



County of Santa Cruz

COMMISSION ON THE ENVIRONMENT

701 OCEAN STREET, ROOM 400, SANTA CRUZ, CA 95060-4073

(831) 454-2580 FAX: (831) 454-22131 TDD/TYY: Call 711

Commission on the Environment

Work Plan

Calendar Years 2021 and 2022

Overview

Consistent with its by-laws, the Commission on the Environment (COE) will focus on priority environmental issues, policies and projects, with the intent of taking one or more of the following actions:

- Advise the Board of Supervisors (BOS) and make recommendations on ways to improve and protect the environment to ensure the long-term environmental sustainability of the County;
- Advise the Board of Supervisors on establishing specific goals that support the County's Climate Action Strategy; advise on actions to protect the County from the hazards of climate change; and assist the BOS in developing policies and programs to meet climate-related goals.
- Advise the Board of Supervisors and work with other commissions to review updates of County policies so that they provide a comprehensive course of action to support environmental goals in both the public and private sectors;
- Serve as an information clearing house to the Board of Supervisors and other county commissions about proposed and pending legislation, both state and federal, which may impact the environment;
- Advise the Board of Supervisors on potential areas of cooperation with other public agencies and private organizations to plan and implement effective environmental policies in Santa Cruz County;
- Proactively identify environmental issues of concern that are not being addressed by other advisory bodies to the BOS; and

- Exercise any other responsibilities that may be set forth in the commission’s bylaws or may be directed by the Board of Supervisors.

Schedule

The timing of COE actions and the order in which the issues below will be addressed will be determined by consulting the BOS master calendar and by communicating with Supervisors and staff about county processes and target dates.

Milestones and Metrics

The COE will use the goals, strategies and objectives of the County Operational Plan, particularly those identified in the Sustainable Environment section (pages 59 to 68), to measure the timeliness and effectiveness of COE activities.

Prioritized Environmental Issues, Policies and Projects for 2021-2022

In calendar years 2021 and 2022 the Commission on the Environment will focus on the following issues:

(1) Anticipate and Respond to Issues before the Board of Supervisors

Background: The COE is an advisory commission to the BOS. As issues arise, they can be brought to the COE by Supervisors, commissioners, or County staff. The BOS maintains a master calendar containing future agenda items and issues that may be brought before the BOS.

COE Role and Actions: The COE will regularly review the BOS master calendar for environmental issues in order to provide timely advice to the BOS. The COE will also request information from County staff and the community regarding emerging environmental issues.

(2) County Climate Action

A. Climate Action Strategy Development and Implementation

Background: The BOS approved the Climate Action Strategy (CAS) in 2013 and directed each County department to implement respective sections of the plan. Annually, each participating department must submit progress reports on their climate-related work, which are compiled into an annual report to the BOS each spring. Annual reports for 2014 to 2020 can be found here:

<http://www.sccoplanning.com/PlanningHome/SustainabilityPlanning/ClimateActionStrategy.aspx>

COE Role and Actions: The COE will annually hear one or more presentations from County Planning staff on each year’s Climate Action Annual Report. The COE will review implementation status reports and comment as appropriate. The COE will contribute to the County’s Climate Action Strategy development and implementation through review

of County draft plans and by providing contacts to appropriate experts and other resources.

B. Maintain Continuity with the Sustainable Santa Cruz County Plan (SSCCP) and the County Operational Plan (COP)

- The COE will request a staff presentations on the Sustainability Update to General Plan and its EIR as these come up for review or modification.
- The COE will request a presentation from the Assistant County Administrative Officer on Operational Plan revisions and implementation.

C. Mitigation Actions

Current Status: County departments continue to address the issues of greenhouse gas emissions reduction and preparation for anticipated impacts of climate change.

Current Status: Implementation of the Climate Action Strategy (CAS) involves a wide variety of activities by multiple County departments that are addressing the issues of greenhouse gas emissions reduction and preparation for the anticipated impacts of climate change. Periodic evaluation of greenhouse gas emissions has shown these efforts are resulting in measurable emissions reductions at major County government facilities and in the residential and commercial sectors of the community.

COE Role and Actions: To support the County’s Climate Action Strategy development, implementation, and continuous improvement, the COE will share information about best practices, examples of effective programs, and community needs that may be suitable for inclusion in the County’s Climate Action Strategy. (Recent examples include transportation options, food sourcing, etc.)

The COE will track and recommend County actions to continue reductions in carbon emissions, including:

- Adequate Staffing – Evaluate and recommend appropriate staffing to oversee and coordinate climate change mitigation initiatives identified in the County’s Climate Action Strategy.
- Public Forum – Provide a public education forum and monitor progress by receiving regular updates from the Planning Department on major implementation and evaluative milestones.
- CAS Annual Report – Review the Climate Action Strategy Annual Report due each April to the BOS.

