



**EAST PALO ALTO
PUBLIC WORKS & TRANSPORTATION
COMMISSION
STAFF REPORT**

DATE: June 4, 2024

TO: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

BY: Tai Michaels, Sustainability Coordinator
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SUBJECT: Climate Action Plan Implementation Report

Recommendation

Receive an informational report regarding the current status and planned implementation of the 2030 Community Climate Action Plan. Offer feedback on existing projects and insight into future priorities.

Alignment with City Council Strategic Plan

This recommendation is primarily aligned with:

Priority No. 2: Implement Comprehensive Transportation and Mobility Plan

Priority No. 3: Promote Health and Public Safety

Background

Cities are leading the charge in combating global warming by adopting sustainable solutions and passing forward-thinking policies. Yet, cities are also on the frontlines of climate impacts such as flooding, extreme heat, and air pollution.

In recognition of both the challenges and opportunities of local climate action, the City of East Palo Alto has taken important steps towards building a more sustainable future. The City of East Palo Alto adopted its first Climate Action Plan in December 2011 with a goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 15% below 2005 levels by 2020. The City exceeded its goal in just six years, reducing greenhouse gas emissions by an estimated 20% and avoiding emitting more than 27,000 metric tons of polluting carbon dioxide.

The City began work on the 2030 Community Climate Action Plan (CAP), its second climate action plan, in 2019. The City set a goal of a 55% reduction in per capita emissions relative to 2005 levels by 2030 in alignment with a long-term goal of carbon neutrality by 2045 and related state regulations ([SB32](#)). The CAP was designed using input from community organizations including Acterra's [Community-Based Vulnerability Planning Report](#), a resident survey, and five council/commission meetings. The CAP was adopted September 5, 2023.

The CAP details key actions the City will take to reach its goals of emissions reduction as well as achieving “co-benefits” to health, equity, the environment, and [climate resilience](#). The plan recommends 53 actions, broadly grouped into Energy & Water, Transportation, and Waste. The CAP also contains 17 recommended adaptation strategies to prepare residents for the impacts of climate change. As part of CAP implementation, the City seeks to provide annual updates on implementation status and the most recent available greenhouse gas emissions.

Analysis

After the adoption of the CAP, City staff have taken key steps to lay the groundwork for CAP actions and develop plans for ongoing implementation. City staff have worked to strengthen ties to the strong community-based environmental movement in order to align City actions and priorities with those of residents and community members. Extensive coordination with County and regional entities has also been crucial to develop thorough implementation planning. The following sections detail [ongoing and planned projects](#) and potential [future strategies](#). Detailed project status and greenhouse gas emissions data are included as attachments.

Current & planned projects

While the Environmental Programs Division is involved in these projects, many are partnerships or are led by other departments or community partners.

Expand engagement and communication

A key part of the CAP is to ensure continued engagement from the community to build awareness of ongoing efforts in the city. This forms a key starting point to improve trust and engagement with the CAP implementation process.

- *The Climate Change Community Team (CCCT)* – The CCCT is a group of city residents and community group members who share information and resources on climate-related topics as well as coordinating events and projects in the city. Environmental Programs representatives have attended nearly every meeting since the passage of the CAP to provide updates on behalf of the City and solicit input.
- *Environmental Programs website* – Created the [Environment & Sustainability website](#) section covering information and resources on key CAP topics including sustainable homes, transportation, waste, resilience, and the environment.
- *Sustainability newsletter* – Started a bimonthly sustainability newsletter to keep residents and community groups informed of events, resources, and ways for the community to get involved.
- *Community events* – Staff have helped coordinate sustainability focused events in the city including a creek cleanup, Earth Day festival, Arbor Day celebration, e-waste event, and Bike to Work Day. Staff have also helped promote, plan, and conduct outreach at other community events such as MLK Day tree planting and upcoming Resilience Fair.

