physical Plant, dining, Residence Life, Information Technology, International Education, and the General Counsel and Community & Belonging offices. Per the committee's charge established in the University's strategic plan, the goal was to develop a comprehensive sustainability action plan within two years of the adoption of *Marist 100,* establishing a deadline of Fall 2025. The committee thus embarked upon a year-long effort to assess existing actions, gather information including benchmarking other institutions, collect input from the Marist community, and develop a set of strategies for moving forward. The following illustrates the SAPC's actions over the course of the 2024-2025 Academic Year.

- **September 2024:** SAPC convenes
- **October 2024:** Campus-wide sustainability event introduces Marist to the SAPC and launches online survey
- **October–November 2024:** Online sustainability survey collects input from Marist community (students, faculty, staff and alumni) on current sustainability performance and future priorities
- **November–December 2024:** SAPC meets with internal and external experts with specialties in physical plant, sustainability planning, and grant seeking
- **January 2025:** Committee creates four working groups (Education & Research; Energy, Greenhouse Gases & Transportation; Buildings, Lands & Grounds; and Food, Water & Waste) to develop goals and strategies
- **April 2025:** Draft report produced
- **June–August 2025:** Key stakeholders provide feedback on draft report

This process resulted in rich discussions among the Marist community. The online survey results reveal that there is broad consensus among community members that sustainability is an imperative goal for Marist. More than 84% of survey participants reported that sustainability is either "important" or "very important" for Marist. Asked to rate our performance in the areas of outdoor environment, transportation, buildings, dining services, and general campus sustainability, survey takers expressed their belief that we are doing best in promoting sustainability around the outdoor environment, receiving a score of 3.43 out of 5. General campus sustainability received the lowest rating, at 3.06 out of 5. These results may in part be explained by the fact that there is clearly a need to do much better at communicating what steps are already being taken at Marist to advance sustainability. Only 21% of respondents stated that they were either 'very familiar' or 'familiar' with Marist's sustainability initiatives, with 79% saying they were only 'somewhat familiar' or 'not familiar' with such actions. Additional data were gathered at the October sustainability event, where participants were asked to contribute their perspective on what "sustainability" should mean for Marist. The results are displayed in the word cloud below.

What should "sustainability" mean for Marist?



Moreover, sustainability is on the mind of prospective students before they ever reach campus. According to the Princeton Review, 77% of college applicants reported that a school's environmental commitment would influence their decision to apply or attend, with 37% stating that this information would influence them "strongly" or "very much."[2] Today's students want to attend a university that takes such issues seriously and prepares them to have an impact. They are looking for institutions that align with their values, especially around climate change, social equity, and community responsibility. Despite this clear demand, only 23% of current college students feel that their own college is "very sustainable."[3] This gap presents an opportunity for Marist to distinguish itself in its strong commitment to environmental sustainability. To do so, the university must communicate the strides we're taking to meet this demand and commit to ambitious future action. As can be seen from the brief history of sustainability at Marist described above, we are starting from a position of strength, with high (and growing) participation levels in sustainability-related courses and majors, faculty-mentored research, community-based service learning, infusion of sustainability in key study abroad programs, and the presence of vibrant student organizations focused on climate justice, waste reduction, and sustainable living. To further position sustainability as a distinctive feature of a Marist education, this plan helps us to tell this story and to write the next chapter of sustainability at Marist University.

2 The Princeton Review *Guide to Green Colleges: 2023 edition*. https://www.princetonreview.com/press/green-guide/press-release-2023.

3 College Pulse (2022) "Sustainable Campuses Study." https://insights.collegepulse.com/vault/question/636bbd2c-7cec11001967708b?token=eyJ0eXAiOiJKV1QiLCJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJpc3MiOiI2M2EwOTFmYTBlYjQwMDAw-MTliOTgxMTMiLCJleHAiOjI1MzU0Njc1MTQ3MzZ9.qsBGPlrm5YTgRmN2qjPvjsvmw4yfsISK8vJKUj_X4Jo&submissionGuid=02c03231-da65-44f5-b859-4aa23076343b.