D. Adaptation Actions

Background: Santa Cruz County has historically been impacted by drought, wildfire, and flooding from both streams and ocean storms. These impacts are exacerbated by a changing climate that is raising sea levels, increasing the magnitude of storms and lengthening the duration of droughts. The County is dedicated to preparing for these events and limiting the damage to life, property and infrastructure.

Current Status: The County Climate Action Strategy states the importance of achieving the twin goals of emissions reduction and climate change adaptation. The Planning Department is in the process of updating the County’s Local Hazard Mitigation Plan and General Plan Safety Element to address vulnerability to a range of climate change related hazards such as fire, flood, drought, and sea level rise. In addition, after many years of negotiations, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has included funding in their 2021 Civil Works Plan to complete preconstruction engineering and design to provide flood control on the Pajaro River.

COE Role and Actions: The Commission will utilize its network of contacts at the local, regional, and State level to:

- Inform the County’s prioritization of climate change adaptation actions, including updates to the County’s Local Hazard Mitigation Plan and General Plan Safety Element and planning for Pajaro River flood control;
- Identify potential grant and other financial resource opportunities;
- Request presentations by representatives of regional organizations, including the Alliance of Regional Collaboratives for Climate Adaptation (ARCCA), and the Central Coast Climate Collaborative (C4), summarizing their conference topics of emerging trends, lessons learned, etc.
- Review and comment on the Capital Improvement Program to consider all relevant environmental constraints, including those influenced by climate change, such as sea level rise, flooding, and fire hazards, to make projects more resilient.

E. Central Coast Community Energy

Background: Over the past decade, Santa Cruz City and County staff initiated partnerships with other service districts and government representatives to establish Central Coast Community Energy (3CE) as a community power authority to help achieve regional climate action goals. The technical study completed to evaluate the potential of Community Choice Aggregation for the Central Coast noted that the program would likely provide multiple benefits, including:

- Providing customers with a choice of power providers;
- Increasing local control over energy rates and other energy-related matters;
- Providing electric rates that are competitive with those provided by the utility predecessor;
- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions arising from electricity usage in the region;
- Increasing local and regional renewable generation capacity;
- Increasing energy conservation and efficiency projects and programs;
- Increasing regional energy self-sufficiency; and
- Improving the local economy by implementing new local renewable and energy conservation and efficiency projects.

Current Status: To date, the 3CE has become fiscally viable and provides customers with competitively priced, low carbon energy. New programs are being developed to support energy efficiency, electrification of our transportation system and initial investigations into local renewable energy generation.

COE Role and Actions: Because County climate goals focus on similar categories of carbon emissions reductions as 3CE, the COE will request an annual presentation from 3CE on the status of various projects and the results of 3CE activities.

Specifically, the COE would benefit from an annual presentation on:

- the power procurement portfolio,
- new programs being implemented,
- climate goals of these programs and status of their implementation,
- future partnerships to advance 3CE local generation, storage, and energy efficiency programs, and
- other technical and programmatic concepts that may help the County implement their Climate Action Strategy.

F. **County Climate Action Manager and the Office of Response, Recovery and Resilience**

Background: The Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors formed the Office of Response, Recovery and Resilience (OR3) in December 2020. OR3 is a division within the County Administrative Office that brings together emergency management functions with a strategic focus on long term resilience and climate change.

Current Status: The COE has recommended that the Board of Supervisors establish a Climate Action Manager position to work across departments to achieve the goals of the Climate Action Strategy. The Supervisors have taken preliminary action of creating this position but it has been delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The recently created OR3 may serve the purpose of or house the activities of a Climate Action Manager.

COE Role and Actions: The COE will request communications and presentations from the OR3 to better understand and advise on the role that OR3 plays in managing the Climate Action Strategy and otherwise planning for the effects of climate change and responding to related disasters.

(3) State and Federal Legislation

Background: Information about pending State and Federal legislation related to the issues, policies and actions listed in this workplan may be submitted from time to time by individual commissioners, County staff or organizations in which the County is a member, such as the California State Association of Counties or the League of Cities. The COE may consider requests from these sources for advisory letters to the BOS related to such legislation. The COE will focus on legislative activities related to the County 2021 Legislative Prospectus and the priorities of this workplan.

COE Role and Actions:

- (a) The COE will identify high priority legislative activities and invite presentations from members of the California Assembly and Senate, and members of the US House of Representatives or their staff.
- (b) Public Forum – Sufficient time will be set aside at each COE meeting for discussing pending State and Federal Legislation. Individual COE commissioners, County staff members or organizations in which the County is a member are responsible for developing summaries of pending legislation for the COE’s consideration. For time management purposes, extensive discussion beyond a 10-minute time allotment will be scheduled for future COE meetings in consideration of other priority meeting topics, unless a majority vote by the COE approves additional time.
- (c) Advisory – The COE will develop advisory letters as necessary to the BOS to support proactive management of the underlying environmental concerns and assure effective compliance with State and Federal mandates and regulations.
- (d) Monitor – The COE will request a report back from the proposing party regarding legislative actions taken. The COE will determine the need for additional advocacy with the BOS.

