

## **County Climate Action Planning Steps Forward**

*By Mike Jacob, Alameda County Planning Commissioner*

In August 2009, the Alameda County Planning Department began working in earnest on the creation of an ambitious and ground-breaking Community Climate Action Plan (CCAP). The CCAP represents a planning effort to create a package of policy measures that would help the County reduce its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions back to Year 1990 levels. This would represent a 15% decrease from 2005 levels, the base year for GHG emissions used in the CCAP, and allow the County to meet its goal which is similar to the reductions being sought at the state level through its aggressive AB 32 and SB 375 programs.

From the start the CCAP was intended to inspire Alameda County residents and businesses to participate in community-based efforts to reduce GHGs, demonstrate a programmatic approach to emissions reductions that would help to reduce the legal risks associated with not having a climate action plan, and establish a range of policy tools that county staff could rely on when implementing the Plan and other projects. These policy tools took many forms and have been broken down into several major categories, including: land use, transportation, energy conservation, biological resources, water conservation and waste reduction. CCAP policies would make communities more livable and comfortable, more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly, more water and energy efficient and more resilient to price spikes in natural resources

Each of these policy areas present unique opportunities and challenges and by the time the first draft CCAP got to the Planning Commission in spring of 2010, it had already been subject to extensive public review – and the extensive public comment and criticism that was expected to come with it.

For all of the comments praising the document there were additional comments of concern – and many community members were torn between what they viewed as critical environmental improvements and our challenging and fragile economic condition. Specifically, concerns were raised that proposed measures of the CCAP would create economic hardship on Unincorporated County community members. Among other items, proposed measures such as the Residential Energy Conservation Ordinance, the development impact fee, a commercial area parking fee, point-of-sale conditions, or any measure that would result in significant costs on community members were not well received. Additional hearings further reinforced these concerns, and subsequent roundtables brought together several citizens and business representatives to discuss these concerns in specifics.

While it seemed that creating a document that was largely through community consensus building exercises would be out of reach, the County was able to cut through many of these issues through a robust process of identifying and relying on Statewide Initiatives to help us meet our total reduction goal. Certain measures in the CCAP were able to be removed or made milder - bicycle parking, showers and lockers, parking lot tree planting, etc. – because of the availability of Statewide Initiatives, like the Low Carbon Fuel Standard and the Renewable Portfolio Standard. Ultimately, 65% of the reduction goals the CCAP will achieve will be done through an acknowledgement of these efforts undertaken at the state level.

Over the course of the summer and fall every comment received by the public was considered and incorporated where possible, and a revised draft CCAP reflected many of these concerns. Not surprisingly, when compared to the original draft of March 2010, the second draft CCAP relied much more heavily on statewide plans and programs, and much less on local efforts and programs, to achieve its goal.

In November, our hard-working planning staff presented the second draft of the CCAP to the Planning Commission for its review. After two long and intense meetings during which we were able to reconcile many of the concerns of community members, the Planning Commission was able to recommend that the Board of Supervisors adopt its climate action plan by the end of 2010.

These challenges must be addressed not simply because its good planning, but because legal considerations are not unimportant. Any of us could find ourselves in the position of San Bernadino County, which recently faced a legal challenge for not having a GHG reduction strategy that fully conformed to state standards. And, while Climate Action Plans present numerous challenges to a community and to a sustainable effort to create economic development, it is important to keep in mind that many of the measures included in your CCAP will eventually also be integrated into those of neighboring jurisdictions. In fact, in our case we found that several of the measures eliminated from our plan, have become common in other CCAPs, and are generally recognized as effective and quantifiable methods of GHG reduction.

Finally, it is important to remember that this first step is one which only creates a programmatic plan; no implementing ordinances and nothing requiring mandates in this CCAP would take effect before the individual components are deliberated on at a future time by the Planning Commission and enacted by the Board of Supervisors. Those processes would provide opportunity for further refinement.

Our plan is not perfect and, with continued debate at the Board, it has not yet been completed; but our Commission helped to drive a process that yielded a good product in a short amount of time with ambitious goals and realistic expectations that also remained sensitive to community needs and economic balance. And, as we finalize our CCAP, it is clear to everyone that this is just the beginning of many new planning challenges.

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*For a copy of the draft CCAP of Alameda County and supporting documents, visit  
<http://www.acgov.org/cda/planning/landuseprojects/climateaction/index.htm>*