# VMWP SUSTAINABILITY ACTION PLA

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ARCHITECTURE URBAN DESIGN -

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# VMWP SUSTAINABILITY ACTION PLAN

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### Notes of Hope

### **VMWP's Commitment**

**Van Meter Williams Pollack (VMWP)** is an awardwinning architecture and urban design firm based in San Francisco with offices in Denver and Minneapolis. Since 1989, we have provided a full range of comprehensive design and planning services for a variety of project types, scales and clients.

VMWP's comprehensive and innovative design approach considers environmental, social, economic, equity, and client needs to create buildings and communities that resonate with people. From small towns grappling with pressures of growth, to major urban centers requiring infill and redevelopment, one of our strengths is the ability to work in the variety of communities that make up diverse, growing regions.

As leaders in sustainable design, with LEED Accredited professionals in all of our offices, we understand that our office should be a microcosm of the collaboration needed across the industry to meet the 2030 Challenge. We implement sustainability as an integral part of quality design and a challenge to build community responsibly.

VMWP affirms signing on to the AIA 2030 Commitment program and its goal of carbon-neutral buildings by the year 2030. We believe we do good work that strives to address the issues of the day and shape a better future. However, we understand that we must reach beyond our standard practices to address the accelerating crisis. We also know that we need to do that work as a committed profession reaching with our peers to do more and support each other in doing more. We are signing the Commitment to improve our current integrated design approach, push our realization of significant reductions in the use of natural resources, non-renewable energy sources and waste production, and promote regeneration of natural resources.



Cottonwood Place Senior Apartments, Fremont, CA: LEED for Homes Platinum, GPR rating of 200 points, Energy Star certification, Bay-Friendly Rated 128 points - extensive storm water management system, solar hot water panels & photovoltaics.

### Introduction

On Earth Day 2021, we, as architects and practitioners of making homes and places for people, are with hope setting forth this 2030 Challenge Commitment and Sustainability Action Plan for our work. We are filled with the sense of urgency and transformation that has been a long time coming, but incised into our altered forms from this year of global pandemic climate crisis.

As residents of the USA, we are devastated by the disastrous loss of over 550K of our similarly politically boundaried souls to the pandemic. Simultaneously, we are in the flush of a springtime sense of renewal and a new normal, as the US returns to a sense of focus on science, and the thrill of having supported the vaccine knowledge that will help bring some remedy to ourselves and the world. As architects of affordable housing and urban designers of walkable multilayered places, we were fortunate to continue working. The production of housing, especially as so many are unhoused, was deemed essential. And as our projects kept moving, hotels were opened up so that people who were unhoused could actually shelter in place. But still on the days of orange skies and unbreathable air of the western firestorms, people were living outside, without even the minimal protection of these windows and walls that are our specialty.

Our project in Marin County, a low income and formerly homeless senior housing development that was hard fought over for almost a decade, continued construction through the beginning of the pandemic, maintaining safety of the workers. Successfully completed, it welcomed its first residents in July of 2020 and served as a vaccination site for all the residents in the spring of 2021.

We take this with us for our breath.

We have a sustainability committee that has worked over the last six months discussing where we are, where we want to go, and how we are going to get there. We have presented to the worldwide office and received feedback that has been integrated into the plan. It has been a truly collaborative process with over half the office participating in the plan. We understand that our office should be a microcosm of the collaboration needed across the industry to meet the 2030 Challenge.

Our Sustainability Action Plan (SAP) document is divided into six sections: Business Culture, Design Approach, Evaluation and Reporting, Sustainability Advocacy Outreach, Education and Training, and Operations and Outlook. We desire to make immediate progress, so we have incremental goals for this year and for 2030. We know that small steps will continue the momentum and help us reach our goal.



1101 Connecticut, San Francisco, CA: LEED Platinum - rooftop PV, solar thermal, 22k gal stormwater cistern, and 100% of stormwater treatment onsite.

