

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

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TO: California Coastal Commissioners and Interested Public

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SUBJECT: Briefing on Draft Sustainability Principles available for public comment.
Informational item only. Commission will consider adoption at a future meeting.

Exhibit 1: [Draft Sustainability Principles](#)

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I. BACKGROUND

As the climate crisis and sea level rise threaten the future of the California coast and its valuable resources, it is more important than ever to make land use policy and development decisions that minimize greenhouse gas emissions. The Draft Sustainability Principles attached as [Exhibit 1](#) describe how greenhouse gas reduction efforts interface with the Coastal Act and relate to the Coastal Commission's work on coastal resiliency, and they include guiding principles and future actions for the Coastal Commission.

As interpretive guidelines that would be adopted pursuant to Coastal Act Section 30620(a)(3), these principles are intended to assist the Commission, local governments, and members of the public in improving climate resiliency and minimizing the effects of climate change through planning and permitting actions that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve land use sustainability. However, this document is not a regulatory document. The document sets forth a suite of potential future actions for the Coastal Commission to carry out in order to implement the guiding principles, as staff resources and funding allow.

The Draft Sustainability Principles document is available for public comment for a period of 45 days beginning March 9, 2023 and closing on April 24, 2023. A final version of the Sustainability Principles will be brought before the Commission for consideration and adoption after the public comment period closes.

A. Climate Change & the California Coastal Act

Climate change, driven largely by anthropogenic activities and associated greenhouse gas emissions, poses unprecedented challenges and will cause widespread impacts to our natural and built environments and their inhabitants. In California, climate change will affect our coastal environments and communities in many ways, such as through rising sea levels, ocean acidification, changing precipitation and temperature patterns, increased wildfire risks, extended periods of drought and limited water supplies, loss of or changes in species diversity and distribution, and more. These many manifestations of climate change are already causing extensive impacts on California's coastal resources, residents, economy, and infrastructure, with disproportionate burdens placed on the state's environmental justice communities.

While planning for adaptation to these new conditions is essential, so are actions to proactively reduce the GHG emissions that drive the current climate trajectories. California is an international leader on this front with the Global Warming Solutions Acts of 2006 (AB 32) and 2016 (SB 32), which set incremental greenhouse gas reduction targets out to 2050, as well as Executive Order B-55-18 (2018), which sets a statewide goal to achieve carbon neutrality by 2045.

The Commission is in a unique position to influence policies that mitigate the impacts of climate change and bolster statewide mandates for GHG emissions reductions in the

coastal zone. The Coastal Act facilitates this through a number of forward-looking policies that support greenhouse gas emission reductions. In particular, Section 30250 generally requires new development to be concentrated in existing developed areas; Section 30252 facilitates the provision of public transit services and non-automobile circulation in new development projects; and Section 30253 requires new development to minimize energy consumption and vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and to meet air pollution control requirements. Other policies protecting the marine environment, sensitive habitat areas, coastal waters, agricultural lands, and timberlands not only protect coastal ecosystems, but also help preserve the carbon sequestration benefits those ecosystems provide (e.g., Sections 30230, 30231, 30233, 30240, 30241, 30243).

In addition, the Coastal Act was recently amended to explicitly require the Commission to “take into account the effects of sea level rise in coastal resources planning and management policies and activities in order to identify, assess, and, to the extent feasible, avoid and mitigate the adverse effects of sea level rise” (Section 30270). Without effective and collective efforts to reduce GHG emissions and minimize climate change, California will increasingly experience the consequences of sea level rise, including direct loss of or impacts to public beach access, coastal recreation areas, coastal development and infrastructure, and myriad coastal habitats and resources.

Together, these Coastal Act policies provide the Commission with the authority and the duty to consider and address the climate-related impacts of land use policy and development decisions. This includes the consideration and minimization of greenhouse gas emissions. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions through sustainable land use planning and development practices is necessary for building more resilient coastal communities, mitigating for impacts of development, and protecting coastal resources over the long term. Such sustainable planning strategies are presented in and supported by the Draft Sustainability Principles.

B. Project Background

The Draft Sustainability Principles document was developed using federal financial assistance provided by the Coastal Zone Management Act, as amended, under award NA21NOS4190085, administered by the Office for Coastal Management, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce. This project is a part of Strategy 1, Building Resilient and Sustainable Communities pursuant to the Commission’s approved 2021-2025 Assessment and Strategy under the Coastal Zone Management Act’s Section 309 Enhancement Grant Program. This project focuses on developing draft guidance for the Commission, local governments, and the public on how to enhance climate resiliency and minimize the effects of climate change throughout the coastal zone through planning and permitting actions that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve sustainable land use practices.