Considering the insights gained from our year-long planning process, this action plan lays out fourteen goals organized within the following four pillars:

The Four Pillars of Marist Sustainability

EDUCATION & RESEARCH

ENERGY, GREENHOUSE GASES & TRANSPORTATION

BUILDINGS, GROUNDS & LAND

FOOD, WATER & WASTE

An Education-First Approach

The Committee believes that our sustainability plan should be closely aligned with Marist University's mission: to help students develop the intellect, character, and skills necessary for students to lead enlightened, ethical, and productive lives in the global community of the 21st century. To ensure this alignment, the plan's guiding principles are rooted in education and research, serving as the foundation for all sustainability initiatives. These principles should be prominently integrated into every aspect of sustainability efforts at Marist University. By embedding sustainability into teaching and scholarship, the plan directly contributes to *Marist 100's* pillar of Academic Vibrancy. The plan promises to enrich curricula, foster interdisciplinary research, and inspire innovation that prepares students to address complex environmental and social challenges.

I. Education & Research

Goal #1. Integrate Sustainability across the Curriculum

To ensure that all students graduate with a foundational understanding of sustainability, Marist University is committed to embedding sustainability education across disciplines. This initiative ensures that sustainability is not confined to environmental science and studies majors but is accessible to all students, aligning with broader institutional sustainability goals.

Recommended Initiatives:

- **Develop climate literacy** through the exploration of ways to embed climate literacy in the educational outcomes of all Marist students and, on a longer term, through the development of interdisciplinary sustainability certificate programs.
- **Incorporate sustainability education** by embedding sustainability topics into existing courses across disciplines and encouraging all academic departments to integrate them into their curricula.
- **Expand support for faculty** engagement through the expansion of faculty development programs, such as the Sustainability Faculty Fellows program.

Goal #2. Expand Experiential Learning in Sustainability

Sustainability education at Marist should be hands-on, immersive, and community-engaged, providing students with real-world applications of sustainability principles.

Recommended Initiatives:

- **Utilize the campus as a "living lab,"** developing campus-based sustainability projects in energy efficiency, waste management, and biodiversity.
- **Increase student participatio**n in sustainability-related activities by engaging them in tracking and reporting on Marist's progress toward goals and, on a longer timeline, by integrating sustainability tracking into coursework.
- **Strengthen experiential learning opportunities** by offering sustainability-related work-study positions, integrating sustainability components into study-abroad programs, collaborating with the Center for Civic Engagement and Leadership, and developing robust service-learning partnerships with regional organizations.

Goal #3. Promote Sustainability-Focused Research and Innovation

Sustainability research is essential to Marist's academic mission, engaging faculty and students in solutions-oriented projects that address global sustainability challenges.

Recommended Initiatives:

- **Support faculty and student research** by expanding seed funding for faculty sustainability research, launching a Student Sustainability Grant Program, developing sustainability-focused proposal writing workshops, and creating a faculty research networking platform.
- **Align research efforts with national and global organizations** by encouraging faculty to align research with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- **Increase external funding and Marist's research reputation** by assessing the feasibility of a Center for Sustainability Research and by positioning Marist as a national leader in sustainability research.

Goal #4. Foster a Culture of Sustainability in Academic and Student Life

To ensure long-term engagement, sustainability must be embedded in student life, campus culture, and institutional policies and practices.

Recommended Initiatives:

- **Establish institutional sustainability education** by developing and implementing a sustainability training module for students, faculty, and staff and enhancing student involvement in sustainability reporting and planning.
- **Increase student leadership and establish Marist as a national leader in student sustainability engagement** by expanding student-led sustainability groups and available resourcing for projects.
- **Ensure transparency, affordability, and equity** by ensuring sustainability initiatives do not increase financial burdens on students.