### **I. Business Culture**

### WHY?

For the past 31 years, VMWP has operated as a mission-driven design firm. Whether this was implementing smart growth principles in an era of wasteful suburban development, planning and building transit oriented development when cars were king, designing net-zero and deep energy retrofits, or building affordable apartments before housing affordability was a cause célèbre, those who know us well understand our business commitment to the triple bottom line of Planet, People, and Profit. In short, we have done well by doing good.

The challenge we face is explaining ourselves to those who do not know us well or who only know us for one aspect of our work. Preoccupied by our work, we may have not told our story of sustainability adequately enough. As a result we may have missed out on opportunities to grow and to share our experience meaningfully.

### SUSTAINABLE DESIGN = GOOD DESIGN = Good Business

Since sustainable design *is* good design *and* good design *is* good business, we will make a meaningful commitment to our Core Values:

### PLACE

We strive to create sustainability of place in all our projects. Beloved, stable places pay dividends over generations and result in less ecological harm than cycles of destruction and redevelopment.

### HOUSING

Sustainable communities are created through secure housing. Housing is the crux of economic, educational, and health equity. Our role is to plan for, design, and assist in the creation of homes for our fellow neighbors of all abilities and means. We believe equity is essential for the sustainability of communities in a time of environmental pressure.

### **DESIGN THINKING**

As spatial practitioners, we are agents of ecology and the thousands of choices we make matter. We prioritize design thinking to explore the interrelationship of our choices from the scale of detail to the level of ecological systems.

### **CLIENTS AND COLLABORATION**

We are committed to seeking out likeminded clients and collaborators who put *equity, environment,* and *economy* first. We commit ourselves to advocate for cradle to cradle thinking and sustainable decision-making processes.

### CULTURE

In order to be sustainable over time, our firm must invest in people and cultivate the next generations of leadership that represent a range of diverse backgrounds and socioeconomic communities to better act for the underrepresented communities we serve.



VMWP 30th anniversary convening focused on sustainability, innovative design, and resilience

### **I. Business Culture - Continued**

### WHAT?

#### 2021 GOALS

- Include a slide or a sheet on architectural sustainability or sustainable urbanism in every VMWP presentation
- Market our expertise at TOD and sustainable communities as a service to help clients with site selection
- Management commitment to expose young designers to business operations and management opportunities.
- Draw on our knowledge of Passivhaus design or resilient urbanism to cultivate a new client relationship.



VMWP Denver, 2018 Best of Colorado Honoree - "in recognition meeting rigorous standards of social and environmental performance, accountability, and transparency"

#### **2030 GOALS**

- Report our firm GHG emissions annually to the Carbon Disclosure Project and include in marketing materials.
- Elevate an Associate Principal for Sustainability
- Develop a structure for leadership transfer
- Participatory firm budgeting to identify and support ongoing firm initiatives
- Consider moving from LLP to woman-owned business and B Corp structures.
- Pursue joint ventures and other non-traditional client-driven opportunities to collaborate with and support the work of Black Indigenous Person of Color (BIPOC)owned firms.

# HOW?

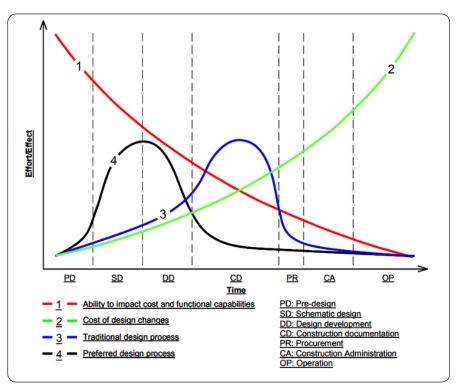
- Client Education Presentations:
  - Presentation on energy and climate resilience for multi-family buildings
  - Presentation on site selection for sustainable sites
  - Presentation on Passivhaus for multifamily
  - Presentation on offsite modular construction with emphasis on waste reduction

- Develop toolkit for low-income housing/underserved communities sustainable site selection
- Factor in carbon emissions into work travel and buy offsets for business travel and operations
- Cultivate leadership that is multigenerational and diverse.
   Commit to mentorship and support of young designers from a range of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds.

