



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Submitted on:
(COB Stamp)

Department Name: Planning and Development
Department No.: 053
Agenda Date: February 10, 2026
Placement: Departmental Agenda
Estimated Time: 60 MINUTES
Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from: N/A
Vote Required: Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors
FROM: Department Director(s): Lisa Plowman
Contact: Alex Tuttle, Deputy Director
SUBJECT: Environmental Justice Element of the Comprehensive Plan

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: N/A

Other Concurrence:

As to form: N/A

Recommended Actions:

That the Board of Supervisors consider the recommendations of the County Planning Commission, follow the procedures outlined below, and approve Case No. 22GPA-00000-00003 to adopt the Environmental Justice Element, and take the following actions:

- a) Make the required findings for approval, including the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) findings (Attachment A).
- b) Find that the proposed comprehensive plan amendment is exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3) and the Notice of Exemption (Attachment B).
- c) Adopt a resolution to approve the proposed comprehensive plan amendment, adopting the Environmental Justice Element as part of the County Comprehensive Plan (Attachment C).

Please refer the matter to staff for appropriate actions and findings if the Board takes other than the recommended actions.

Summary Text:

The County of Santa Barbara (County) proposes to adopt the Environmental Justice Element. State law (Senate Bill 1000) requires that the County incorporate environmental justice goals, policies, and objectives into the Comprehensive Plan because there are communities within the unincorporated area of the County that meet the state definition of Disadvantaged Communities. The following eight communities meet the state definition for Disadvantaged Communities and are referred to as "Environmental Justice Communities": Cuyama, New Cuyama, Ventucopa, Sisquoc, Garey, Casmalia,

Los Alamos, and Isla Vista. As discussed below, Planning and Development staff worked with community members and service providers in the Environmental Justice Communities to understand their specific needs as they relate to environmental justice issues. Staff engaged community members and an interdepartmental working group to develop draft objectives and actions in the Environmental Justice Element to address these needs and comply with State law. The Element's implementation actions are primarily service-related and identify County-led opportunities for funding, programs, and projects, in collaboration with community partners, to improve the conditions of underserved and underrepresented communities, as opposed to imposing new land use regulations or restrictions on businesses or property owners. Many of the actions are a continuation of existing County programs or provision of resources.

Discussion:

County staff prepared the Draft Environmental Justice Element to comply with California State Law, which requires that local jurisdictions amend their Comprehensive (General) Plan to identify Disadvantaged Communities within their jurisdiction and, if present, develop policies and actions to address specific health risks and health needs in these communities. Stakeholder feedback prompted a change in terminology to refer to these communities as "Environmental Justice Communities".

More specifically, Government Code Section 65302(h) (Senate Bill 1000) requires all cities and counties with Disadvantaged Communities to adopt an Environmental Justice Element or related environmental justice goals, policies, and objectives that do the following:

1. Identify objectives and policies to reduce the unique or compounded health risks in disadvantaged communities by means that include, but are not limited to, the reduction of pollution exposure, including the improvement of air quality, and the promotion of public facilities, food access, safe and sanitary homes, and physical activity,
2. Identify objectives and policies to promote civic engagement in the public decision-making process, and
3. Identify objectives and policies that prioritize improvements and programs that address the needs of disadvantaged communities.

EJ Goals and Policies

The Environmental Justice Element has a total of three goals, nine policies, 39 objectives, and 100 actions. The Environmental Justice Element fully embraces the County's "One County-One Future" guiding principles with the following Environmental Justice Element Goals:

1. Providing a comprehensive picture of County services within Environmental Justice Communities,
2. Establishing a collaborative process for including Environmental Justice Communities in County decision-making, and
3. Developing an equitable approach for addressing Environmental Justice Community needs through cost efficient exceptional services so all can enjoy a safe, healthy, and prosperous life.

The County, with guidance from the Equity Advisory and Outreach Committee, developed the nine policies for the Environmental Justice Element to directly address the statutory requirements in Government Code Section 65302(h). The Element's policies are as follows:

Policy 1: Promote public facilities in Environmental Justice Communities.

Policy 2: Promote access to healthy and affordable food in Environmental Justice Communities.

Policy 3: Promote physical activity for community members residing within Environmental Justice Communities.

Policy 4: Improve air quality within Environmental Justice Communities.

Policy 5: Reduce exposure to pollution within Environmental Justice Communities.

Policy 6: Reduce unique or compounded health risks within Environmental Justice Communities.

Policy 7: Promote civic engagement in the public decision-making process among Environmental Justice Community residents.

Policy 8: Promote safe and sanitary homes within Environmental Justice Communities.

Policy 9: Prioritize the needs of Environmental Justice Communities.