Sustainable homes & buildings

Building energy use accounts for 35% of the city’s greenhouse gas emissions, primarily from natural gas-fueled appliances. It is also one of the emission sources over which the City and residents have the greatest control, and it is key to reaching the City’s ambitious emissions reduction goals.

- *Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG)* – Participated in the planning process for a regional application for over \$100 million in federal funding towards electrifying gas appliances in single family homes and small multifamily complexes across the Bay Area including in EPA. Notification of funding is expected by Fall 2024.
- *Increasing City facility sustainability* – Working with PG&E and PCE to secure funding through three programs to help reduce emissions from City facilities by replacing gas water heaters, installing more efficient HVAC, and potentially installing EV charging. Connecting with energy-efficient design incentives and technical assistance from the State to improve sustainability of upcoming housing and library projects.
- *Existing building electrification (EBE) planning* – Creating an EBE plan is a key part of the CAP and the city’s long-term emissions reduction goals. Staff have met repeatedly with key organizations involved in housing and electrification work including CRC, PCE, BayREN, and the Rent Stabilization Program to evaluate challenges and needs. Currently part of a County working group strategizing collective approaches including permit standardization or an outreach campaign.

Transportation

Transportation is the largest part of the city’s emissions — and also the largest opportunity for

a shift to a more sustainable city. Since the vast majority of residents get around by driving alone in a gas vehicle, shifting towards more sustainable modes of transit (such as biking and bussing) or more sustainable vehicles (such as electric and hybrid) can have a big impact on both emissions and air pollution.

- *City fleet upgrades* – Completed first holistic inventory of City fleets across all departments to comply with Advanced Clean Fleets (ACF) regulations. Working with PCE to develop a plan for shifting City vehicles to EVs over time to reduce air pollution and comply with ACF regulations. Planning and designing EV charger installation for City vehicles and potentially the public as well.
- *Increasing access to bikes* – Worked with Live in Peace (LIP) Bike Shop to secure dozens of free bikes for EPA residents. Working with LIP and community members to identify locations for new and expanded bike parking. Helping promote free bike safety in partnership with LIP and SMC Safe Routes to School projects.

Reduce waste

Rethinking how we deal with waste is a key part of maintaining a healthy environment and a clean city. Even something as simple as putting trash in the right bin can avoid pollution and reduce emissions. The City has made strong commitments to reducing waste both within the CAP and through other policies and targets it has set.

- *Composting outreach* – As part of CA SB1383, all businesses and multifamily developments are required to have composting available. City staff coordinate with businesses to help them comply with regulations and reduce the amount of food/yard waste that goes to landfills. Installed composting at all City offices.
- *City sustainable purchasing* – Certifying that paper products the City purchases are compostable/recyclable and made from qualifying percentages of recycled content. Training staff to use recordkeeping systems.

Community resilience

It is crucial for residents to adjust to more damaging, climate change-fueled disasters by increasing community resilience – preparing for, responding to, and bouncing back from these disasters. The City plays a key role in helping inform residents and developing forward-thinking policies and infrastructure improvements.

- *Safety & Environmental Justice (EJ) Element Updates* – Working with County consultants to update the Safety and EJ Elements of the City's General Plan. Currently planning and conducting initial outreach about the plan, soliciting resident input.
- *Expanding tree coverage and green infrastructure* – Working with Canopy to plant more than 50 trees per year with the help of the Teen Urban Foresters program. Currently partnering with Canopy on two grant applications totaling over \$11 million to dramatically expand tree planting and resilience outreach programs. Partnering with

CRC on an application to expand their community rain garden program to install hundreds of rain gardens for residents.

- *Flood preparation and flood insurance* – Investigating projects to improve flood response planning and communication to increase resident awareness and safety. Seeking to reduce flood insurance costs for residents by improving the city’s FEMA Community Rating System classification.

Future projects & options

In addition to the projects listed above, there are many other parts of the CAP still in early stages. A major goal of the implementation report is to seek guidance on which projects to prioritize and explore further over the next seven years of implementation.