### 2. Design Approach

### WHY?

We work on housing and urban design that is dense, affordable, and connected to urban fabric. Isn't that already doing enough? We are challenging ourselves to take what we do well, and innovate to lead in the climate challenge that we collectively face, by deepening our design strengths, and questioning our design assumptions.



The now familiar Macleamy Curve illustrates the minimal cost and increased impact of early design decisions in an integrative design process.

# WHAT?

#### 2021 GOALS

- Formulate a conceptual design framework that is easily engaged at VMWP on all new projects.
- Pursue and partner with clients, consultants, contractors, and other leaders that are pushing the envelope and are committed to the 2030 challenge.
- Engage with evaluation tools as an integral part of the iterative design process.
- Establish Baselines. Understand what our current design process leads to as a baseline for both Energy Use Intensity and Embodied Carbon.

#### **2025 GOALS**

- Identify where we make the gains, the big steps in addressing the climate crisis in our process, and how that relates to our overall goals as a firm.
- Embodied carbon reduction is fully integrated as a priority.

#### **2030 GOALS**

Meet 2030 Challenge with carbon neutral & embodied carbon emissions 65% below standard for global warming potential. Projects we are starting now in 2021 might be completing in 2030. This means we are working towards our 2030 goals now.

# 2. Design Approach - Continued

### HOW?

VMWP Design Process:

- Start earlier at the beginning of the design process. For example, site design is early and often poses orientation challenges and potential conflicts with primary design priorities such as urban design streetwall.
- Identify points in the design process to integrate tools that provide true data for evaluation.
- Create a narrative based on the Owner's Project Requirements that outlines the sustainability goals.
- Connect Material palette and technologies, including Traditional Environmental Knowledge (TEK), to reduce embodied carbon.

#### **FRIDAY PROJECT INTRO**

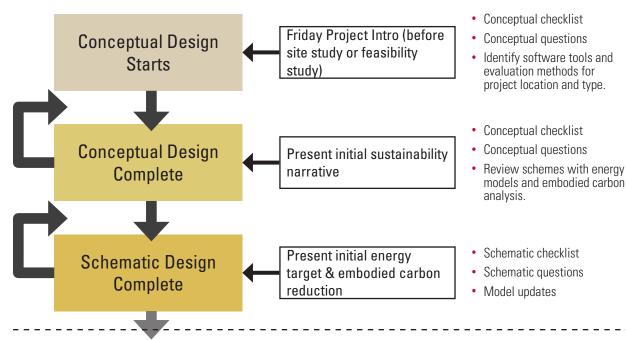
- If we meet early we can better work through the challenges and initial design decisions to evaluate more intensively through an energy performance lens.
- 1 hour maximum weekly preliminary discussion on all new project leads/ site studies/RFPs prior to work on sketches and test fits. Meeting is open to the office, but not required. Preparation prior to discussion is limited to checklist and photos/ screenshare of site location. Conceptual questions from the list to be discussed during the discussion.

#### THURSDAY DESIGN DISCUSSIONS.

- Weekly interoffice presentations which include brainstorming sessions with evaluations tools help VMWP to reach our project energy targets and a more efficient design.
- We are a team that learns from and pushes each other- collaboration and staff feedback is crucial to our design model.

### **SUSTAINABILITY NARRATIVE**

Interweave sustainability goals into the substance of the design narrative such that they tell the story of the project. The sustainability narrative is specific to the project and also linked into the larger collective goals.



Initial Design Process Augmentation

# **3. Evaluation and Reporting**

### WHY?

While code minimums and required documentation vary from region to region, VMWP's commitment is to exceed these baseline requirements. Documentation of data is critical to evaluate how we can achieve this.

