

# Contra Costa County General Plan Update: Policy Suggestions from Environmental Advocates



In order for Contra Costa County to adapt and thrive in the face of the climate crisis, the General Plan needs to set goals that are not just incremental, but ambitious and transformative. Clear measurables must be included to support the following concepts from our [original vision letter](#) that we shared in the Fall of 2019. Building on our original vision, below are some specific policy language suggestions for each item outlined in our vision

## 1. Protect, restore and preserve our natural spaces and water: open space, hillsides, riparian habitats, vernal pools, waterways, shorelines, wetlands, sloughs, and green infrastructure.

- Preserve and protect hillsides and vistas. Identify and create an inventory of areas in the County with significant natural habitat, open space and recreation resources and promote conservation, preservation and environmental rehabilitation of these lands. Work with property owners to acquire or dedicate those lands that could be preserved as open space.
- Develop hillside development guidelines that will ensure construction activities retain natural vegetation and topography and minimize grading of hillside. Minimize soil depletion and prevent erosion.
- Require all new construction to protect and restore natural features such as waterways, creeks & wetlands in urban areas as a means of connecting residents with nature and reversing damage to natural systems. Where feasible, restore creek corridors in urban areas. Creeks currently diverted in culverts or hardened channels should be restored to their natural state.
- Prohibit the use of invasive plant species such as broom and ivies, especially adjacent to wetlands, riparian areas, or other sensitive habitat. Require landscaping that incorporates native, drought-tolerant plants and sustainable maintenance practices and standards. Provide trees on residential & mixed-use streets. Ensure a 3 to 1 replacement of all trees removed. Plant trees to shade county buildings, businesses and residential homes to reduce energy use and sequester carbon.



Require green infrastructure such as impervious surfaces to reduce stormwater runoff and provide swales and retention basins.

- Require new development and significant remodels to reduce the waste of potable water through the use of efficient technology, recycled water plumbing (purple pipe), and conservation efforts that minimize the County's dependence on imported water and conserve groundwater resources.

## 2. Plan for more equitable outcomes for residents, prioritizing the needs of disadvantaged and historically marginalized communities

- Develop a plan to transition from toxic industries to clean industries that offer good-wage jobs that are accessible by biking, walking and public transportation. Include a local hiring incentive or requirement.
- **Mitigate historic and current toxic uses adjacent to frontline communities through brownfield clean up, buffer zoning for open space in and around disadvantaged communities, and developing high-quality urban parks in disadvantaged communities**
- Work with local Native American tribes to protect recorded and unrecorded cultural and sacred sites and to educate developers and the community at large about the connections between Native American history and the environmental features of our local landscape.

## 3. Take bold action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, sequester carbon, and transition to a carbon-free economy;

- Require implementation of a Climate Action and Resiliency Plan, that includes a baseline greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions inventory for both community wide and county operations, that is reviewed and adjusted on an annual basis to ensure GHG reduction goals are met or exceeded. The Inventory shall provide a business-as-usual forecast for GHG emissions for 2020 and 2030 and beyond if needed. The GHG emissions reduction target will align with Executive Order B 55 80, committing to net zero carbon by 2045 and will include commitment to SB100, 100% zero carbon energy by 2045.
- Establish a goal: "County leadership in addressing the climate crisis". This goal will commit to 1) leadership in promoting new initiatives and innovative strategies that meet and exceed state requirements; 2) proactive education of residents and businesses about the importance of these actions; 3) Participation with other jurisdictions and



organizations to develop effective regional solutions and regulation at regional, state and federal levels; 4) Collaboration with residents, businesses, public agencies and neighboring jurisdictions, in order to meet or exceed state requirements for reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

- Establish a goal: "Climate-Resilient Communities". While the impacts of climate change on local communities are uncertain, to the extent possible, prepare to respond to and protect residents and businesses from increased risks of natural disasters and extreme weather events such as flooding or drought.

