

Sustainability and General Plans: Examples of Policies to Address Climate Change California Attorney General's Office



Right now, many cities and counties are taking the first steps toward addressing climate change and sustainability at the general plan level. These local governments recognize the substantial benefits of taking a programmatic approach to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and preparing for the impacts of climate change. Among other things, a local government has a greater number of mitigation and adaptation options when it looks at the “big picture” than if the analysis is done only at the project-specific level. Moreover, if the program-level analysis and mitigation is done well, subsequent projects will benefit from streamlining under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and from the predictability that results when a local government sets forth a clear plan of action.

Since sustainability and climate action plans, integrated into general plans and local ordinances, are a relatively new concept, cities and counties are looking for good examples. Fortunately, there are many resources that local governments can use as a starting point for creating their own tailored, community-specific plan.

General Overviews

The following resources may assist local governments in thinking about how sustainability and climate change fit into general planning and local land use regulation:

- CoolCalifornia.org, [Climate Action Planning](#) (website). CoolCalifornia.org, created by several expert state agencies and non-profit organizations, has a section devoted to local governments. The website includes informative [Tips to Develop a Climate Action Plan](#).
- Local Government Commission (LGC), [Ahwahnee Principles for Climate Change](#) (2008). LGC’s concise document sets forth seven recommendations related to the content of, and process for adopting, local climate action plans; outlines a climate action plan implementation strategy; and lists five regional principles emphasizing the need for coordination and cooperation at the city, county and regional level.
- Attorney General’s Office, [Climate Change, the California Environmental Quality Act, and General Plan Updates: Straightforward Answers to Some Frequently Asked Questions](#). This document answers some of the most frequently asked questions related to climate change, general plan updates, and compliance with CEQA.

Compilations of Specific Policies and Implementation Measures

The following resources may be useful to local governments in compiling a list of potential policies and implementation measures for further consideration and refinement:

- California Air Pollution Control Officers Association (CAPCOA), [Model Policies for Greenhouse Gases in General Plans](#) (June 2009). This white paper sets out objectives, goals, and well over 350 general plan policies designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and create more sustainable, livable communities. The white paper includes a convenient worksheet that allows a community to evaluate each policy for its effectiveness, ease of implementation, timing of reductions, and relative cost.
- Institute for Local Government (ILG), [Best Practices Framework](#). ILG has compiled 16 pages of “best practices” to assist cities and counties in climate action planning. The document is organized into ten Climate Leadership Opportunity Areas, specifically: Energy Efficiency and Conservation; Water and Wastewater Systems; Green Building; Waste Reduction and Recycling; Climate-Friendly Purchasing; Renewable Energy and Low-Carbon Fuels; Efficient Transportation; Land Use and Community Design; Storing and Offsetting Carbon Emissions; and Promoting Community and Individual Action.
- California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD), [Housing Element Policies and Programs Addressing Climate Change](#) (Feb. 2009). As HCD states, “The housing element update can provide an effective mechanism to adopt new efficient land-use strategies such as infill, mixed-use, or downtown revitalization” and thereby “significantly contribute to reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.” HCD’s table lists programs and strategies that can help the community meet housing and climate objectives and, in addition, highlights potential environmental co-benefits.
- Sacramento Area Council of Governments, Rural-Urban Connections Strategy / [Land Use Working Paper](#) (August 2009 (draft)). This draft paper, styled as a “wiki,” discusses policies, programs and the unique issues that affect rural land use in the Sacramento Region. The paper includes innovative land use policies and programs designed to support economic viability and environmental sustainability that may be applicable to many rural and semi-rural cities and counties across California.
- Natural Capitalism Solutions (NCS), [Climate Protection Manual for Cities](#). NCS, a non-profit group, states that its mission is “to educate senior decision-makers in business, government and civil society about the principles of sustainability.” The Climate Protection Manual includes a section on “[Best Bets](#)” – measures that in the group’s view are efficient and can result in substantial greenhouse gas reductions. The manual supports its “Best Bets” with case studies across the U.S. It also includes a section entitled “[Adapting to Climate Change](#).”

