

Adaptation to Climate Change

Climate change is altering the environment in significant ways, and successful adaptation to climate change will require new and innovative long-range planning strategies. To prompt counties to action, the Legislature has decreed counties must now include in their respective general plans not only an assessment of the risks caused by climate change but also a set of strategies to deal with the consequences of climate change. Disappointingly, the draft 2020-2040 General Plan does not meet this statutory requirement.

California Senate Bill No. 379 (2015) amended the Government Code to require counties to update their respective general plan safety elements to include resilience strategies for adapting to climate change. At a minimum, the updates need to include a vulnerability assessment and a set of adaptation and resilience goals, policies, objectives and mitigation measures to protect county residents from the effects of climate change.

The law gives counties options on how to meet this statutory requirement. If a county has an adopted hazard mitigation plan (HMP) that contains the provisions required by SB 379, the county can summarize that information in its safety element and incorporate the HMP into its general plan by reference. As a second option, if the information required by SB 379 is already incorporated into various elements of a county's general plan, the county can opt to explain in its safety element how the information in various sections of its general plan satisfies this statutory requirement. And a third option is to employ a hybrid of the first two options.

County actions suggest the County is taking the hybrid approach. In 2019, the County revised its HMP to include new information on climate change, and the County's July 2021 draft of the 2020-2040 General Plan contains a new section titled "Adaptation and Resiliency."

Notwithstanding these changes, County plans have a long way to go to satisfy the requirements of SB 379. The HMP, as amended, does not contain the adaptation and

resilience goals, policies and objectives required by SB 379. Neither does the draft 2020-2040 General Plan.

The HMP does not address adaptation to climate change. Instead, it describes the potential for climate change to increase the frequency and intensity of various hazards. For example, the text describing the effect climate change will have on agricultural reads in full as follows:

"Climate Change Considerations

As climate change has progressed, noticeable changes have occurred with the climate and weather patterns across the globe. Weather events have become more numerous and more severe. Changes in weather patterns can have dramatic impacts on the ecosystem, including agriculture systems; more severe impacts can be expected into the future."

The policy section proposed for addition to the General Plan does not meet the intent of SB 379. Printed out in full are drafts of four new policies designed to protect life and property from the effects of climate change.

- ♦ The County shall support plans, standards, regulation, incentives, and investments to reduce the impacts of climate change.
- ♦ The County shall monitor information from Federal, State, and regional agencies on the effects of climate change to determine if the County should implement additional adaptation strategies.
- ♦ The County shall continue to collaborate with Federal, State, regional, and local agencies, business and property owners, and residents to reduce generation of GHG and other emissions that contribute to climate change and adapt to potential effects of climate change.
- ♦ The County shall support programs to provide financial assistance for the retrofitting of low-income homes (such as energy efficiency upgrades, improved insulation, renewable energy upgrades, and use of electric appliances).

The County's HMP and draft 2020-2040 General Plan do not contain a strategy for adapting to climate change.