The Draft Sustainability Principles document aligns with and helps carry out the Commission’s [2021 to 2025 Strategic Plan](#), particularly with respect to Objective 4.5, which calls for Commission actions to protect coastal resources and enhance coastal resiliency to climate change through GHG reduction measures in Local Coastal

Programs (LCPs), coastal development permits (CDPs), and other efforts. The Draft Principles also align with the state’s goal of carbon neutrality by 2045 and related statewide climate strategies including but not limited to those presented in the California Air Resources Board’s *Climate Change Scoping Plan*, the California Natural Resource Agency’s *Safeguarding California Plan*, the California State Transportation Agency’s *Climate Action Plan for Transportation Infrastructure*, and the Office of Planning and Research’s *Planning and Investing for a Resilient California*.

II. SUMMARY OF SUSTAINABILITY PRINCIPLES

The Draft Sustainability Principles ([Exhibit 1](#)) describe how greenhouse gas reduction efforts relate to the Coastal Commission’s work on coastal resiliency and provide guiding principles and future actions for the Coastal Commission. The guiding principles and action steps are listed below, but more details and discussion can be found in the full document.

A. Guiding Principles

The Draft Sustainability Principles document provides the following principles to guide the Coastal Commission in its climate change resiliency and adaptation work:

1. The Commission joins the State of California in recognizing that collective, momentous action is necessary to achieve the statewide goal of carbon neutrality by 2045.
2. The Commission can improve the implementation of sustainable land use practices and the outcome of climate resiliency projects by engaging in meaningful tribal consultation.
3. The Commission can advance environmental justice by considering sustainability and GHG emission reductions in its decision-making.
4. The Commission will utilize best available climate change science to inform decisions that lead to reduced GHG emissions and improved climate resiliency throughout the coastal zone.
5. The Commission recognizes that protecting, restoring, and managing coastal habitats and agricultural lands can result in GHG reductions, improved climate resiliency, and enhanced sustainable land use planning.
6. The Commission supports interagency and intra-agency efforts to “cut green tape” for the purpose of facilitating climate resiliency projects and achieving statewide GHG emission reduction goals.
7. The Commission encourages innovative sea level rise adaptation strategies, particularly those that have multiple benefits in protecting coastal resources and improving climate change resiliency.

8. The Commission can help facilitate the transition from carbon-based energy sources to renewable energy sources by supporting renewable energy projects and expediting decommissioning of onshore and offshore oil and gas facilities.
9. Commission decision-making is informed by the need to reduce vehicular travel, cut transportation-related GHG emissions, and enhance non-vehicular transit alternatives in order to help meet statewide GHG emission reduction targets.
10. The Commission supports policies and practices that lead to decarbonizing existing development and constructing new carbon-neutral development.

C. Future Actions

The Sustainability Principles document presents the following future actions for the Coastal Commission to carry out in order to implement the guiding principles, as staff resources and funding allow:

- Continue working with local governments and other stakeholders to update LCPs to address climate resiliency, including strategies for GHG reductions and sustainable land use practices.
- Support research that furthers the Commission's understanding of climate change impacts and mitigation strategies specific to the California coastal zone.
- Continue to coordinate with state, regional, and local partners to meet statewide GHG reduction goals.
- Review and consider updating the Commission's regulations to provide opportunities to facilitate or incentivize sustainability projects.
- Develop policy guidance on specific sustainability topics for Commission and local government use during LCP updates and CDP reviews.
- Continue to support existing and new legislation that advances climate change mitigation.
- Continue implementing ways to reduce the carbon footprint of the Commission's business operations.

III. NEXT STEPS

The Draft Sustainability Principles document is available for public comment for a period of 45 days beginning March 9, 2023, and closing April 24, 2023. Members of the public are encouraged to provide comments via email to statewideplanning@coastal.ca.gov. The Draft Sustainability Principles is available for review on the Commission's [website](#).

In addition to general public comment, Commission staff will continue to communicate and coordinate with coastal-affiliated California Native American Tribes to seek input regarding the draft guiding principles and associated future actions.

The Sustainability Principles will be brought before the Coastal Commission for potential adoption after the public comment period has closed and consultation with California Native American Tribes is complete.