We strive to incorporate energy consultants and/or provide in house energy modeling early on in the schematic design phase. We heed the expert knowledge of various sustainability consultants. The early collaboration allows the team to set goals that lead to better design. Early energy modeling information is critical to establish building orientation, materials, assemblies, and mechanical systems. Beyond collaboration with other consultants, VMWP is currently experimenting with several in-house energy modeling programs. Our goal is to determine the best program for our office by summer 2021.

The next 10 years is critical for climate change reduction and that the embodied carbon in our buildings can and must make an impact.

# WHAT?

### ARCHITECTURE

#### 2021 GOALS:

- Request Post Occupancy Evaluations on all recently built buildings. Include discussions focusing on the value of post occupancy evaluations and how they respond to the Owner's Project Requirements and the project's goals during our initial conversations with clients. Continue to formalize our Post Occupancy Evaluation process by working with our clients to develop project specific surveys and communication methods with residents and staff.
- Request EUI from each of our clients on completed projects
- Begin to integrate early modeling to set targets that establish goals and benchmarks to evaluate the projects at completion and beyond.
- Establish baselines that will push us all to be more innovative and increase our performance with every project.
- Using Tally software, evaluate the embodied carbon in VMWP's buildings.

#### 2030 GOALS:

VMWP will have a solid evaluation protocol that allows for efficient and substantive review of each project. It is understood that every project brings new challenges and opportunities to use less embodied carbon and be more energy efficient. It is our company policy to strive for these goals.

### **URBAN DESIGN**

#### 2021 GOALS:

- In-house office-wide evaluations of each urban design project through multiple lenses, bringing sustainability to the forefront of our design.
- Cater to every project scale ranging from zoning amendments, specific area plans, development design guidelines and masterplans with an unique outlook.

#### 2030 GOALS:

All VMWP urban design projects must be evaluated for their distinctive physical and jurisdictional assets. For each project, a clear understanding of what each of these projects provides and how to bring them into a sustainability focused framework.

This framework commits to:

- maintaining healthy air (zero emissions and non-toxic),
- pushing for renewable energy alternatives (carbon-free and efficient),
- supporting and nurturing existing ecosystems (healthy and diverse ecology),
- making clean water resources available, and
- aiming for a responsible cradle to cradle approach resulting in zero-waste.

# 3. Evaluation and Reporting - Continued

### HOW?

### ARCHITECTURE

Tools for evaluating energy performance: Tools vary regionally.

- San Francisco: Title 24, LEED
- Denver: IBC, Enterprise Green Communities, LEED
- Minneapolis: B3, SB2030
- 2030 Tools: Reporting to DDX
- PIKS

Tools for evaluating embodied carbon:

- Tally, Cove Tool, Sefaira
- EC3

Sustainability Certifications

- LEED, GPR GreenPoint Rated, Enterprise Green Communities, Passiv Haus
- Living Building Challenge

#### **URBAN DESIGN**

Some of the third party certifications that we have pursued so far on our projects include:

- LEED for Neighborhood Development
- SF Planning : Sustainable Neighborhoods Program

We are also in the process of exploring other certification programs including:

- Living Communities Challenge
- EcoDistricts
- Sustainable SITES Initiative
- One Planet



Del Corazón, Denver, CO: Enterprise Green Community - extensive use of photovoltaic panels, white TPO roof, air barrier building envelope, adjacent to public transportation, cement board siding, efficient windows and appliances.



Balboa Reservoir, San Francisco, CA : Applied for the SF Planning - Sustainable Neighborhood Program.

# 4. Advocacy Outreach

# WHY:

In keeping with other organizing themes latent in the Sustainability Action Plan, Organizing and Outreach tactics are distilled through the lens of Sustainability of Place. This logic is broad enough to adapt to the varied needs of three unique offices, their associated microclimates and housing landscapes, and even local office structures and advocacy goals. Meanwhile, the framework can provide a unifying umbrella topic for our firm to advocate around common and measurable goals.