- StopWaste.Org, [Climate Action Plan Template](#) (2007). StopWaste.Org is a program of the Alameda County Waste Management Authority and the Alameda County Source Reduction and Recycling Board. StopWaste has created a template Climate Action Plan. The template includes a [list of model policies](#) that may be implemented through general plan policies and local ordinances.
- Natural Resources Agency, [2009 California Climate Adaptation Strategy \(Discussion Draft\)](#). This document, current in draft form, summarizes the best known science on climate change impacts in seven specific sectors and provides recommendations on how to manage against those threats.

Additional Resources and Examples of Innovative Local Planning Efforts

The Governor’s Office of Planning and Research maintains a regularly updated [list of cities and counties](#) that have adopted sustainability or climate action plans.

Any local government seeking to adopt a fully enforceable sustainability or climate action plan has the benefit of being able to survey what others already have considered. Two excellent sources of potential policies and measures are Marin County’s [Countywide Plan](#) (2007) (excerpted in CAPCOA’s whitepaper), which was awarded the 2008 National Planning Excellence Award for Implementation, and Yolo County’s [Draft 2030 Countywide General Plan](#) and [Draft Environmental Impact Report](#). Yolo County’s draft plan, which is currently in progress, proposes more than 300 specific climate-change related policies and measures.

The table below sets forth some additional general resources, as well as some exemplary and innovative local sustainability and climate policies and measures currently being implemented or under review. This is by no means an exhaustive list. The policies and measures are organized by action area, based on CAPCOA’s [Top Ten Actions by Local Governments and Communities](#) (see June 2009 whitepaper at p. E-1.)

Strategy	Resources
Smart growth, jobs/housing balance, transit-oriented development, and infill development through land use designations, incentives and fees, zoning, and public-private partnerships	<p>U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Examples of Codes That Support Smart Growth Development (webpage)</p> <p>California Department of Transportation, Smart Mobility Framework, Smart Mobility Handbook (draft) (draft document includes table of best practices)</p> <p>California Department of Transportation, Statewide Transit-Oriented Development Study: Factors for Success in California (2002) and California Transit-Oriented Development Searchable Database (includes detailed information on 21 TODs)</p> <p>Association of Bay Area Governments, Urban Growth Boundaries and Urban Limit Lines (2006) (includes list of cities and counties with UGBs and ULLs)</p>

	<p>State of Massachusetts, Smart Growth/Smart Energy Toolkit</p> <p>Examples</p> <p>City of Sacramento, City Sponsored Infill House Plan Program (allowing purchase of pre-approved house plans in established neighborhoods and redevelopment areas)</p> <p>City of Ventura, Infill First policy</p> <p>Sacramento County Regional Sanitation District, sewer impact fee ordinance (tiered structure that charges less for connections to “infill communities” as compared to “new communities”)</p> <p>Santa Clara County, long- and short-term urban growth boundaries (boundaries established in coordination with cities)</p> <p>City of San José, Urban Growth Boundary</p> <p>Yolo County, directed growth policy (proposed), LU-3.1 at LU 15 (directing all of the County’s residential growth to designated areas within cities and within growth boundaries of existing unincorporated communities (with specified exceptions))</p> <p>Yolo County, jobs/housing balance policy (proposed), CC-3.3 at LU 30</p> <p>Santa Cruz County, Urban and Rural Service Lines (directing countywide growth into urban areas where services are more readily available and less costly)</p> <p>City of Hayward, required minimum densities along transit corridors (reflected in General Plan and Land Use Map)</p> <p>City of Visalia, Growth Criteria Before Advancing to Next Growth Area (phased development)</p> <p>City of Benicia, Downtown Mixed-Use Master Plan (2007) (utilizing form-based code to facilitate mixed use development)</p>
<p>Create transit, bicycle, and pedestrian connections through planning, funding, development requirements, incentives and regional cooperation; create disincentives for auto use</p>	<p>Reid Ewing, Smart Growth Network, Pedestrian and Transit-Friendly Design: A Primer for Smart Growth (1999) (checklist of pedestrian and transit-friendly features)</p> <p>Alameda County Transportation Improvement Authority and Alameda County Congestion Management Agency, Toolkit for Improving Walkability in Alameda County (October 2006)</p> <p>National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Safe Routes to School Toolkit (2002)</p> <p>Metropolitan Transportation Commission, Reforming Parking Policies to Support Smart Growth / Toolbox/Handbook (June 2007)</p>