The Environmental Justice Element objectives and actions were developed in collaboration with the Environmental Justice Element Working Group, including staff from 15 County departments and affiliate agencies: all with a critical role in project implementation. The focus of the objectives and actions are on items the County and community partners can do to address the needs of the Environmental Justice Communities. The actions are primarily service-related, as opposed to new regulations or restrictions on land use, businesses or property owners. Many of the actions are the continuation of existing County programs or resources, which already support and address Environmental Justice Community needs. The California Attorney General's Office's Environmental Justice Element Guidelines state that the policies, objectives and actions must be measurable and attainable according to a stated schedule. As a result, the Element's actions will be implemented in phases (e.g. short, medium, or long-term timeframe) depending on several factors such as complexity and cost. Implementation of the Environmental Justice Element would involve engagement with Environmental Justice Communities to implement its objectives and actions and continued collaboration among County departments through the Environmental Justice Working Group. The Environmental Justice Element's Implementation Matrix (Attachment C. Exhibit 1. Appendix A) provides each policy, objective, and action as well as the department(s) assigned to implement them and their phase or timeframe.

Planning Commission Recommendations

On November 5, 2025, the County Planning Commission conducted its third and final public hearing on the Draft Environmental Justice Element. The Commission voted (3-0) to adopt a resolution

recommending that the Board approve the Draft Environmental Justice Element (Attachment E) with additional recommendations as follows:

- a) Direct staff to work with community organizations to conduct additional in-person community outreach and engagement on the policies, objectives, and actions in the Environmental Justice Element,
- b) Direct staff to create and convene a stakeholder advisory group to assist with the community outreach, and monitor and consult on the implementation of the Environmental Justice Element,
- c) Direct staff to develop an implementation plan for the Environmental Justice Element, including adding definitions of key terms, and
- d) Consider the phases assigned to actions in the Environmental Justice Element Implementation Matrix (Appendix A) to reflect priority actions.

As the Board considers these recommendations, it should be noted that additional outreach and engagement prior to adoption of the Environmental Justice Element would require additional staffing and resources, necessitating a deferral or delay of other Board priorities. The Planning Commission has recommended forming and convening an advisory group; however, staff consulted with the Equity Advisory and Outreach Committee throughout the project and plans to continue to do so to implement the Element, as appropriate. In addition, the Environmental Justice Element's implementation plan is the Implementation Matrix (Attachment C. Exhibit 1. Appendix A), and staff will utilize existing opportunities like the Transformative Climate Communities grant funding to conduct outreach and engagement to further the Element's implementation measures. Finally, the phases for each action in the Implementation Matrix are guideposts and can be adjusted based on priorities, availability of funding, feasibility, community interest, etc.

Background:

Identification of Environmental Justice Communities

Planning and Development staff completed an analysis to identify Environmental Justice Communities in accordance with the Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation (Governor's) guidelines for Environmental Justice Elements (Chapter 4). The Governor's guidance includes mapping low-income areas and evaluating whether they are disproportionately affected by environmental pollution and other hazards that can lead to negative health effects, exposure, or environmental degradation. Specifically, the guidance includes mapping: 1) household median incomes at or below the statewide median income by census tract; 2) areas at or below the California Department of Housing and Community Development's state income limits; 3) disproportionate environmental burdens and hazards (such as pollution and population characteristics) using the State's CalEnviroScreen 4.0 tool; and 4) community-specific data for health risk factors and pollution. The County completed a thorough screening analysis and determined that Cuyama, New Cuyama, Ventucopa, Sisquoc, Garey, Casmalia, Los Alamos, and Isla Vista meet the Disadvantaged Community criteria and recommended they be designated as Environmental Justice Communities. Staff's identification methodology including a complete list of environmental hazards considered in the analysis can be found in Attachment C, the Environmental Justice Element's Appendix B: Mapping Methodology. Seven of the eight Environmental Justice Communities are already designated as Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities in the Land Use Element. Isla Vista was also identified

in the economic screening analysis as a Disadvantaged Community but is not rural in nature and therefore is not a Disadvantaged Unincorporated Community.

Community Engagement

In accordance with state law and guidance, community engagement has been a central component of developing the Environmental Justice Element, so Planning and Development staff completed a multi-faceted approach to engagement. The Element's Appendix C: Engagement Summary (Attachment C. Exhibit 1) discusses the community engagement process to develop the Environmental Justice Element. The Equity Advisory and Outreach Committee provided guidance on terminology and engagement strategies, reviewed proposed environmental justice policies, and reviewed submissions of environmental justice artwork that were used to illustrate the Element. The Santa Barbara County Promotores Network supported the design and implementation of engagement within each of the Environmental Justice Communities, including administration of a survey, co-facilitation of public meetings, and direct engagement at community events. The joint Housing Element Update and Environmental Justice Element survey was administered in 2022, and the Promotores Network collected 348 total responses. The Promotores Network co-facilitated three bilingual community meetings with staff in Isla Vista, Los Alamos, and New Cuyama where the County wanted to learn more about the community members' experiences and opportunities to support them. Staff also worked with the Promotores Network in fall 2023 to collect multimedia responses from community members describing their community, and their responses have been incorporated into the community descriptions within the Environmental Justice Element.

