



Local Government Commission

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February 25, 2015

The Honorable Bob Wieckowski
Chair, Senate Environmental Quality Committee
State Capital Building, Room 2205
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Chairman Wieckowski, Committee Members Gaines, Bates, Hill, Jackson, Leno and Pavley,

The Local Government Commission applauds the Senate Environmental Quality Committee's leadership in examining how to effectively adapt to changing climate conditions. We are glad to share our perspective on what local governments are doing to tackle climate change, and how the state can work effectively with them to address this challenge.

I. To what extent are climate adaptation efforts being planned for and implemented at the local government level in California? Highlighting a case study or project examples would be helpful.

Roughly 70% of California cities and counties have adopted or are planning to adopt policies or programs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In August of 2014, Over 800 people attended the first California Adaptation Forum of which 23% were local or regional government representatives. This widespread engagement with mitigation and strong interest in adaptation, gives us hope that local governments will become a key force for adaptation action throughout California, and sets the stage for me to share a few salient examples. These are by no means the only examples, but are ones that highlight the kinds of responses we need to scale throughout the state.

First, local governments are utilizing and leveraging existing funding and new financing approaches for resilient projects that offer broad benefits:

- The Town of Windsor was the first municipality to adopt a Pay as You Save (PAYS) water conservation and energy-efficiency upgrade program that provides residents with immediate savings on utility bills and requires no upfront cost or new debt. To date, Windsor has saved almost 6 million gallons in water and more than 72,000 kWh of electricity. [Learn more here](#)
- San Francisco recently became the first US City to adopt formal guidance for incorporating sea level rise into the over 25 billion in projected capital planning decisions the city will make in the coming decade. [Learn more here](#)
- Placer County and other sierra regional partners are looking at ways to ramp up sustainable forest management practices to protect air quality, human health, and community stability while also stimulating local economic development through biomass energy production, reduced wildfire costs and eventually carbon offset projects. [Learn more here](#) and [here](#)

Second, we are seeing local governments look beyond traditional “hard” infrastructure responses, towards green infrastructure solutions that can protect natural resources, optimize environmental benefits and even save money.

- Los Angeles has used bonds and reallocated funds from hard-infrastructure projects to finance green infrastructure projects that achieve water conservation, water quality, flood protection and stormwater management objectives. This commitment has resulted in large-scale initiatives, such as the Sun Valley Watershed project, that integrate flood control, stormwater pollution reduction and water conservation efforts through infiltration and stormwater recycling practices. [Learn more here](#)
- The Napa River has seen 22 serious floods since 1862. After two hard-infrastructure approaches were rejected by voters, the community approved - by a 2/3 majority - a "living river" approach, which will reconnect the river to its historic flood plain, and support a continuous fish and riparian corridor. In addition to environmental restoration, the Napa River project has generated \$898 million in public and private investment from 1997-2010. [Learn more here](#)

Finally, local governments are using their regulatory and policy-making authority to respond to climate risks and coordinate action at the local and regional level.

- In 2011, the city of Chula Vista approved one of the first standalone climate adaptation plans. The 11 strategies in the plan include measures to expand urban forests, incorporate “cool” roofs, promote water reuse, adjust open space management, and design future development to be resilient to sea level rise. [Learn more here](#)
- In 2012 the Sacramento Municipal Utility District adopted a Climate Readiness Strategy that treats climate impacts as an enterprise risk, has a 4 year update cycle, and will be applied to all long-term planning activities (>5 years). [Learn more here](#)
- In response to a projected 4-5 degree warming that will drive extreme heat public health risks, in December of 2014 the city of Los Angeles approved an ordinance that requires cool roofs – that both provide cooling and energy savings - on all new residential construction and re-roofs above 50% of the square footage. [Learn more here](#)
- Monterey Bay and San Diego County are both working to integrate climate change risks into their Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan. Although comprehensive documents, Hazard Mitigation Plans have not typically been developed to account for future risks, making this a potentially significant approach to addressing climate change by fostering coordination of public health, safety, and planning activities. [Learn more here](#) and [here](#)

It is important to note that many of these examples and many of the relevant projects to date are happening at the intersection of adaptation and mitigation because they are leveraging existing mitigation funding or planning mechanisms. This has been invaluable to progress, but also does impose some limits on the development of other adaptation efforts.

II. What have been the major challenges and successes to date for local governments working to plan and implement adaptation projects?

Across these efforts, we see the following themes of success:

- **Local Leadership:** Although they recognize that adaptation is beyond any one local government, some are stepping forward and demonstrating the local leadership we need. This leadership is indicative of 1) a recognition of the urgent need to take action, 2) a willingness to invest in the process and 3) the potential among local governments to create innovative and integrated models to respond to climate challenges.
- **Creative Application of Existing Mechanisms:** We are seeing interesting applications of existing policy mechanisms (Hazard Mitigation Plans, General Plans, Climate Action Plans, Local Coastal Plans) to the

climate adaptation concerns. Such creative approaches are creating solutions and opportunities for stakeholders to build momentum within existing frameworks.

- **Learning from mitigation experience:** Given the decade plus of robust local Climate Action Planning for mitigation, local governments are in a much better position to approach climate adaptation. The growth of staff expertise and supporting resources around mitigation planning has definitely given adaptation efforts an invaluable starting point.