Existing building electrification (EBE)

Although some of the City’s current work covers sustainable buildings and healthy homes, creating strategies to equitably transition homes and businesses to all-electric appliances (i.e., water heaters, HVAC, stoves) is a key part of CAP goals. Electrification has important financial and health benefits as well – switching to electric stoves alone reduces the risk of childhood asthma by more than 40% by reducing nitrous oxide emissions.¹ However, this project is challenging due to the costs (many of which may be unexpected), lack of awareness of benefits and incentives, and a wide range of barriers for renters including unresponsive property owners, increasing rents, and the “split incentive” – where tenants benefit from lower utility bills but the property owner owns the actual appliances.

Several potential options exist for promoting EBE, and further input is key for focusing on the pathways that offer the greatest potential. A few key pathways are listed below:

- *Time of replacement/renovation* – Through education and financial incentives, facilitate the transition of old gas appliances to electric versions once they need to be replaced with some exceptions. High impact but could raise costs for residents depending on how incentives change.
- *Building performance standards* – Setting standards of energy efficiency for large building which become stricter over time. This would have a moderate impact on energy use and emissions (e.g.: Ikea alone is responsible for >5% of all building emissions in the city). This requirement would largely avoid financial pressure on residents but requires a lot of management from the City and may be more practical if implemented on a county or state level.
- *Pursue funding to support electrification for priority groups* – Most electrification projects to date have been done by wealthy homeowners in single family homes. Increasing funding to reach renters, low-income residents, and residents with language barriers is key to support equitable electrification. Due to high demand and upcoming regional rules, it may be difficult to get funding specific to East Palo Alto.

- *Expand outreach about existing programs* – Increasing resident awareness and use of existing programs that offer incentives and technical assistance with electrifying homes. Taking a more active role in outreach could increase voluntary electrification; however, existing programs have gaps, frequently failing to address the needs of renters and low-moderate income residents.

Other CAP measures

Beyond EBE, there are many CAP measures that are still in early planning stages. While the City is working to achieve all of the goals in the CAP, prioritization is important, especially early on in CAP implementation. More information on each CAP measure is listed below, but several key topics that the City has not thoroughly approached yet include:

- Promoting residential water efficiency;
- Creating a plan for public EV charging;
- Reducing the impact of small off-road engines (e.g., leaf blowers, lawn equipment);
- Recruiting e-bike/e-car share services to the city;
- Promoting microgrid pilot projects – energy systems that maintain power even when the grid is down;
- Reforming parking policies to encourage alternative transit; and
- All measures listed as **planning** in Attachment E.

Public Notice

The public was provided notice by making the agenda and report available on the City’s website and on the City’s official bulletin board outside City Hall and report available at the San Mateo County Library located at 2415 University Avenue in East Palo Alto.

Environmental

The action being considered does not constitute a “Project” within the meaning of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), pursuant to CEQA Guideline section 15378 (b)(5), in that it is a government administrative activity that will not result in direct or indirect changes in the environment.

Government Code § 84308

Applicability of Levine Act: No, as the proposed action does not involve an entitlement within the meaning of the Levine Act.

Analysis of Levine Act Compliance: Not applicable.

Attachments

Attachment A – 2030 Community Climate Action Plan – See here for the full plan:

<https://www.cityofepa.org/publicworks/page/2030-climate-action-plan>

Attachment B – 2005 Greenhouse Gas Emission Inventory

Attachment C – 2021 Greenhouse Gas Emission Inventory

Attachment D – Existing building electrification strategy options matrix

Attachment E – Action-by-action status

References

1. Weiwei Lin, Bert Brunekreef, Ulrike Gehring, Meta-analysis of the effects of indoor nitrogen dioxide and gas cooking on asthma and wheeze in children, International Journal of Epidemiology, Volume 42, Issue 6, December 2013, Pages 1724–1737, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ije/dyt150>