



# COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

## PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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September 16, 2014

**Agenda Date: September 24, 2014**

Planning Commission  
County of Santa Cruz  
701 Ocean Street  
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

### **Subject: SUSTAINABLE SANTA CRUZ COUNTY PLAN**

As you know, the California Strategic Growth Council awarded a grant to the County of Santa Cruz to provide funding for a community process leading to preparation of an integrated land use and transportation plan for the unincorporated area. A primary goal of the Plan is to identify ways to support a land use pattern for the urbanized area that, as the community evolves, would lead to reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from use of cars and vehicles. The project began in 2012, with selection of consultants, the establishment of a stakeholder Advisory Group, and publication of an Existing Conditions Report. The process included three sets of community workshops that guided participants through a process of defining a sustainable vision for Santa Cruz County, exploring alternative land use and transportation patterns within selected Focus Areas, and discussing implementation concepts that could make neighborhoods and community areas more sustainable.

The planning effort was carried out from the perspective of continuing Santa Cruz County's long standing commitment to managed growth and environmental protection, but adding the perspective that the county's urban areas must be given more focused attention and planning in order to ensure that community quality of life is protected and enhanced through appropriate land use and transportation policies related to housing choices, a strong economy with good jobs, and availability of multi-modal transportation options.

The result of the effort is the "Sustainable Santa Cruz County" (the "Plan"), a planning study that suggests a vision, guiding principles and strategies that could, over time, lead to a more sustainable development pattern in our County. The Plan also implements the two top transportation related, greenhouse gas emissions reduction strategies in the county's Climate Action Strategy (CAS).

### **PREPARATION OF THE PLAN**

The early preparation of a Vision and Guiding Principles for the Plan, which came out of the first set of public workshops and was approved by the Board of Supervisors, provided the structure for the Plan. In the second phase of the project, five neighborhoods within the urban area were selected as "Focus Areas" to test different land use and transportation ideas, and suggestions for new and amended land use tools were developed. Two additional series of public workshops were held, as were two meetings focused solely on renovation of the East Cliff Village shopping

center. Coordination with staff of the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission, Santa Cruz Metro, AMBAG and other agencies was strengthened, we believe for the long term. Presentations and/or study sessions were held with your Commission, the Commission on the Environment, and the Housing Advisory Commission. Additional meetings with property owners, local college students, and environmental, neighborhood, business, and transportation groups also informed the Plan. The last phase was the writing and assembling of the document.

## SUSTAINABLE LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION STRATEGIES

Suggestions for new and revised land use policies and regulations that would implement the core ideas in the Plan are distributed throughout the document, as the topics of natural resource preservation, land use, and transportation are fully intertwined. Suggestions addressing natural resources, urban food production, and energy and water conservation appear primarily in Chapter 6 "Natural Resources".

Recommended land use approaches and tools that are specific to new development and renovation of existing development are also discussed throughout the document, and especially in Chapter 8, "Next Steps". These ideas focus on bringing the principles of efficient use of land, importance of good urban design, and the integration of land use and transportation planning into the regulatory framework that guides development in the County. There are suggestions for new General Plan designations, new zoning districts and overlay approaches, amendments to zoning site standards, and a variety of other suggestions.

Transportation next steps are also found in Chapter 8. These describe a process for creating a layered network and street type approach to better support the more balanced transportation system that is described in Chapter 5. In addition, there are next steps for the process of expanding options for measuring transportation performance to better address needs of pedestrians, bicyclists and transit riders, and to more accurately characterize the transportation system as it is experienced by the users.

## REVISION OF PUBLIC REVIEW DRAFT TO PRODUCE DRAFT SSCC PLAN

The Public Review Draft of the Plan was released on July 18, 2014, and public comments were encouraged to be submitted by August 18<sup>th</sup> in order to ensure adequate time for integration into the Draft Sustainable Santa Cruz County Plan (SSCC Plan) now before your Commission. Comments were submitted by a number of community members and partner agencies. All written comments are included with Appendix G of the Plan, along with public comment collected throughout the planning process. Staff and consultants reviewed each comment and made many revisions to the Plan to reflect this input.

## NEXT STEPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SSCC PLAN

The Sustainable Santa Cruz County Plan and the recommendation of your Commission will be considered by the Board of Supervisors on October 28, 2014. When the Board accepts the Plan (as a planning and feasibility study that completes the grant-funded work program) the requirements of the grant will be fulfilled.

It is relevant to note that this type of plan is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), as provided below:

**15262. FEASIBILITY AND PLANNING STUDIES**

A project involving only feasibility or planning studies for possible future actions which the agency, board, or commission has not approved, adopted, or funded does not require the preparation of an EIR or Negative Declaration but does require consideration of environmental factors. This section does not apply to the adoption of a plan that will have a legally binding effect on later activities.

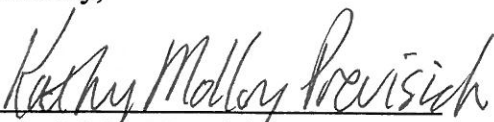
The Plan itself notes in Chapter 8 that, at the time the Board considers accepting the Plan to complete the grant, the Board should direct staff to return during Summer 2015 with a proposed work program that would identify which of the multitude of suggestions in the Plan should be considered for further development as implementation work products. In other words, staff would return to both the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors during Summer 2015 with a proposed selection of the "new tools" that would be drafted during 2015/2016 as proposed amendments to the General Plan/Local Coastal Program and County Code. In Summer 2015, then, the Board would confirm and/or provide direction as to items to be included in the implementation package, and staff would begin to work on actual policy language, code provisions, and design guidelines. Once the draft implementation package is prepared, it would be confirmed by the Board as the "project description" that would then be the subject of a Master Environmental Impact Report (MEIR). As the Plan notes, it is expected that drafting the implementation package and completing the MEIR would likely take until Fall/Winter 2016 before public hearings to consider adoption of the package could occur.

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Preparation of the Sustainable Santa Cruz County Plan has begun the process of more closely integrating land use planning with transportation planning. It also strengthened the conversation in the community about how to find the balance among environmental, social equity and economic concerns. A sustainable balance will be needed over the coming decades in order to ensure that a high quality of community life is available for residents, workers and visitors.

Staff recommends that your Commission consider the Sustainable Santa Cruz County Plan, and provide a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors that (1) the Plan be accepted as a planning and feasibility study, and (2) that the Board direct staff to return to the Planning Commission and the Board during Summer 2015 with a proposed work program that would identify which of the multitude of suggestions in the Plan should be considered for further development as implementation "new tools" that would be drafted during 2015/2016 as proposed amendments to the General Plan/Local Coastal Program and County Code that would then be subject to CEQA environmental review prior to consideration for adoption.

Sincerely,

  
Kathy Molloy Previsich  
Planning Director

**Exhibits:**

- A. Sustainable Santa Cruz County Plan, Public Hearing Draft, September 2014, available for review at [www.sustainablecantacruzcounty.org](http://www.sustainablecantacruzcounty.org)