Despite the many individual successes, the challenges remain significant:

- **Scale of the Problem:** Unlike mitigation planning, the magnitude of natural disasters under climate pose vast decision making / risk analysis challenges for local governments who do not have the information and skills to assess the full suite of their vulnerabilities, or plan for possible responses in a holistic way.
- **Lack of Standards:** Also unlike mitigation planning local governments as of yet, we do not have a widely accepted and well-developed “protocol” for adaptation, a body of field-tested “solutions”, or any clear ways of defining or measuring outcomes to determine success. Absent a centralized approach or framework for action, local governments find themselves inventing solutions in isolation, leading to a patchwork of actions that may not be cohesive across a region, or effective at scale throughout the state.
- **Lack of Financial Resources:** Despite the obviousness, it bears mentioning that given the scale of the problem, local governments are woefully under resourced to take on adaptation at an individual jurisdiction level. So many of the problems we face from climate change are at least regional in scale, and so leaving local governments to respond with only the existing revenue generation tools will never succeed.

III. In what ways and to what extent do local governments work with the state when incorporating climate adaptation and resiliency efforts? How could this process be improved?

Local governments are finding ways to work with the state in a number of cases;

- **Information and Dialogue:** The state has been proactive in providing venues for information sharing with local government. OPR’s efforts to serve as a coordinating body for conversations and information has been extremely valuable as evidenced by their participation in the Alliance of Regional Collaboratives for Climate Adaptation ([ARCCA](#)) and partnership on [CivicSpark](#) – the new statewide climate change capacity building AmeriCorps program for local governments. We also see dialogue with Natural Resources through the safeguarding California Plan (and participation in the California Adaptation Forum. Additionally the tools and resources provided by the state (Cal-Adapt, the Adaptation Planning Guide) have been valuable resources for local governments to utilize.
- **Project Partnerships:** Some agency programs (Coastal Commission, Strategic Growth Council, Department of Water Resources, Department of Public Health, among others) are starting to work with specific jurisdictions on a project or grant basis. We saw the addition of specific adaptation criteria in the Strategic Growth Council’s Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities GHG Reduction Fund program as a very positive step towards mainstreaming adaptation considerations into state / local funding streams.
- **Use of Policy Mechanisms:** As noted above, some local governments are also attempting to use existing state/federal policy structures not specifically designed for adaptation (Hazard Mitigation Plans, General Plans, Climate Action Plans, etc.) as a means to address adaptation, leading to further interaction and dialogue about how we collectively respond.
- **Adapting to Rising Tides:** Finally, we want to point to a specific example that could be a prototype for how state and local partners can work together. Over the last couple of years a state agency - the Bay Conservation and Development District has been leading the [Adapting to Rising Tides](#) project, which is now growing into a larger Resilient Shorelines Initiative. Not only has ART piloted a strong holistic planning process designed to protect both resources and community well-being, but we have heard from some participants, that ART

has also enabled each partner (state, regional, local) to leverage it's own resources and insights resulting in a stronger engagement and ownership by all parties.

In terms of improving state and local coordination and collaboration, a number of points are worth mentioning. Through the 2014 Safeguarding California Plan, we already have a set of seven excellent action principles intended to guide state efforts. As good as these principles are they do not explicitly respond to local needs, nor provide a platform to integrate local governments into the process. Strategies must account for the different needs and resources of our state's unique regions. In light of this and our preceding comments, we suggest the following:

- **Create a Supportive Regulatory Environment:** Climate effects transcend our multiple layers of government – creating an extremely challenging regulatory environment. Authority should rest with the appropriate level. Land-use decisions are appropriately made at the city or county level, but better incentives are needed for coordination so decisions at each level help to reduce the risk of climate change and increase resiliency. In this context, we need to see this not as a “new” initiative, but the state could provide templates and funding to local governments so they can integrate adaptation into existing vehicles (Hazard Mitigation Plans, General plans, Climate Action Plans, and other relevant codes and ordinances)
- **Build Strong Local / State Collaborations:** The state can support and gather effective allies when developing its climate-change policies by creating an official forum to engage local governments early in the process and giving credibility to local and regional efforts. For example, the state could consider setting up Climate Risk / Resiliency Management Council, made up of local and state agency representatives to publically define a shared path forward.
- **Ensure Investment Alignment:** Past and present state funding for climate mitigation work contributed to the rapid adoption of policies across California. Similar state resources for planning and implementation are needed to catalyze adaptation efforts. For example, a “Resiliency in all Policies” approach would align state investments (capital outlay, permits, grants) so they do not support projects are located in at-risk areas vulnerable to sea level rise, flood, erosion, landslides and wildfire. Further, we must ensure that sufficient funding and other vital resources go to communities who are developing innovative models to successfully adapt to climate change. We must think about climate-change adaptation as the smart "investment" opportunity, instead of additional costs on top of already burdensome costs.
- **Provide Robust Decision Support, and Action Frameworks:** Local governments need up to date information and guidance from state agencies that account for future projections under climate change instead of outdated historical trends. As we move past the easy steps toward increasingly difficult, costly implementation measures, cities and counties will need fine-grain research on local impacts that can justify more expensive strategies. Within this arena, the state can provide transformative, tipping-point resources – an integrated toolbox for funding, techniques, templates and research – to strengthen partnerships with local governments and build a statewide engine for climate-change innovation and implementation.

Our responses to climate change – at the local level and the state – will be powerful forces in the coming years. We can protect our people and environment while we also grow a strong economic future but only if we take action together starting today.

Sincerely,



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