



# SUSTAINABILITY & CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

August 12, 2021

Sustainability and Climate Action Plan Ad Hoc Committee

*86 attendees, 105 registered*

## Public Comments from 40 participants

### **Public Comments on Sustainability and Climate Action Plan (S/CAP) Timeline, Implementation, and Financing:**

- Accelerate action on the S/CAP Update - Palo Alto has an opportunity to lead. The Goals and Key Actions are done, let's get started on implementation (+ 31 similar comments)
- Work on implementation in parallel to S/CAP Update completion. Don't wait for financing before getting started on implementation. (+ 2 similar comments)
- Develop a financing plan. Funding is a critical topic. (+ 2 similar comments)
- The funding aspect of the discussion needs to come sooner in this process
- We need to devote money to these efforts - budgets are statements of values

### **Public Comments on S/CAP Update Issue Areas:**

- The S/CAP Update needs to be more focused. Focus on the 3-5 biggest contributors to the carbon footprint and the solutions.
- Recalculate Palo Alto's GHG emissions using a "consumption-based" approach, rather than the current "production-based" model
- Develop a plan to increasingly address Palo Alto's energy needs via actual renewable energy and energy conservation / load management – not via RECs and offsets
- We need persuasion, capacity building, and financing for residents who need financial help to electrify (+ 2 similar comments)
- The Palo Alto climate is temperate, so it's more difficult to electrify. Is it possible to partner with another city to balance costs across the two cities?
- Set a sunset date for the natural gas system
- We need a second transmission line if we eliminate gas
- Broaden bulk buy programs to include things like e-bikes and water heaters
- Put pilot programs in motion sooner than later
- Integrate energy resiliency into the S/CAP Update. Suggestions: single building solar microgrid pilot focused on resiliency of critical facilities (e.g. the new Fire Station), Cubberley should be the basis of a neighborhood community microgrid pilot. (+ 2 similar comments)

- Integrate emergency preparation / response into the S/CAP Update
- Sea Level Rise is a critical topic and needs faster action and a robust plan (+ 2 similar comment)
- Need to analyze the impacts of basement construction on groundwater. There are very few basements built in Palo Alto and it should not be allowed.
- There is a significant overlap between housing policy and VMT reduction. Could we deed restrict certain units for people who work locally?
- We need more housing near jobs and transit
- We need to address waste and recycling; and water and wastewater usage

**Public Comments on S/CAP Ad Hoc Committee Structure:**

- The Ad Hoc Committee process as currently conceived will slow down action. (+ 1 similar comment)
- Focus only on climate action, not sustainability broadly. Don't focus on inventories, long term plans - focus on what moves the needle in the near term.

**Public Comments on the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA):**

- Work around CEQA - make a negative declaration, get an exemption, or find another way (+ 3 similar comments)
- Why do we need CEQA review of the S/CAP Update? (+ 1 similar comment)

**Public Comments on Partnerships, Collaboration, and Outreach:**

- We need to reframe this as a technical and innovation effort rather than an enforcement or sacrifice effort
- Use workgroup collaboration tools (e.g. Gira, Slack, Asana) to facilitate a collaboration platform to enable small working groups and teams to develop plans and ideas
- Devote some staff time to sharing insights with other cities
- Need more outreach to help people understand what they need to do (+ 1 similar comment)
- Pilot a community microgrid project and solar and storage at City facilities (+ 1 similar comment)
- Partner with local nonprofits
- Partner with other agencies to focus on sea level rise policies
- Partner on a local plant for transforming wood waste into biochar and green energy

**General Responses to Themes from the Public Comments**

**Sustainability and Climate Action Plan (S/CAP) Timeline, Implementation, and Financing**

The recently released 2021 [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) (IPCC) report is an urgent call to action against the climate crisis. The [Sixth Assessment Report](#) found that the climate has already changed in unprecedented ways — such as a certain amount of sea level rise is already irreversible and world temperatures will spike beyond the long predicted 1.5 to 2 degrees Celsius if greenhouse gas emissions are not rapidly reduced.

The City of Palo Alto recognizes the urgency and importance of taking action on climate change and is committed to reaching our goal of reducing GHG emissions 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2030 (the

“80 x 30” goal). The Sustainability and Climate Action Plan (S/CAP) Update seeks to provide a roadmap to meeting our sustainability goals, including the 80 x 30 goal.

We want to reach out to as many members of the community as possible – especially those who are not currently actively engaged – to ensure discussion and understanding of the strategies proposed in the S/CAP Update. It’s also important to note, that while development of the S/CAP Update is underway, implementation is already beginning and financing planning can occur concurrently.

