Contra Costa County Sustainability Commission

Record of Action for April 28, 2025, 5:00 P.M.

Sustainability Commission

Present: Howdy Goudey, Community Group #2
Victoria Smith, District 2
Jamie Duran, Commercial Seat #1
Shoshana Wechsler, District 1
Brandon Matson, District 4
Kim Jones, District 1 (Alternate)
Norman Cohen, District 3
Susan Hurl, Commercial Seat #2
Reilly Kent, District 5 (Alternate)
Julie Haas-Wajdowicz, District 3 (Alternate)
Devin Jackson, Education/Research
Kiara Pereira, Environmental Justice #1
Solomon Belette, District 5
Christopher Easter, District 2 (Alternate)
Sarah Foster (remote participation via "Just Cause")

Absent: Luz Gomez
Wesley Sullens

Staff Present: Jody London, Sustainability Coordinator, Dept. of Conservation and Development;
Jamar Stamps, Principal Planner, Dept. of Conservation and Development;
Wade Finlinson, Integrated Pest Management Coordinator, Contra Costa Health Services;
Lia Bristol, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of Supervisor Carlson;
Emily Groth, Planner, Dept. of Conservation and Development;
Blake McPherson, Sustainability Fellow, Dept. of Conservation and Development

Attendees: Bruce "Ole" Ohlson, Andrea Bailey, Charles Davidson, Lisa Jackson, Richard Free

1. Roll Call and Introductions

   Chair Wechsler called the meeting to order at 5:05 pm and invited the Commissioners and staff present to introduce themselves.

2. Public comment on any item under the jurisdiction of the Commission(s) and not on this agenda (speakers may be limited to two minutes)

   Bruce Ohlson of Pittsburg, also known as "Mr. Bicycle," requested the Commission to ask Contra Costa Transportation Authority to consider adding bicycle lanes to Pacheco Blvd between Arthur Rd and Highway 4, particularly on the railroad underpass. Ohlson suggested paving the road to the concrete abutments and striking the narrowest vehicle lane on the underpass to create a shoulder for a bicycle lane.

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Jody London, Sustainability Coordinator at Contra Costa County Dept. of Conservation and Development, responded that the comment will be passed forward with Public Works personnel, and the Commission could put this topic of the connectivity of the County's bike network on a future meeting agenda to act upon.

3. APPROVE Record of Action for February 24, 2025, meeting

Commissioner Smith moved to approve the Record of Action. Second: Commissioner Pereira. The Record of Action was approved. New Commissioners Duran, Jones, Cohen, Jackson, Belette, and abstained.

4. RECOMMEND the appointment of a Sustainability Commission representative to serve on the Integrated Pest Management Advisory Committee

Wade Finlinson, Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Coordinator at Contra Costa Health Services, conveyed the importance of the Commission's representative to the IPM Advisory Committee to the Contra Costa Board of Supervisors, which will meet the third Thursday of every other month, starting in September. The nominee would also work on a subcommittee focusing on nature-based solutions to look at strategies to help control pests on multiple fronts. The majority of work in IPM in Contra Costa County is vegetation management, often along streams, flood control channels, and open spaces. The Commission's representative to the IPM Advisory Committee does not need to be an IPM expert, but rather someone who will be a representative for the community.

The Commission deliberated over the potential nomination of Periera and discussed the subcommittee meeting times and locations.

Smith motioned to nominate Pereira to the IPM Advisory Committee. Commissioner Kent seconded the motion.

The Commission voted unanimously to appoint Pereira to the IPM Advisory Committee.

5. RECEIVE Report on the update to the County's Tree Protection Ordinance and PROVIDE DIRECTION, as appropriate

Jamar Stamps, Transportation Principal Planner at Contra Costa County Dept. of Conservation and Development, provided a verbal update on the County's new proposed Tree Protection Ordinance. Stamps, prior to the presentation, mentioned that the Public Comment regarding the creation of bicycle lanes on Pacheco Blvd will be addressed in the future, as a project to create separate bicycle lanes in the area of interest is already planned with the start of construction pending the distribution of funds.

