

Climate Action Plan Regulatory Mandates

Is the County required to prepare a Climate Action Plan?

The Climate Action Plan (CAP) is being prepared to face the issue of climate change head-on. The main objectives of the CAP are three-fold: to build resilience to climate-related hazards that threaten the community; to reduce (or “mitigate”) local greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions; and to preserve and improve the county’s natural resources and quality of life. The CAP includes strategies that will help the community prepare for and adapt to the anticipated impacts of climate change while also mitigating GHG emissions. Simultaneously, implementation of CAP strategies will result in additional benefits to the environment, economy, and residents, workers, and visitors of the county, such as energy costs savings and improved local air quality. Ultimately, the CAP serves to ensure the sustainability, prosperity, and resiliency of the county for generations to come. The CAP is being developed in response to local and state regulations.

County Mandates

The CAP development process is driven by Policy 18.A.1 of the Tuolumne County General Plan. This policy requires the preparation of a CAP that establishes GHG reduction targets and includes strategies to mitigate local GHG emissions and build resilience to climate change impacts. The CAP requirement did not originate from the 2019 General Plan lawsuit. The CAP is required to be prepared because it was a mitigation measure identified in the General Plan Environmental Impact Report, which was certified by the Board of Supervisors. The litigation resulted in an agreement which required the County to consider amending the General Plan, including adding measures to the CAP. The agreement listed subjects that could, but were not required, to be included in the future CAP. The General Plan EIR was completed due to the



Tuolumne County Climate Action Plan

Regulatory Requirements

environmental review requirements outlined in the California Environmental Quality Act.

State Mandates

First, SB 379 was adopted in 2015 which required cities and counties within California to integrate climate change vulnerability, adaptation strategies, and emergency response strategies into the safety element of their general plans. The bill required the preparation of a vulnerability assessment, which must identify the risks that climate change poses to the local jurisdiction and the geographic areas at risk from climate change impacts, using federal, state, regional, and local climate vulnerability documentation. This requirement drove the development of a local vulnerability assessment, which is located in Appendix B of the Climate Action Plan.

This assessment, titled "Adaptation and Resiliency Report for Tuolumne County", was included in the CAP in direct response to community input. After a few initial meetings it was clear that the community was significantly concerned about the threat of wildfire and the impact from drought. This report was compiled in response to those concerns, which also fulfilled the requirements outlined in SB 379.

Secondly, while the State does not require local agencies to prepare climate action plans, it can be considered a compliance pathway for new discretionary development projects seeking approval through the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). As provided in Chapter 5, the greenhouse gas emissions inventory, forecasts, and targets developed for the CAP support GHG efficiency thresholds which can be used by discretionary development projects to analyze GHG emissions and climate impacts. Alternatively, projects may develop, if required, a development specific GHG analysis using County thresholds or other trending emission standards that are recommended at the time of the future project.

What happens if the County doesn't adopt a Climate Action Plan?

Generally, without the CAP, the County will not be providing project developers and applicants with a clear pathway to demonstrate compliance for GHG analyses pursuant to CEQA. The County will still be subject to all State laws and regulations that seek to reduce GHG emissions and address climate change, but there will not be a local approach to dealing with these issues.

Further, if the County doesn't adopt the CAP, it would need to identify an equal alternative measure to satisfy the impact analysis in the General Plan Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and General Plan Policy 18.A.1. If there were no feasible alternative mitigation measures, the County would need to revise the General Plan EIR for the General Plan's impact on greenhouse gases and an amendment to the General Plan. This would require revisions to the adopted EIR and additional public hearings.