The S/CAP Update is an interdepartmental effort that draws upon expertise and engagement with multiple stakeholder groups and other agencies. The scope of the City’s sustainability and climate change efforts encompasses many departments and several different initiatives. There are multiple plans related to the S/CAP Update that have already been approved by City Council, including the 2030 Comprehensive Plan, Urban Forest Master Plan, Urban Water Management Plan, Zero Waste Plan, Utilities Strategic Plan, Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan, Local Hazard Mitigation and Adaptation Plan, and the Green Stormwater Infrastructure Plan. The proposed S/CAP Goals and Key Actions that are found in those plans can already be implemented since they have Council approval. Several items are already in development or about to be launched, such as residential program services and incentives to promote voluntary electrification of water heating, space heating, cooking, clothes drying, and other appliances that use natural gas; expanding bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure; promoting incentives for electric vehicles (EVs) and EV chargers; developing a “One Water” portfolio for Palo Alto; completing a Sea Level Rise Vulnerability Assessment; developing programs to increase Palo Alto’s tree canopy; and, expanding the Disposable Foodware Ordinance to eliminate single-use disposable cups and containers.

In order to meet its 80 x 30 goal, the City will need to decide on a policy framework that takes into account updated climate science describing what actions are needed to combat global warming, and reinforce community awareness leading to actions that aggressively reduce vehicle miles traveled and vehicle emissions, and electrify existing buildings. The overall scenario described in staff’s analysis achieves 72 percent reduction below 1990 levels by 2030, leaving 8 percent remaining. The analysis also identifies a number of policies that could be pursued, if legally feasible, while continuing analysis to identify the remaining 8 percent needed.

Based on staff and consultant modeling, and depending on what strategies Council chooses to pursue, the cost to implement the goals and key actions analyzed is roughly \$740 million. If debt financing is available, staff estimated the annual cost in 2030 would be roughly \$53 million per year. Fortunately, there are ongoing savings associated with these emissions reductions estimated at \$43 million per year, for a net cost of \$10 million per year. For comparison, the total of all community electric and gas bills is roughly \$175 million per year. This means the net cost to implement would be 5 to 6 percent of total community energy spending. The actual costs and benefits accrue differently across the community, however. While the costs may seem high and the scale of action large, the cost of inaction is also high.

### **S/CAP Ad Hoc Committee**

The purpose of the S/CAP Ad Hoc Committee is to engage with a stakeholder group of domain experts and community activists, and to help guide the development, implementation, and communication of the S/CAP. This new City Council Ad Hoc committee will complement the work of the City Council and Staff on our sustainability and climate action efforts to help finalize the S/CAP Update. The S/CAP Ad

Hoc Committee provides a forum for more in-depth discussion of the issues, which is not possible at City Council Meetings, and is designed to provide swifter resolution on key issues, ultimately resulting in faster implementation of actions. Since the S/CAP Ad Hoc Committee is not subject to the requirements of the [Brown Act](#), this allows it to be much more nimble, for example, not needing to go through the six-week staff report process.

### **The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)**

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is a California statute passed in 1970 that requires state and local agencies in California, such as Cities and Counties, (in this context, called the “Lead Agency”) to analyze the potential environmental impacts of their actions. CEQA requires Lead Agencies to determine and disclose if those impacts are significant, and if so, to avoid or minimize those impacts, as feasible.

In early 2020, the City of Palo Alto launched an update to the Sustainability and Climate Action Plan (S/CAP) to develop the strategies needed to meet our sustainability goals, including our goal of reducing GHG emissions 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2030 (the “80 x 30” goal). Achieving the bold goals in Palo Alto’s S/CAP Update will require aggressive strategies, which may have the potential to adversely impact the physical environment. Although these impacts may be outweighed by the environmental benefits sought under the S/CAP Update, they must be analyzed and considered under CEQA. While many components of the S/CAP Update could be adopted under various exemptions under CEQA, the plan as a whole - since it is a coordinated set of actions driving towards a goal, like the Comprehensive Plan - requires CEQA analysis.

CEQA review of the S/CAP Update will establish it as a CEQA reviewed GHG emissions reduction plan, on which future projects within the City can rely, thereby streamlining the environmental analysis necessary for CEQA, and ensuring cost savings for future S/CAP Update-related projects as well as more rapid implementation of components of the program. It should be noted that CEQA review of the S/CAP Update does not necessarily need to delay early S/CAP Implementation steps. There are several S/CAP Update-related programs, projects and initiatives that were planned as part of the 2018 – 2020 Sustainability Implementation Plan, and as such have components already in progress, with Council approval. Those select early implementation steps can proceed in parallel with CEQA review.

Finally, because the S/CAP Update contains many aggressive strategies to meet the City’s climate goals, it may be met with opposition in some communities. A robust CEQA analysis is one strategy to head off potential legal challenges to the plan.

### **Partnerships, Collaboration, and Outreach**

Sustainability and climate change efforts are not limited to geographic boundaries. Collaboration with regional and national partners has been an integral part of the City’s efforts. We work closely with groups such as the Urban Sustainability Directors Network, Green Cities California, Santa Clara County Climate Collaborative, ICLEI, RICAPS Multi-City Working Group, and the Joint Venture Silicon Valley Public Sector Climate Task Force to share resources, collaborate on regional efforts, and share best practices. We meet regularly with advocacy and community groups such as CoolBlock, Carbon Free Palo Alto, 350 Bay Area, Acterra, and Canopy. As we finalize our S/CAP Update outreach strategy, we will seek to build upon existing relationships and develop new ones.