II. Energy, Greenhouse Gases (GHG) & Transportation

Goal #1: Reduce GHG Emissions—Commitment to Net Zero by 2050

Reducing GHG emissions is vital to supporting climate resilience and promoting public health. By committing to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050, Marist University not only aligns with peer institutions and global efforts to build a more sustainable future but also advances the *Marist 100* pillar of Expansive Community. This commitment reflects our responsibility to care for the well-being of people both locally and globally, fostering connections that transcend campus boundaries, aligning with peer institutions, and cultivating a culture of shared environmental stewardship.

Recommended Initiatives:

- **Audit the University's carbon footprint,** engaging a qualified consultant to evaluate Marist's Scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions and establish a comprehensive baseline.
- **Establish clear goals for GHG reductions,** using audit results to inform goal setting and developing a phased GHG reduction plan aligned with regional and national benchmarks and financial best practices.
- **Develop awareness programs** by launching awareness campaigns and behavioral incentive programs to encourage the community to reduce energy consumption and adopt sustainable habits.
- **Forge partnerships and memberships,** collaborating with regional utility providers and stakeholders across the non-profit, academic, and private sectors to pursue energy efficiency and renewable integration and pursuing relevant state and federal energy-efficiency and clean-energy grants.
- **Utilize smart energy systems,** implementing smart grids and energy management tools to improve operational efficiency and inform future energy strategies.

Goal #2: Increase Renewable Energy Usage

Expanding the use of renewable energy reduces dependence on fossil fuels and supports a resilient energy future. Marist seeks to integrate on-campus renewable energy solutions while exploring external partnerships and procurement opportunities to amplify impact.

Recommended Initiatives:

- **Engage with experts,** working with internal and external specialists to identify and implement opportunities for renewable energy integration.
- **Investigate renewable energy collaboratives,** exploring solar, geothermal and other renewable energy partnerships.
- **Pursue renewable energy projects** by expanding on-campus solar energy systems and evaluating the feasibility of geothermal or other clean technologies.
- **Explore battery storage solutions** by assessing the potential solutions that enhance campus resilience and grid flexibility.

Goal #3: Promote Sustainable Commuting and Transit

Transportation emissions are a significant contributor to overall campus GHG emissions. Encouraging sustainable commuting options and transitioning to cleaner vehicle technologies can reduce GHG emissions while promoting health and accessibility.

Recommended Initiatives:

- **Evaluate the campus vehicle fleet** regularly and prioritize low-emission vehicle procurement (e.g., hybrids and EVs). On a longer timeline, pursue a transition to 20% of the overall campus fleet vehicles being EVs by 2030.
- **Support alternative transportation** by offering shuttle services and other incentives to encourage low-impact commuting and expanding services to off-campus destinations to support multimodal transportation. On a longer timeline, enhance infrastructure for biking, walking, and public transit consistent with the campus master plan.
- **Reduce emissions** through the establishment and enforcement of vehicle idling policy on campus and through the monitoring of transportation emissions to measure progress. On a longer timeline, pursue flexible work schedules, where appropriate, to reduce commuting emissions.

Goal #4: Monitor and Report GHG Profile and Energy Usage

Transparent monitoring of energy usage and GHG emissions supports data-informed planning and community accountability. A robust system of metrics will help identify progress, challenges, and opportunities over time.

Recommended Initiatives:

- **Support data-driven decision making** in the short term by exploring opportunities to conduct routine assessments and implement tools to track energy use, emissions, and other sustainability indicators and establishing systems that track sustainability outcomes, inform planning, and targeted interventions. On a longer timeline, implement energy metering and smart systems to enable real-time feedback, long-term benchmarking, and energy optimization.
- **Engage students** in these efforts by integrating student participation into data collection, analysis, and sustainability-reporting efforts.