Stamps invited the Commission to ask general questions about the proposed ordinance.

The Commission inquired if Contra Costa County Fire Protection District (Con Fire), Rodeo-Hercules Fire Protection District, the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, or any other fire districts

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with unincorporated County coverage have reviewed the proposed ordinance. Stamps confirmed that Con Fire has reviewed the proposed ordinance but would need to check with other fire districts within Contra Costa County to confirm if they have reviewed the proposed ordinance.

Stamps explained that the ratio of planted replacement trees to trees removed under this proposed ordinance is 3:1. The current ordinance is outdated (not updated since 1994) and its definition of a "protected tree" is difficult to decipher. The goal of this proposed ordinance is to simplify the tree protection ordinance for permitting efficiency and clarify language for the public to more easily understand.

Stamps highlighted three tables in the Agenda Packet created to better understand the proposed Tree Protection Ordinance. Table 1 illustrates what types of trees are protected or excluded under this proposed ordinance. Table 2 illustrates how the proposed ordinance would apply. Table 3 compares the differences between the new proposed ordinance and the current ordinance through example scenarios.

Stamps explained that all native and non-native trees are proposed to be protected, with several exceptions for invasive trees or trees that present a high fire hazard risk. Many exceptions from the current ordinance with regards to permit requirements to remove a tree were carried over to the proposed ordinance, such as utility line trimming or if the tree presents an immediate hazard. Designated "heritage trees" are protected, which refers to an individual tree and not all trees of that species. The current ordinance's permitting process does not align with several other similar permitting processes; therefore, the proposed ordinance is intended to follow similar rules to other current permitting processes. Certain criteria must be met for the tree to be granted for removal.

The Commission inquired if community input indicated other types of trees to be excluded from protection. Stamps explained that palm trees and a type of cottonwood tree have been highlighted by the public as trees that are negatively impacting communities but are not currently listed in the proposed ordinance. Commissioner Foster suggested adding Bradford Pear and Tree of Heaven to be excluded from protection under the proposed ordinance because they can host multiple invasive insect species.

The Commission inquired if the use of a tree as habitat for wildlife is considered a factor in tree removal permitting. Stamps noted to discuss that topic with other planners for the proposed ordinance.

The Commission discussed a suggestion that protecting all trees with specific exceptions may be too all-inclusive for permitting efficiency, and the County could instead manage a list of tree species for expedited permitting based on known qualities, such as hosting invasive species or increased fire hazard. This list of trees could be available to the public to let them know the permitting process for these trees is an easy, fast process to help ensure the correct process is followed. Commissioner Goudey also explained that the blanket approval of tree removal without review for homes in a very high fire hazard severity zone may be too far-reaching because living trees are not as large of a fire hazard in wildfires as dead brush and other dry, flammable material. The Commission suggested speaking with the County Council to ensure the ordinance

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aligns with State law requiring vegetation to be removed within 5 feet of homes in very high fire severity zones.

The Commission discussed several administrative policies that could be included for this proposed ordinance. One suggestion was setting a guaranteed turn-around time to ensure the County follows through with permits in a reasonable amount of time, otherwise permitting fees are refunded to the applicant. The Commission discussed making the fine for cutting a tree down more expensive than the permit cost. Another suggestion was to require tree cutting service businesses to validate the property owner's County-issued permit before removing a tree.

The Commission discussed the proposed ordinance's enforcement ability to fine the property owners if a tree is cut down illegally instead of the person or business that cut down the tree. Outreach to the services was suggested to make sure they know the law, however holding the tree removal services accountable for illegally cutting down trees is out of scope for the County's code to enforce.

The Commission discussed possibly adding language to the ordinance to combat illegal dumping. Stamps noted that he would pass on that comment.

The Commission suggested adding language to the proposed ordinance under Article 816-6.204(a) to align with the County's goals of improving air and water quality within the County. Stamps agreed language of that sort should be added to the proposed ordinance.