	<p><u>Examples</u></p> <p>City of La Mesa, Sidewalk Master Plan (in progress; will include map used to prioritize funding)</p> <p>Marin County Bicycle Coalition, Safe Routes to School (offering assistance to communities in developing program)</p> <p>Solano County Transportation Authority, Safe Routes to School</p> <p>City of San Francisco, Transit First Policy (gives priority to public transit investments)</p> <p>City of Palo Alto, Bicycle Transportation Plan and supporting programs (resulting in 5.6% of residents commuting to work by bike)</p> <p>City of Ventura, Downtown Ventura Mobility and Parking Plan and Downtown Parking Management Program</p> <p>City of Sacramento, multi-modal system policy (employing “flexible” level-of-service (LOS) standards permitting increased densities and mix of uses to increase transit ridership, biking, and walking)</p> <p>Yolo County, LEED Neighborhood Design policy (proposed), CC-2.16 FF at LU 27 (requiring adherence to LEED Neighborhood Design Standards or the equivalent, for new development)</p>
<p>Energy- and water-efficient buildings and landscaping through ordinances, development fees, incentives, project timing prioritization, and other implementing tools</p>	<p>California Energy Commission, Local Ordinances Exceeding the 2005 Building Energy Efficiency Standards and Local Ordinances Exceeding the 2008 Building Efficiency Standards (lists)</p> <p>Attorney General’s Office, Local Government Green Building Ordinances in California (list)</p> <p>U.S. Green Building Council, Summary of Government LEED Incentives (updated quarterly; nationwide)</p> <p>Build it Green, Green Policies (lists organized by California regions)</p> <p><u>Examples</u></p> <p>City of Santa Monica, Office of Sustainability - Green Building (program to educate the public about and encourage green building)</p> <p>San Bernardino County, Green County San Bernardino (among other things, program waives permit fees for alternative energy systems and high-efficiency heating and air conditioning systems)</p> <p>City of Lompoc, water retrofit ordinance (requiring new development to offset projected water use either by directly changing out existing high-use fixtures or by paying in lieu fee to fund retrofits)</p>

	<p>City of San Diego, plumbing retrofit ordinance (requiring that all buildings, prior to a change in property ownership, be certified as having water-conserving plumbing fixtures in place)</p> <p>City of San Francisco, Residential Energy Conservation Ordinance (requiring residential property owners to install specified energy and water conservation measures)</p> <p>City of Sebastopol, Water and Energy Conservation Requirements (requiring, among other things, Energy Star appliances)</p>
<p>Green procurement and alternative fuel vehicle use through municipal mandates and voluntary bid incentives</p>	<p>California Integrated Waste Management Board, Green Procurement Policies (list)</p> <p>Commission for Environmental Cooperation, Existing Green Procurement Initiatives (list; Canadian and U.S. examples)</p> <p>Examples</p> <p>Los Angeles County, Green Purchasing Policy</p> <p>Nevada County, Green Procurement and Sustainable Practices Policy</p> <p>Solano County, green purchasing policy, HS.1-60 at HS 74</p> <p>City of Chula Vista, Clean Vehicle Replacement Policy (for City and City-contracted fleets)</p> <p>City of Vacaville, Electric Vehicle and CNG Vehicle Incentive Programs</p>
<p>Alternative fuel facilities and infrastructure through land use designations, zoning, and public-private partnerships</p>	<p>City of Riverside, Alternative Fuel Program</p> <p>City of Los Angeles, Clean Fuels Policy</p> <p>City of Vacaville, public solar fuel station</p>
<p>Renewable energy generation (utility and residential) through feasibility evaluations, land use designations, zoning, permit streamlining, incentives and financing</p>	<p>Database of State Incentives for Renewables and Efficiency (includes specific California examples with links)</p> <p>American Planning Association, Planning and Zoning for Renewable Energy (Feb. 2008)</p> <p>Examples</p> <p>Sonoma County, Energy Independence Program (financing program available to City and County residents for energy efficiency, water conservation and renewable energy upgrades with costs repaid through assessment on property tax bill)</p>