III. Buildings, Grounds & Lands

Marist University will meaningfully integrate a sustainability-informed mindset into our management of buildings, grounds, and lands, providing students, faculty, and staff with a sustainable working and living environment. In alignment with *Marist 100's* "Our Built Environment," the sustainability action plan will enhance the environmental sustainability of Marist's buildings, grounds, and lands through energy efficiency, resource conservation, and ecological stewardship.

Goal #1: Develop and Maintain Energy-Efficient and Sustainable Buildings

As part of the Marist campus master planning process, sustainable building design and energy efficiency are key priorities in reducing the institution's environmental impact. Marist University is committed to constructing and retrofitting buildings to meet high-performance sustainability standards and aligning with modern environmental best practices while supporting academic vibrancy and operational effectiveness.

Recommended Initiatives:

- **Increase energy efficiency** in the short term by:
    - completing the transition to LED lighting in all buildings to reduce electrical consumption on campus;
    - evaluating and improving space-management processes to maximize space utilization;
    - engaging relevant members of the Marist University community to improve knowledge of sustainable building best practices and create a sense of shared ownership of our commitment to create a sustainable culture; and
    - endeavoring to create baseline usage metrics, identifying and implementing areas for improvement, and implementing sustainable improvements to reduce consumption.

  And in the longer term by:
    - reviewing campus buildings to establish baseline sustainability practices already in place and devising sustainability improvement plans customized to each building's lifecycle, structure, and unique elements;
    - continuing to build with energy-efficiency building standards for new construction and major renovations, even if we do not seek certification; and
    - installing monitoring tools to aid efficiency monitoring and identify areas for continued improvement.
- **Reduce waste** in the short term by:
    - establishing 3-stream waste system: recyclables, organic, and general waste to minimize the waste sent to landfills and improve recycling and composting efficiency;
    - providing communication aimed at awareness and education about 3-stream waste system, e-waste, and how single-stream recycling works; and
    - continuing to purchase sustainable and durable sources of furniture.

And in the long term by:

- reducing, reusing, and recycling materials from building demolition and renovation projects whenever feasible; and
- centralizing the process for recycling and reuse of fixtures, furniture, and equipment.

- **Improve stormwater management** through the investigation of opportunities that would allow for enhanced outcomes.

Goal #2: Implement Sustainable and Eco-Friendly Grounds Management

The campus master plan emphasizes the importance of sustainable landscape management to enhance environmental resilience, biodiversity, and the overall campus experience. Thoughtful stewardship of campus grounds reduces ecological impact, conserves natural resources, and fosters a healthier, safer, and beautiful environment for students, faculty, staff, and visitors.

Recommended Initiatives:

- **Prioritize native and drought-resistant plant species in campus landscaping** to reduce water, pesticide, and herbicide usage and promote biodiversity. On a longer timeline, continue tree-planting efforts and activate outdoor spaces that provide shade, sequester carbon, and enhance campus aesthetics.
- **Enhance environmentally sustainable grounds maintenance and housekeeping** in the short term by:
  - Implementing turf management practices that prioritize reduced mowing frequencies, maintenance, and cost while enhancing the habitat for pollinators and other wildlife;
  - Reducing chemical fertilizers and pesticides, transitioning to organic landscaping practices; and
  - Identifying environmentally harmful cleaning chemical agents in use and replacing them with biodegradable agents without reducing the sanitizing/disinfecting effectiveness.

  And in the longer term by:

  - Investigating, developing, and implementing de-icing and snow-melting methods that use alternative products that minimize an impact on plant and water sources (e.g., heated mats); and
  - Investigating the feasibility of ionization systems to replace chemical dispensers for cleaning and disinfecting.
- **Conserve water** by investigating improvements to the irrigation system that will reduce system maintenance, water usage, and costs.
- **Improve stormwater management** by implementing permeable pavement, rain gardens, and bioswales for stormwater management and reduced erosion.