In that vein, both the goals of this document (and, more broadly, of the 2030 Commitment) extend beyond the discrete boundaries of environmental sustainability, and into the intersections of social and economic sustainability. Our firm's work around housing justice is uniquely positioned in the middle of this diagram, and the ways in which we advocate for a more sustainable future must also be situated in these crossroads. To that end, themes of institutional knowledge, relationship building, and data-driven outcomes help to guide the goals and initiatives of this document.



The VMWP team at a SPUR even

# WHAT?

#### **2021 GOALS**

- Cultivate local relationships with industry thought leaders by sharing our internal sustainability information, collaborating on projects or developing joint presentations for conferences/ events. This can serve as both a tool of business development and as a way of pushing ourselves internally in support of the 2030 goals.
- Design presentation materials, boards, blog posts, social media posts to help disseminate and market sustainable achievements in our built work

### 2030 GOALS

- Create and deliver presentations to external groups or offer continuing education external presentations / continuing education forums in support of visibility as a trusted expert in the industry
- Credible (peer-reviewed)
   Publications create industry
   whitepapers that demonstrate firm
   knowledge and project expertise
- Identify and pursue local project awards centered around environmental and social sustainability goals
- Establish and cultivate relationships with elected officials by sharing our internal firm knowledge on sustainability issues to influence policy changes that are in support of firm sustainability goals.

# 4. Advocacy Outreach - Continued

### HOW?

#### **SF BAY AREA SPECIFIC INITIATIVES:**

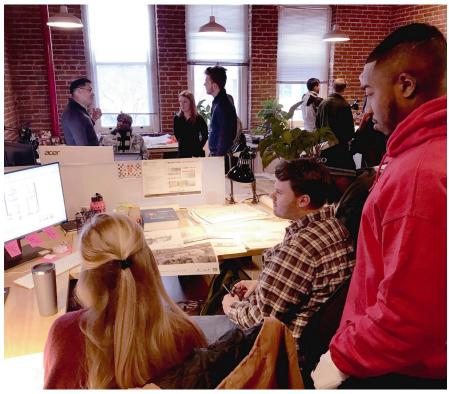
- Membership and leadership roles with professional & advocacy groups:
  - Sustainability Groups (USGBC, EPIC, PassivHaus, Pacific Energy Center, MF Low Carbon Action Plan Committee, CA Building, Decarbonization Group)
  - Industry Organizations (AIASF / AIA COTE / SFNOMA)
  - · Allied Organizations (SPUR, ULI, NPH)
  - Advocacy Groups (SFHAC, EBHO, HLCSCM, SV@Home)
- Service on Housing Element technical advisory or community advisory panels to promote environmentally sustainable, socially equitable and economically efficient housing policies & programs
- Circulation of state/county/city policy or legislative campaigns to encourage affordable, infill, transit oriented housing that helps meet state climate objectives
- Planting days for project sites (ie Colma, Fairfax), Food/clothing/toy/bike drives with Mercy, Eden, BRIDGE Housing and other clients
- Outside education and mentorship such as participating in high school oriented programs such as NOMA Project Pipeline, ULI's UrbanPlan Program or teaching architecture workshops and studios at local high schools or colleges.

#### **DENVER SPECIFIC INITIATIVES:**

- Membership and leadership with groups such as AIA Colorado and Housing Colorado.
- Annual application commitment to present at Housing Colorado as an opportunity to showcase our green initiatives.
- Annual commitment to volunteer at Housing Colorado's Design Charrettes as an opportunity to teach students about sustainable practices.

#### **MINNEAPOLIS SPECIFIC INITIATIVES:**

- Membership and leadership with groups such as AIA Minneapolis, AIA Minnesota, ULI MN
- Mentorship opportunities with UofM / Dunwoody / Minneapolis and St. Paul Public Schools
- Engagement with Greater Minnesota



University of Louisiana NOMAS student chapter visits VMWP to discuss affordable housing, designing for community, master planning, mission-driven architecture, and climate-resilience.