#### **4. Strengthen community and natural environment resiliency through climate adaptation and emergency planning efforts**

- Name and address climate action explicitly, and incorporate Climate Action Plan goals and strategies within the General Plan.
- Incorporate the climate adaptation and resilience strategies in the [San Francisco Bay Shoreline Adaptation Atlas](#), into all relevant policies to protect environmental quality and public health and safety, with a focus on disadvantaged communities.
- Identify all infrastructure, particularly industrial infrastructure, at risk of floods, seismic/liquefaction risk and enhanced wildfire risk due to climate change. Require needed safety upgrades identified in hazard mitigation assessment and emergency preparedness policies and procedures and hold public meetings to discuss these plans and ensure widespread understanding and confidence in these plans.

#### **5. Protect and improve our agricultural lands and associated economy**

- Implement the policy recommendations from "[Recommendations on Reforming Agricultural Land Use Policies in Contra Costa County](#)" document from Fall 2019.
- *Preserve agricultural lands for sustained crop production, grazing and farming. Encourage local organic food production on commercial farms and through micro farming in community gardens and private yards. Protect viable topsoils to ensure working landscapes. Incentivize regenerative farming practices.*
- *Adopt farmland mitigation programs aimed at preserving farmland while giving agricultural landowners the opportunity to recover equity in their property without developing it. These should be coordinated among localities so as to create a level playing field and prevent developers*

*from playing one jurisdiction against its neighbors. LAFCOs can help do this by adopting their own policy of requiring cities to mitigate farmland loss as a condition of annexation.*

- *Encourage small-scale food production, such as community gardens and cooperative neighborhood growing efforts, on parcels within the city limits, provided that the operations do not conflict with existing adjacent urban uses. Collaborate with water suppliers and wastewater treatment plant operators to increase the availability of treated or recycled water for agricultural purposes.*

**6. Ensure transit-oriented development, focus economic development near housing or transit, reduce vehicle miles traveled and promote equitable access to jobs and services, especially for disadvantaged communities**

- Strengthen the urban limit line, and preserve lands along the line.
- Create a jurisdiction-wide program for mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and vehicle miles traveled that incentivizes carbon sequestration, zero-emission buildings and vehicles, soil building agricultural activities, and natural based shoreline adaptation measures and social resilience;
- Expand the green transportation network by encouraging the use of climate-friendly technology, planning growth around multiple modes of travel and reducing automobile reliance. In addition to promoting improved public transit, partner with private developers to undertake citywide improvements that make active modes of travel, such as walking and bicycling, more comfortable and preferable options. Establish an energy efficient fleet management and operation practices.
- Reduce energy consumption by promoting sustainable land uses and development patterns. Pursue infill development opportunities and encourage the construction of higher-density, mixed-use projects around existing public transit infrastructure, schools, parks, neighborhood-serving retail and other critical services. Incorporate ecologically sustainable practices and materials into new development, building retrofits and streetscape improvements. In areas that are already built-up include affordable and deeply affordable housing, as a means to reduce vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions, and facilitate walking, bicycling, and transit use, including through mixed-use corridors and activity centers.

- Work with existing shuttle service providers to coordinate their services with other forms of transit, special events and work centers. Encourage home offices, live/work sites and satellite work centers in appropriate locations. Encourage telecommuting options through public outreach and with new and existing employers, as appropriate and modeled by County policies that encourage telecommuting whenever feasible.
- Coordinate with ride-sharing programs to provide up-to-date lists of potential riders and to educate the public on commuting options. Encourage the development of employer-funded vanpool and shuttle bus services to new employment centers. Encourage employer provision of information on alternative modes of transit. Encourage employers to offer flextime arrangements to their employees in order to reduce the percentage of trips made during peak hours.

**7. Prioritize efficient land use and house every resident ethically and affordably through new housing production, tenant protection, and existing housing preservation**

- We recognize that the housing element is not part of this current update and will have more comments when the housing element is updated in the future.

**8. Ensure accountability to the goals and priorities laid out in the General Plan.**

- Add a section to all staff reports that reviews impact on sustainability, resiliency, and equity; as well as fiscal impact.
- Mandate annual reporting on general plan progress be posted on the front page of the county website with a clear dashboard that indicates progress on implementation plans. And clear visuals of how the county is meeting its greenhouse gas reduction goals.
- Conduct annual outreach events to the communities identified as disadvantaged per SB1000 to update on progress and elicit community comment and guidance for future action.
- Provide for systematic reviews of General Plan progress and associated metrics that are transparent, engage the community, and demonstrate measurable equitable outcomes consistent with the Plan's intent.