Goal #3: Promote Responsible Land Stewardship and Conservation

Responsible land stewardship is essential to balance development with environmental preservation. We must prioritize sustainable land use by protecting natural areas, enhancing biodiversity, and ensuring future expansion aligns with ecological best practices. Thoughtful conservation efforts, such as maintaining green spaces, restoring habitats, and implementing sustainable land management strategies, contribute to the long-term health of the campus environment.

Recommended Initiatives:

- **Create awareness campaigns** to engage stakeholders through sustainability workshops and the involvement of students, faculty, and staff in projects that connect the University community to sustainable practices (e.g., urban gardens, reforestation efforts, and habitat restoration).
- **Establish conservation areas** by incorporating green spaces, pollinator gardens, and protected natural areas on campus into the campus master plan to continue to provide a sustainable path forward.

IV. Food, Water & Waste

The Sustainability Action Plan prioritizes responsible resource management to reduce environmental impact and enhance long-term resilience. In the areas of food, water, and waste, we aim to implement sustainable sourcing, conservation practices, and waste-reduction strategies. By integrating these strategies, we strive to create a more sustainable and responsible approach to resource consumption, benefiting both the environment and the Marist community. In line with the *Marist 100* pillar of Student Centrality, these goals take student health and well-being seriously. Moreover, they offer the Marist community opportunities to engage in meaningful actions to benefit local and regional interests, contributing to the pillar of Expansive Community.

Goal #1: Improve Food Sustainability and Conservation

Care for student wellness starts with what we consume. Improving food sustainability directly enhances the student experience by offering healthier, more environmentally friendly dining options that reflect concern for student welfare and values. Involving students in programs like surplus food donation and composting invites campus members to participate in shaping a more responsible campus culture.

Recommended Initiatives:

- **Prioritize a local and sustainable supply chain** by increasing the sourcing of local and sustainable foods in dining halls and campus vendors and promoting plant-based meal options to reduce the environmental impact of campus food consumption. On a longer timeline, contract with local farms to provide fresh, locally grown produce.
- **Target zero food waste by implementing a food-waste** reduction program in dining services, through the donation of surplus food to food banks or community groups, and through the periodic assessment of waste-reduction efforts. On a longer timeline, expand composting and food recovery programs and establish sustainability standards as a key consideration for contracts with food-service and other vendors.
- **Promote awareness through educational campaigns** such as the hosting of "Weigh Your Waste" events in dining halls and through the introduction of educational campaigns on food waste; sustainable eating habits; recycling; and conservation for faculty, students, and staff.

Goal #2: Improve Water Conservation and Quality

Water initiatives support *Marist 100's* Student Centrality pillar by ensuring access to safe, high-quality drinking water and convenient refill stations that prioritize student health and daily experience. Campaigns and research opportunities empower students to engage directly with water conservation and quality, transforming everyday habits into leadership in sustainability. By collaborating with public utilities, local organizations, and research partners, water initiatives extend the University's impact beyond campus.

Recommended Initiatives:

- **Improve water quality** by conducting regular water-quality testing in collaboration with public water utilities and sharing results to establish baseline benchmarks and monitor progress over time. On a longer timeline:

- develop research opportunities to study and improve water filtration technologies on campus, especially regarding emerging concerns such as microplastics and forever chemicals, in collaboration with public water service; and
- partner with local organizations to improve water quality in line with environmental and public health standards.

- **Promote sustainable water use** in the short term by:
  - optimizing water fountains and dispensers to prevent waste and ensure efficient use;
  - promoting the use of reusable water bottles through expanded access to refill stations; and
  - reducing bottled water sales by transitioning campus dining and retail to sustainable alternatives.

  And on a longer time by:
  - implementing a comprehensive water conservation plan to track and reduce drinking water consumption; and
  - eliminating single-use plastic water bottles from campus dining and retail.
- **Promote awareness through educational campaigns** designed to increase awareness of campus drinking water quality and conservation.

