

Addressing Climate Change Impacts at the City and Council Level through Land Use and Community Development

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Land use and community development play a foundational role to how Californians are able to prepare for, and respond to, the impacts of climate change. Development patterns, land conservation and protection, and land management practices can help, or hinder, the State's long-term community health, environmental, and economic goals, including climate adaptation. Incorporating climate considerations into local long-range planning is a critical step to adapting to the impacts of a changing climate. While the practice of adaptation planning continues to evolve, there are a number of ways local governments address climate change, meet statutory requirements, and build community resilience.

General Plans and Local Hazard Mitigation Plans

The safety element of every jurisdiction's general plan is required to identify hazards and hazard abatement provisions. The recent introduction of climate risk to the discussion of the safety element, adds a focus on longer term preparation of a community for a changing climate. Policies in a safety element should identify hazards and emergency response priorities, as well as mitigation through avoidance of hazards by new projects and reduction of risk in developed areas. As California confronts mounting climate change impacts, local governments are now required, in accordance with [Senate Bill 379, Land Use: General Plan: Safety Element \(Jackson, 2015\)](#)¹ to include a climate change vulnerability assessment, measures to address vulnerabilities, and comprehensive hazard mitigation and emergency response strategy as outlined in section (Gov. Code § 65302(g)(4)). Policies may include methods of minimizing risks, as well as ways to minimize economic disruption and expedite recovery following disasters.

Updating the Safety Element is required at the next update to a city or county's Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP), or by January 1, 2022 if the jurisdiction does not have an LHMP. Opportunities to leverage State and federal funding opportunities should be considered as part of the update timeline. Some distinct actions are required to meet the new requirements:

- Review existing plans and prepare a gap analysis;
- Assess community vulnerability;
- Create a set of goals, policies and objectives;
- Create a set of "feasible" implementation measures;
- Implement measures and update over time.

As required by § 65302(g)(4), these steps should be implemented in consideration of the steps outlines in the Adaptation Planning Guide and the Cal-Adapt climate tool. The [General Plan Guidelines](#)² include additional information on requirements and recommendations for addressing climate risk, including policy recommendations.

Climate change reflects new uncertainties and factors shaping and conditioning hazard mitigation planning. As with general plans, chapter 4.5 in the 2013 [California State Hazard Mitigation Plan](#)³ (SHMP) addresses a specific approach for local communities to evaluate their risk as a result of climate change. The hazard mitigation guidance materials are the same materials referenced in Chapter 4: Safety Element of the General

Plan Guidelines. The similarities in base science, policy guidance, and implementation materials provides for consistency across multiple documents such as an adaptation plan, climate action plan, general plan, implementation plan, local hazard mitigation plan, local coastal plan, etc. See the [CalOES website](#)⁴ for additional discussion on co-benefits.

Climate Action Plans and Adaptation Plans

Many local governments are incorporating climate adaptation considerations into standalone Climate Action Plans (CAP) or Adaptation Plans. Through these plans and other local planning documents, local governments have the ability to influence many activities that contribute to climate change and can help address the impacts of climate change on the community. Many climate action plans that have been developed since 2009 have been created in response to CEQA mandates regarding GHG emissions. More recently, adaptation is being added to respond to local planning requirements. As the planning practice around CAPs continues to evolve, many local governments are using these plans to also align adaptation and mitigation planning efforts. Additional information on what local governments are doing throughout the state on climate change can be found by reviewing the Air Resources Board interactive [CAP-Map](#)⁵, the OPR Annual Planning Survey, General Plan Guidelines (Chapter 8: Climate Change and Chapter 4: Safety Element). For additional resources and examples of work being done around the United States, resources such as the [US Climate Resilience Toolkit](#)⁶ and the [Georgetown Climate Center](#)⁷ can be helpful.

Local Coastal Programs

Jurisdictions in the coastal zone are required to develop a local coastal plan in addition to the development of a general plan. As part of a Local Coastal Program, update, or amendment, prepared pursuant to the [Coastal Act](#)⁸, local governments should evaluate and plan for sea level rise. Sea level rise potentially increases the risk of coastal hazards as identified in Public Resources Code Section 30253 (geologic flood, and fire), as well as potentially increasing impacts on coastal resources identified throughout the Coastal Act. The analysis can be performed through a vulnerability assessment, climate action plan or other document and is best coordinated with the guidance in the general plan guidelines on how to address climate change risk, vulnerability and adaptation. The Coastal Commission maintains [Sea Level Rise Policy Guidance](#)⁹ on how to plan for sea level rise within an LCP or permit. Additional information on LCP planning, such as updating certified LCPs and Best Practices for amending LCPs, can be found on the Coastal Commissions [Local Government Resources](#)¹⁰ page. Additional information regarding Coastal Act Requirements and the General Plan can be found in the Implementation Chapter of the [General Plan Guidelines](#).

Local governments play a critical role in safeguarding California from the impacts of climate change and just as no two communities are the same, local governments have the flexibility to incorporate climate considerations into long-range planning in various ways that can be tailored to local needs and context.

For more information contact Michael McCormick at Michael.McCormick@opr.ca.gov

¹ https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160SB379

² <http://opr.ca.gov/planning/general-plan/>

³ <http://www.caloes.ca.gov/cal-oes-divisions/hazard-mitigation/hazard-mitigation-planning/state-hazard-mitigation-plan>

⁴ <http://www.caloes.ca.gov/cal-oes-divisions/hazard-mitigation/hazard-mitigation-planning/california-climate-adaptation>

⁵ <https://webmaps.arb.ca.gov/capmap/>

⁶ <https://toolkit.climate.gov/>

⁷ <http://www.georgetownclimate.org/>

⁸ <https://www.coastal.ca.gov/coastact.pdf>

⁹ <http://www.coastal.ca.gov/climate/SLRguidance.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.coastal.ca.gov/rflg/>