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Environmental Justice Year in Review 2020

California Coastal Commission



Environmental Justice

The year began on an optimistic note, as the Environmental Justice Unit, in collaboration with EJ community leaders, conducted two full days of training on implicit bias, equity and inclusion for all Commission staff. The training sessions were integral to helping agency planners understand how to implement the recently-adopted EJ Policy, as well as advancing the goal of integrating EJ goals and principles throughout the agency's internal work and culture.



As the Commission's fluency in these issues increases, we are finding new opportunities to advance EJ principles, from simple projects such as requiring [bilingual interpretive signs](#) and educational components about [Black history](#) in new development projects, to hosting all-staff discussions about race and equity, and drafting complex EJ analyses that lift up voices of underserved residents and take a closer look at the impacts of proposed projects on their communities. Collectively, these public and private conversations are helping to promote a deeper understanding of how the Commission can do its part to help dismantle institutional racism and reverse historic development patterns caused by exclusionary land use decisions and patterns of development in the coastal zone.

A few examples of how analyzing the equitable distribution of benefits and burdens are informing Commission actions include an application by the City of Pacifica to re-authorize a [parking fee program](#) and allow for beach parking lot maintenance activities. After considering how the project would impact lower-income populations, the Commission added a condition for the city to create the "Pacifica Resource Pass" for families whose beach access could be negatively affected by rate increases.

In July, the Commission heard an appeal of a [48-lot subdivision](#) on 14 acres in Encinitas. The four affordable units were initially going to be clustered on a corner of the complex with capped, contaminated soil. The project included two private parks for residents within the complex, but there was no provision for public coastal access, even though the site is located between the first public road and the sea. After a public discussion of these issues, the Commission worked with the applicant on a re-design that moved the four affordable units away from the toxic site and disburses them more evenly throughout the subdivision, and also includes a public trail along the northern perimeter of the site, providing new access to Batiquitos Lagoon.

In Orange County, a proposal to [re-design Dana Point Harbor](#) would have reduced the number of public slips by 389, while increasing the number of private slips available for yacht club members and enlarging many of the remaining slips to accommodate bigger, more expensive vessels for a higher fee. The Commission approved the project, which also included needed upgrades to the existing facility. But to offset impacts to lower-cost recreational opportunities, the Commission required the applicant to work with local partners to create and implement an outdoor environmental education program for underserved youth in Orange County that will exist for the lifetime of the development.



Small craft at Dana Point Harbor

In September, staff recommended denial of the [Cal Am desalination project](#) in Monterey County, due to its impacts on ESHA and public access, projected sea level rise impacts, and identification of a feasible and less environmentally preferable alternative available to meet the region's water needs. The proposed project also would have had significant impacts on the disadvantaged communities of Marina, Seaside and Sand City, which were the most detailed EJ findings staff has researched to date. Although the applicant withdrew the item shortly before the hearing, the comprehensive analysis validated the local residents' lived experience of struggling to survive economically in a coastal community that historically has received a disproportionate share of industrial development. Cal Am is working on revisions to the proposal.

Focused discussion of environmental justice has begun to increase the participation of marginalized groups at Commission hearings. Switching to virtual hearings made meetings more accessible to those with the technology and experience to follow the new procedures for remote testimony. Yet staff continued to hear from underserved stakeholders that the process was still confusing. To facilitate a smoother transition to virtual meetings, staff listened to EJ groups' suggestions on how to improve the Zoom meeting procedures and instructions. The Commission's [homepage](#) now makes the process more easily accessible to first-time users, and agendas include more simplified directions and contact information for Spanish-speakers to connect with a staff person who can answer questions by phone or email. The Commission has also purchased the necessary equipment to produce short instructional videos which will be available in early 2021.

Internally, staff made steady progress implementing the Commission's Racial Equity Action Plan (REAP) throughout the year. The agency's racial equity team conducted an internal staff survey to better understand where the Commission needs to focus additional training, created an on-boarding packet for new employees.

As protests and outrage mounted across the nation over the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmed Arbery and countless other unarmed Black Americans, the EJ Unit responded to staff's growing anxiety and grief by launching a series of interactive Racial Equity Discussions (the RED series) open to all staff seeking a safe space to discuss the complicated history of racial issues in America. In response to several questions and requests, EJ team leaders compiled an internal resource library of books,

articles, documentaries and other materials for staff seeking to deepen their understanding of race, equity and systemic discrimination. Executive leadership authorized staff to review and discuss these materials to fulfill personal development hours during the work day as appropriate.

The key goals and objectives of both the REAP and the Commission's EJ Policy were incorporated into the new Environmental Justice and Equity Section of the [2021-2025 Strategic Plan](#), adopted unanimously by the Commission in November 2020. The Strategic Plan provides the bridge between the outward-facing EJ Policy that informs the Commission's public actions, and the internal, structural commitments of the REAP that will guide institutional reforms for a more inclusive, diverse, equitable workplace for all.