Goal #3: Expand Recycling, Composting, and Waste Reduction

Background

By diverting materials from landfills through reuse, recycling, and composting, the University reduces its ecological footprint and demonstrates fiscal responsibility through more efficient resource management. Just as importantly, zero-waste initiatives turn the campus into a living laboratory, offering students daily opportunities to practice sustainability, engage with innovative solutions, and carry lifelong habits of stewardship into their communities and professions.

Recommended Initiatives:

- **Divert material from the waste stream** by advertising and ensuring clear, standardized recycling signage and expanding the e-waste program and battery-recycling collection points on campus.
- **Reduce waste, working toward zero-waste to landfill** by identifying major sources of waste and implementing reduction strategies; increasing the availability of composting bins in dining halls and student housing; and reducing single-use plastics in campus dining and retail locations. Longer term:
  - implementing enhanced recycling, composting, and reuse programs;
  - developing a closed-loop waste system to ensure all campus waste is recycled, composted, or repurposed;
  - implementing waste-to-energy initiatives or other innovative waste management solutions; and
  - introduce sustainability clauses in vendor contracts to reduce packaging waste.

Sustainability Action Plan Key Performance Indicators

To ensure meaningful progress in sustainability, it is essential to track, measure, and evaluate our efforts using clear and effective key performance indicators (KPIs). By leveraging data-driven insights, we can assess the impact of our initiatives, identify areas for improvement, and make strategic decisions about future investments. The Sustainability Action Planning Committee endorses the University's adoption of the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (STARS). STARS is administered by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) and represents a strategic opportunity for Marist University to strengthen its leadership in sustainability, enhance transparency, and align with best practices in higher education. STARS is the most widely recognized and respected framework for measuring and benchmarking campus sustainability performance. More than 1,200 institutions in over 40 countries, including peer and aspirant institutions, use STARS to track progress, identify opportunities, and communicate their commitment to sustainability. By joining this global community, Marist can position itself alongside leading colleges and universities that are advancing climate action and sustainability as an important part of their mission and culture.

The benefits of STARS include:

- **Comprehensive and Credible Framework:** STARS evaluates 68 indicators across academics, engagement, operations, planning, and innovation. This holistic approach ensures that Marist's sustainability performance is measured not only in environmental terms but also in social responsibility, equity, and governance—areas increasingly emphasized by prospective students, employees, and external stakeholders.
- **Benchmarking and Comparability:** With a standardized set of metrics, STARS allows Marist to compare its progress both longitudinally and against peer institutions. This provides powerful insights into strengths and gaps, guiding strategic decision-making and resource allocation.
- **Recognition and Reputation:** Achieving a STARS Bronze, Silver, Gold, or Platinum rating is a visible demonstration of institutional commitment. Such recognition will enhance Marist's reputation in the higher education sector and differentiate Marist through action, accountability, and transparent reporting of sustainability efforts.
- **Continuous Improvement:** The system is designed to incentivize ongoing progress. Even institutions that achieve high ratings are encouraged to innovate further, ensuring that sustainability is not a one-time initiative but a continuous, strategic commitment.
- **Strategic Alignment and Storytelling:** Sustainability is increasingly central to higher education's role in addressing global challenges. By adopting STARS, Marist will not only advance its operational and academic sustainability goals but also highlight sustainability as a differentiator and competitive advantage in a crowded higher education landscape. This strengthens our ability to tell a compelling story to prospective students, parents, faculty, and others.
- **Data Transparency and Engagement:** STARS reporting is publicly available, fostering accountability while showcasing Marist University's progress. The process itself engages multiple stakeholders across campus—from faculty and staff to students—strengthening collaboration and cultivating a shared culture of sustainability.