# **5. Education and Training**

# WHY?

The best way to make sure we achieve our sustainability goals is to start from within. Sustainable design is constantly evolving to address issues more comprehensively. Building up professional skills ensures that we stay at the forefront of our response and continue to push the envelope.

# WHAT?

VMWP aims to foster a healthy learning environment for the continued sustainability training and education of staff members. At the organization level, the Sustainability Committee is an action group within the firm that engages employees and helps to frame and realize the company's sustainability goals.

### 2021 GOALS:

- Build up the sustainability skills of current staff members
- Set up a system to pool + popularize known resources
- Complete and adopt the VMWP Sustainability Action Plan as a resource for staff education.

### 2030 GOALS:

- Formalize our methodology (evaluation and reporting) and make that part of onboarding/internal training
- Sustainability goals in the hiring process
- Staff participation in the larger sustainability conversation within the profession
- Create and internalize a creative process of looking at all that we do through a sustainability lens- from buildings and sites, to beyond.



VMWP tours Veteran's Village, a project that offers affordable housing and health services to formerly homeless veterans.

# 5. Education and Training - Continued

# HOW?

### ORGANIZATIONAL

- Sustainability committee as an initiative in itself
- Intra-office training sessions with JEDI (justice, equity, diversity, inclusion) principles to cultivate internal communication, awareness, and connection, in support of both firm culture and climate justice.
- Additions to policy manual based on SAP goals and recommendations
- Formalize design approach into a methodology:
  - Green master specifications and internal sustainable design standards
  - Added onboarding and internal training process
- Formalize/prioritize/elevate the importance of green credentials and/or goals in the hiring process
  - Identify gaps/specific skill set instead of general interest
  - Create list of each person's specific area or interest to pursue and report back (new/existing)

#### **KNOWLEDGE SHARING**

Facilitate knowledge sharing of sustainability practices through:

- Monthly firm-wide sustainabilityfocused lunch & learns by all staff; with topics covering new initiatives, technologies, materials, or policies.
- Presentation series based on project lessons learned or given by outside consultants and experts
- Quick sustainability report as an add-on to the weekly Monday staff meeting



Weekly Friday design discussions

### RECOGNITION

- Showcase staff achievements and sustainable design contributions.
- Feature on website/social media/ virtual bulletin board

#### **RESOURCES + CREDENTIALS**

- Consolidation of resource material and dissemination
- Database of project data for architecture and urban design (Project Information Knowledge Share)
- Support, encourage and incentivize sustainability training:
  - Up to 16 hours per year of paid time or similar incentive for employees to participate in continuing education.
  - Encourage use of professional development funds for green credentials or conferences

- Reporting back from conferencesin the form of threaded posts, screenshots of powerpoints, notes, etc.
- Highlight access to study material
- Study groups and mentoring sessions for new staff
- Optional training/in-house workshops
- Advertise available local resources (such as PG&E Energy Center, Passive House, AIA Committee for the Environment)
- Virtual bulletin board
  - Accessible to all three VMWP offices
  - Tie into existing systems like wiki/website/social media where needed
  - "What's new on the board?"monthly collective check-ins tied into staff meetings/presentation/ discussion sessions

# 6. Operations and Outlook - Office Culture

### WHY?

In addition to advocating for larger system changes, we must practice what we preach. We believe that sustainable action begins with individuals in offices and in homes and we must always strive to become more innovative and more efficient in our own practice and within our own four walls.

# WHAT?

### OFFICE CULTURE

2021 GOAL:

- Make it official. We hire, train, and recruit like-minded individuals who believe deeply in the stewardship of the Earth and their responsibility as designers to save water, materials, and energy, always.
- Support and encourage employee volunteering and community engagement; to encourage employees to be advocates for sustainability and equity in our communities.