Stamps referenced Table 2 and clarified the differences between coniferous vs. non-coniferous trees, developed vs. undeveloped parcels, and the definition of non-native trees. In Table 3, example scenarios are highlighted to illustrate differences between the current ordinance and proposed ordinance.

The Commission commented on four topics to clarify for this proposed ordinance. The topics included clarifying the purpose of the proposed ordinance, conducting adequate stakeholder outreach prior to and throughout implementation, ensuring the financial aspects of fees and fines make sense, and ensuring data will be collected to assess the effectiveness of the proposed ordinance.

Comments can be offered on this proposed ordinance through June 30, 2025.

There was no public comment on this item.

6. RECEIVE Report on Clean and Efficient Built Environment section of the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan and PROVIDE DIRECTION, as needed

Jody London, Sustainability Coordinator at Contra Costa County Dept. of Conservation and Development, provided a presentation on the Clean and Efficient Built Environment section of the County's Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP). Four themes are interwoven through both the General Plan and CAAP: environmental justice, community health, economic development, and sustainability. The CAAP's overall function is to serve as the plan to address climate change, presenting strategies to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions within the County. Looking at

the GHG emissions inventory of the County, the built environment is the second largest GHG emissions sector at nearly 30% of overall emissions in the unincorporated County. To meet the statewide GHG emission reduction targets, a fuel source transition in residential buildings from natural gas to all-electric will be necessary.

The Clean and Efficient Built Environment includes community-facing programs like adopting new reach codes to install all-electric appliances in new buildings, as well as County operations like reducing water and electricity usage in County facilities.

London noted that under Strategy BE-1, Ordinance No. 2024-17 was adopted by the California Energy Commission going into effect on May 1. Ordinance No. 2024-17 will amend the California Energy Code to increase energy efficiency standards for certain newly constructed buildings. Strategy BE-2 is focused on existing building infrastructure. Strategy BE-2 is aligned with the County's draft Clean Energy Roadmap, pilot programs for all-electric appliances, and rebates for heat pump furnaces. Direct installation programs are suggested to be used in Impacted Communities where the model of rebate is not appealing. Strategy BE-3 encourages programs for the public and County to increase use of clean energy. Multiple developments are ongoing in the field of batteries and solar installations throughout the County.

Chair Wechsler recommended starting a working group to work with MCE to install solar arrays on Brownfields, particularly on industrial properties in the County. The Commission suggested having representation with private property owners on the possible working group.

Commission Discussion:

The Commission inquired about the possibility of the County increasing the amount of remote work to keep more gasoline-powered cars off the road to further reduce GHG emissions. London indicated that the County has a remote work policy for employees whose tasks can be completed remotely allowing up to 50% of their time to be spent working remotely per week.

There was no public comment on this item.

7. RECEIVE Report on Staff Activities that Support Sustainability Goals

Jody London, Sustainability Coordinator at Contra Costa County Dept. of Conservation and Development, presented specifics on County staff activities to support sustainability goals. The $19 million Community Change Grant (CCG) from the United States Environmental Protection Agency has been suspended since January 2025, besides a small window in February in which the County pulled down funds to cover time worked on the grant to date. On April 15, 2025, a federal judge ordered all federal agencies to unfreeze funds associated with the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and Inflation Reduction Act, which includes the CCG. The sea level rise grant from Ocean Protection Council is moving forward, as well as the Urban Forest Tree Management Plan.

8. RECEIVE reports from Sustainability Commission members and alternates, and PROVIDE DIRECTION as needed

This agenda item was skipped.

9. RECEIVE Report from Sustainability Commission Chair and IDENTIFY TOPICS for next report to the Committee on Sustainability

   Chair Wechsler recommended the Commission to send potential topics for the next meeting in emails to her, with only one-on-one communication to comply with Brown Act regulations.

   The topic of a GHG emissions dashboard for the County was recommended to be added to the agenda for the next Commission meeting.

10. The next meeting is currently scheduled for June 23, 2025

11. Adjourn

    The meeting was adjourned at 7:00 pm.

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