	<p>City of Berkeley, Financing Initiative for Renewable and Solar Technology Program (financing program for solar PV systems with costs repaid over 20 years through special tax on property tax bill)</p> <p>City of Palm Desert, Energy Independence Program (financing program for major energy-saving home improvements, such as high-efficiency air conditioners, dual-pane windows and solar PV systems with costs repaid through assessment on property tax bill)</p> <p>Solano County, policies governing permitting and siting of wind projects in identified areas, RS.1-37 at RS 56.</p> <p>City of Palm Desert, solar pre-wiring ordinance, Tit. 24, § 24.30.030</p> <p>City of Los Angeles, ordinance exempting solar devices from building height limits, Planning and Zoning, Ch. 1, Art. 2, § 12.21.1</p> <p>City of Santa Ana, solar permit fee waiver (two-year program)</p> <p>County of San Bernardino, permit fee waiver for energy efficiency projects</p> <p>City of Santa Barbara, information packets and brochures to assist in solar permitting and compliance with solar access ordinance</p>
<p>Waste diversion, recycling, water efficiency, energy efficiency and energy recovery in cooperation with public services districts and private entities</p>	<p>California Integrated Waste Management Board, Construction and Demolition Debris Recycling, Local Government Sample Documents</p> <p>Eureka Recycling, Zero Waste Ordinance Resource Guide</p> <p>CoolCalifornia.org, Local Government, Recycle and Cut Waste (recommended actions and resources)</p> <p>Department of Water Resources, Updated Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance</p> <p>Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, Model Water Conservation Ordinance</p> <p>Examples</p> <p>City of San Francisco, Zero Waste diversion program</p> <p>City of San Diego, Recycling Ordinance</p> <p>Town of Truckee, Business Waste Reduction Assistance Program (free waste assessment and recommendations on opportunities to reduce waste and recycle)</p> <p>Marin County, Marin Countywide Plan, Built Environment Element, water conservation implementation strategy (PFS-2.q, recommendation for tiered billing rates based on water use to encourage conservation)</p>

	<p>City of Sebastopol, Water Efficient Landscape Program</p> <p>City of Fresno, Watering Regulations and Restrictions</p>
<p>Urban and rural forestry through tree planting requirements and programs; preservation of agricultural land and resources that sequester carbon; heat island reduction programs</p>	<p>U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Reducing Urban Heat Islands: Compendium of Strategies (webpage)</p> <p>U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Heat Island Effect, Initiatives for California (list of examples with links)</p> <p>Examples</p> <p>City of Irvine, Sustainable Travelways program</p> <p>City of Fresno, Performance Standards for Parking Lot Shading (requiring fifty percent of paved parking lots surface to be shaded within fifteen years of tree planting)</p> <p>Yolo County, agricultural preservation policies (proposed), AG-1.3 through 1.5 at AG 22 (proposed)</p>
<p>Community outreach and education to foster community involvement, input, and support for GHG reduction planning and implementation</p>	<p>Flex Your Power</p> <p>Examples</p> <p>Sonoma County, Climate Protection Campaign</p> <p>San Bernardino, Green County</p> <p>City of Irvine, Irvine Environmental Programs</p> <p>City of San Mateo, San Mateo Acting Responsibly Together</p>
<p>Regional cooperation to find cross-regional efficiencies in GHG reduction investments and to plan for regional transit, energy generation, and waste recovery facilities</p>	<p>Examples</p> <p>Sacramento County and City of Natomas, Natomas Joint Vision (memorandum of understanding including joint planning and revenue sharing policies)</p> <p>Yolo County, policy for City/County planning cooperation (proposed), LU-6.4 at LU 21</p> <p>Yolo County, policy for City/County revenue sharing (proposed), LU-6.7 at LU 21</p>