### OFFICE CULTURE

2030 GOAL:

To ensure every employee is passionate and dedicated to their role in their community and to VMWP's 2030 plan.

# HOW?

- Upon hiring, all new employees must adhere to our mission as stated in our handbook: "We integrate client needs into sustainable design solutions that address climate resilience, social and economic equity, to create beautiful, inspiring communities and places for people to live and thrive."
- The firm supports the culture of volunteering, by featuring individuals and the programs they support on social media and the firm's website, regardless if they are relevant to the field of architecture or urban design.



VMWP joins residents to plant trees at Veteran's Village, a project that offers affordable housing and health services to formerly homeless veterans

# 6. Operations and Outlook - Energy and Supplies

### WHAT?

### OFFICE ENERGY AND SUPPLIES 2021 GOALS

- Reduce office technology energy usage by 25%
- Reduction of paper use by 25%
- Continue our best practices learned by working from home into the office
- Dedicate a person in each office to be responsible for sustainable supply procurement.
- Incentive plan (or policy) to shut down computers at night.
- Using cloud-based software such as BIM360 and Bluebeam Studio to reduce load on our office server.
- All in-house catering offers vegan options.

### **OFFICE ENERGY AND SUPPLIES**

#### **2030 GOALS**

Yearly reduction of office supplies until we become a zerowaste and carbon-neutral office by 2030.



Lunchtime design chat

### HOW?

- Providing touch screen tablets to principals in order to mark-up without printing sets, then roll out to project managers and therefore reducing our printing footprint.
- Moving from tower to laptop and greatly reducing energy use.
- Add inductive electrical metering to office subpanels where VMWP office spaces are not separately metered. Consider upgrading fluorescent fixtures to LED tubes.
- Work with management at our office locations to provide energy from renewable sources
- Plotters and printers to go into green mode between 10PM-7AM
- In all three VMWP offices, we provide:
  - Earth-friendly/post consumer products
  - Low-impact dining options/lunch practices (Denver has limited space)
  - Low-waste options, recycling and composting (Denver to research reliable compost options)
  - Filtered water/no bottled water
  - Rechargeable batteries
  - E-waste all electronics that are not re-homed
- Nudge our habits toward conservation, i.e. when hiring, provide commuter cards and consultation on how to get to work via public transportation, public transportation incentives, green practices at home, etc.

# 6. Operations and Outlook - Healthy Workplace

### WHAT?

### HEALTHY WORKPLACE 2021 GOAL:

Our employees have the tools and the support they require to not only be productive workers, but also to thrive at VMWP creatively and freely in a healthy environment.

### HEALTHY WORKPLACE 2030 GOALS:

We meet the needs of our employees by remaining flexible and adaptable to changing needs and demands of our office.



Screenshot from the virtual 2020 VMWP Holiday party

# HOW?

#### PHYSICALLY

- Standing desks provided to benefit employees' health and promote movement.
- Room acoustics improved to reduce noise disturbances.
- Office plants added as necessary to boost workplace attentiveness and prevent fatigue.
- Secure bicycle parking provided in all three offices to encourage daily exercise and alternative modes of transportation.

#### SOCIALLY:

Social events such as happy hours, design conversations, lunch and learns, and tours foster internal connection, reduce stress, and promote a positive work environment.

#### **MENTALLY:**

- We aim for a culture of inclusion at VMWP to promote workplace diversity and belonging (see Section 1. Business Strategy).
- Professional growth opportunities to encourage and support learning outside of the office (see Section 5. Education and Training)
- VMWP provides no cost access to Calm and myStrength meditation applications to help relieve stress.
- VMWP actively and collectively practices gratitude. After staff meetings, we practice a "moment of gratitude" where we can share positive experiences in and out of the office.





LEED Platinum Mixed-Use Housing - 2175 Market St., San Francisco, California