Environmental Justice Working Group

The Environmental Justice Working Group, comprised of representatives from 15 County departments and affiliate agencies, was convened to support development of the proposed objectives and actions. The Working Group is well suited to address the multifaceted set of environmental justice issues through their various roles and responsibilities. It includes staff from the Agricultural Commissioner's Office, Air Pollution Control District, Behavioral Wellness Department, Community Services Department, County Education Office, County Executive Office, County Health (formerly the Public Health Department), Fire Department, First Five Santa Barbara County, General Services Department, Office of Emergency Management, Planning and Development Department, Public Works Department, Sheriff's Office, and Social Services Department. Additionally, because some of the response rates and participation levels during the community engagement efforts were low, staff supplemented data collection with the knowledge and experience of the Working Group to identify additional environmental justice-related issues and needs. Staff used the Working Group to compile an inventory of the numerous efforts currently underway as well as proposed new initiatives to meet the environmental justice-related needs of these communities. Many of the environmental justice actions in the Element are efforts that the County is already undertaking. The Working Group will remain in place as a resource to support and facilitate implementation of the EJ Element.

Environmental Review

The proposed general plan amendment is exempt from CEQA according to CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3), which exempts projects that have no possibility of a significant effect on the environment. See the attached Notice of Exemption for further details (Attachment B).

Policy Consistency

The proposed general plan amendment is a state-mandated element and is consistent with all applicable policies and development standards of the County's Comprehensive Plan, including community plans. The Environmental Justice Element is closely linked to all other elements of the Comprehensive Plan and is an important step in bringing equitable representation into the County's planning process. Several Environmental Justice Element policies and objectives are directly interrelated with mandated topics in the Land Use, Housing, and Safety Elements. Any projects that address identified environmental justice needs or deficiencies that result from the Environmental Justice Element would be subject to applicable requirements in effect at the time a project is proposed.

County Planning Commission Hearings

Staff presented the proposed Project to the County Planning Commission (Commission) in three public hearings on August 27, October 7, and November 5, 2025. Throughout each hearing, the Commission received public comment and recommended minor edits to the Environmental Justice Element to clarify the following:

- The purpose and intent of the Environmental Justice Element as assisting the County in gaining a greater understanding of community needs and opportunities for improving the conditions of underserved and underrepresented communities, rather than imposing new regulations;
- How the Environmental Justice Communities (EJCs) were identified and additional clarity regarding the boundaries of the EJCs;
- The intention of the data sources used to help identify the EJCs; and the scope of various objectives and actions.

These revisions are summarized in Attachment E (Planning Commission Staff Memo dated October 27, 2025).

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

Budgeted: Yes

The County Adopted Budget FY 2025-2026 includes funding for general plan amendments and maintenance as part of the Planning and Development Department, Long Range Planning Division Budget Program.

The time and costs associated with completing this project have been anticipated and included in the Planning and Development Department's Long Range Planning Division's 2025-26 Annual Work Plan that was presented and approved by the Board of Supervisors on April 8, 2025.

Limited staffing will be available in Long Range Planning to support the implementation of the Environmental Justice Element. The staff allocation will be included in the Annual Work Plan but would be covered with existing funding and staffing levels. No additional staff will be required to fulfill this assignment.

The County Community Services Department was awarded a \$1,084,660 grant from the California State Strategic Growth Council's Transformative Climate Communities Grant Program to support community-based organizations, stakeholders, and residents in the Cuyama Valley. The program's mission is to develop projects that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve community quality of life and resilience to climate change. Planning and Development was allocated \$25,520 from the grant to work on various Environmental Justice implementation efforts in the Cuyama Valley, the majority of which remains available. The grant runs through August 2026. There are no facilities impacts.

Staffing Impacts:

None. Should the Board direct staff to complete additional tasks as recommended by the County Planning Commission, there may be associated staffing impacts.

Special Instructions:

The Planning and Development Department will satisfy all noticing requirements. The Clerk of the Board shall forward a copy of the minute order and an executed copy of the executed resolution to the Planning and Development Department, attention Zoë Carlson.

Attachments:

Attachment A. Findings for Approval

Attachment B. Notice of Exemption

Attachment C. Board of Supervisors Resolution Adopting the Environmental Justice Element

Exhibit 1. Environmental Justice Element

Appendix A. Implementation Matrix for Environmental Justice Element Policies and Objectives

Appendix B. Mapping Methodology

Appendix C. Engagement Summary

Attachment D. County Planning Commission Staff Report dated August 19, 2025

Attachment E. County Planning Commission Staff Memo dated October 27, 2025

Attachment F. County Planning Commission Action Letter and Resolution

Attachment A. Findings

Attachment C. County Planning Commission Resolution

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