Recommended Resources and Investments for Sustainability

Achieving our sustainability goals will depend on strategic funding, institutional support, and targeted workforce development. In making these key investments, the University should be innovative and entrepreneurial, maximizing existing resources through the reallocation of existing funds in service of our highest priorities, inspiring external philanthropic and grant-funded support wherever possible, and through the pursuit of innovative partnerships.

1. **Faculty and Academic Resources**

   - Expanding faculty professional development programs in sustainability education
   - Increasing seed funding for faculty-led sustainability research and curriculum development to foster competitive external grants
   - Increasing the number of sustainability-focused faculty and support staff
   - Developing online-education modules for faculty and staff

2. **Student Support and Engagement**

   - Funding student sustainability projects, research, and grants
   - Expanding of sustainability-related internships and work-study positions
   - Providing institutional support for student sustainability organizations and leadership programs
   - Training and engaging student interns for energy efficiency projects and data collection
   - Supporting student-led social media campaigns and outreach initiatives

3. **Infrastructure and Administrative Support**

   - **Sustainability Leadership:**
     - Creating the role of a Director of Sustainability to centralize efforts, track progress, and lead initiatives
     - Creating a support team for the Director of Sustainability, which could include students, interns, and fellows
     - Conducting a feasibility study for a Center for Sustainability Research
   - **Data Tracking & Auditing:**
     - Conducting a GHG emissions audit through external consultants
     - Establish baseline data for major sustainability areas
     - Establishing a sustainability reporting and tracking system to ensure transparency and accountability

- **Campus Infrastructure & Smart Systems:**
  - Upgrading campus energy management systems with advanced monitoring, automation, and demand-response capabilities
  - Investing in campus infrastructure to support living lab initiatives (e.g., campus garden expansion, renewable energy pilot programs)

4. **Energy and Carbon Reduction**

- **Renewable Energy & Efficiency:**
  - Engaging a consultant/broker to assist with energy purchasing agreements and strategies
  - Conducting a geothermal feasibility study and, if viable, implementing geothermal energy solutions
  - Increasing investment in on-campus renewable energy sources
- **Fleet & Transportation:**
  - Replacing gas-powered vehicles with electric/hybrid models
  - Developing a sustainable fleet-management policy
- **GHG Mitigation:**
  - Funding carbon offsets, such as tree-planting initiatives
  - Implementing travel-mitigation strategies to reduce carbon emissions

5. **Grounds and Land Management**

- Strategic reallocation of labor and resources in buildings and grounds management to adopt more sustainable practices
- Investment in native and drought-resistant landscaping to reduce maintenance and chemical treatments
- Educating and providing ongoing professional development for staff in sustainable landscape-management techniques

6. **Workforce Development and Skill Building**

- Identifying skill gaps in sustainability-related areas and developing a professional development and targeted hiring strategy
- Incorporating sustainability expertise into existing job descriptions with performance-based sustainability metrics
- Supporting certifications and specialized professional development in areas such as energy management and green supply chain management
- Selective use of consultants to provide expertise in high-impact sustainability initiatives while building internal capacity

7. **Grants and External Funding**

- Securing external grant funding to offset sustainability investments
- Seeking partnerships with industry, government, and non-profits to support sustainability initiatives

8. **Outreach and Awareness**

- Investing in signage and educational materials to promote sustainability initiatives
- Collaborating with instructional technologists and the Director of Sustainability to develop faculty and staff education programs
- Creating sustainability programming for student orientation, developed in partnership with First Year Programs

What Comes Next

This plan represents both an ambitious vision and the first step in an ongoing commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainability. Many of the outlined initiatives focus on gathering critical data to establish measurable future goals, such as targeted reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and water consumption. This sustainability plan lays out the necessary steps to be taken over the next five years for building a strong foundation for future sustainability efforts. To ensure continued progress, we recommend reconvening a similar group of stakeholders during the University's next strategic planning cycle. By that time, with dedicated personnel, robust data, and impactful projects already in motion, we will be well-positioned to bring Marist to the next level of environmental leadership.

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