(4) Environmental Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Background and Rationale: Promoting equity and environmental justice are central themes of governance in Santa Cruz County. The County is adding new sections on environmental justice to the General Plan and Local Coastal Program Public Safety Element to support the needs of low-income areas of the County that may be disproportionately affected by environmental pollution and other hazards. As a body that advises on environmental decisions affecting the entirety of Santa Cruz County, the Commission on the Environment is dedicated to promoting principles of equity and environmental justice, and adopting a plan to include these principles in all its deliberations.

Current Status: While justice and equity are often brought into discussions on the COE, there has not been an established process or lens through which commissioners address these considerations in their approach to all issues.

COE Role: The COE will undertake the actions below to develop an approach to ensure consideration of environmental justice topics throughout commission endeavors. The COE will prioritize equity across race, gender, LGBTQ+, and socioeconomic status in all environmental issues addressed by the commission, and ensure that there is a process for diverse representation, access to information, and accountability to the community.

COE Actions: The COE will propose, review, and adopt a strategy developed by an ad hoc committee of commissioners that addresses the following goals and tasks:

Goals

- A commission that is representative of the diverse community it serves and reflective of the environmental issues prioritized by that community.

- A commission that addresses all environmental issues through the lens of environmental and social justice as an integral part of its deliberations.
- A commission that actively encourages participation from and solicits the expertise of members of historically underrepresented or disadvantaged communities in the process of raising and addressing environmental issues.

Tasks

- The COE will discuss with their Supervisors ways that the recruitment process for commission members can be enhanced in order to recruit and include members that reflect the entirety of the community. The COE will evaluate other commission models and produce a recruitment checklist.
- The COE will create a simple framework for establishing environmental justice priorities and considering environmental justice in all discussions, including addressing the most vulnerable populations impacted by environmental decisions and prioritizing support for those communities.
- The COE will consider developing an equity statement.
- The COE will deliberately seek early input from community groups, individuals, and organizations to address social and environmental justice issues. For example, indigenous groups such as the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band have expertise in climate mitigation and adaptation for regenerative/resilient resource management.
- The COE will recruit student groups to attend commission meetings or speak to issues from their perspective.

(5) Ad hoc Inter-Commission Coordination Working Group (ICCWG)

Background: Many issues have aspects that can be addressed by the COE, the Water Advisory Commission (WAC) and/or the Fish and Wildlife Advisory Commission (FWAC). From time to time as needed, two or three designated COE commissioners will be directed to meet with members of WAC and the FWAC on an "ad hoc" basis. The purpose of these informational meetings will be to identify environmental issues at the intersection of commissions' responsibilities and determine those that need coordination or strategic focus. In addition, this allows an opportunity for commissioners to proactively identify environmental issues of concern that are not being adequately addressed by the COE or other advisory bodies to the BOS. The designated commissioners will regularly report back to the full COE with relevant information.

COE Role and Actions:

- (a) Public Forum – Time will be set aside as needed at each COE meeting for discussing issues identified. Designated COE commissioners are responsible for developing a brief summary of each issue to be discussed. For time management purposes, extensive discussion beyond a 10-minute time allotment will be scheduled for subsequent COE meetings in consideration of other priority meeting topics, unless a majority vote by the COE approves additional time.
- (b) Advisory – Develop advisory letters as necessary to the BOS.

- (c) Monitor – The COE ICCWG members should review WAC and FWAC agendas as they are posted to identify items of possible overlap or inattention among commissions.
- (d) ICCWG Meeting – Anticipate a meeting once each year, as needed, during which two or three COE commissioners would meet with a similar number of commissioners from the WAC and FWAC to discuss priorities for each Commission as well as any joint efforts. This meeting might be most useful in the late fall as the County begins development of annual budgets.
- (e) Share all COE meeting agendas and minutes with the WAC and FWAC.

Table 1. Commissioner and Staff Leads for each Issue

Issue	Commissioner Leads	County Staff Leads
Issues Before the Board of Supervisors	Tiffany Wise-West, Antonio Gregorio, Greg Pepping	David Carlson, Jason Hoppin
Climate Action	Margaret Bruce, Ross Clark, Bob Culbertson, Beth Trenchard, Jane Orbuch	David Carlson
State & Federal Legislation	Margaret Bruce, John Hunt, Antonio Gregorio	Jason Hoppin, T. Goncharoff
Environmental Justice	Rachel Kippen, Tiffany Wise-West	
Ad Hoc Inter-Commission Coordination Working Group (ICCWG)	John Hunt, Ross Clark, Greg Pepping	David Carlson, Kristen Kittleson, Sierra Ryan