



# County of Monterey Planning Commission

## Agenda Item No.3

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Board of Supervisors  
Chambers  
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Salinas, CA 93901

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### GPZ090005 - MOSS LANDING COMMUNITY PLAN UPDATE

**Project Location:** Moss Landing Community Plan area of the North County Land Use Plan

**Proposed CEQA action:** Receiving a status report is not a project under CEQA. An Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is being prepared for the Community Plan update.

#### RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Planning Commission receive a status report on the Moss Landing Community Plan update, including recent work completed, public input received, and next steps in the plan update process.

#### PROJECT INFORMATION:

**Current Status:** The County is currently preparing an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) to analyze the community plan update and associated projects/regulatory changes. County staff are also reviewing comments received on the latest the community plan draft and regulations. The tentative timeline for release of the EIR is fall 2025, and timeline for returning to the Planning Commission with an updated plan and regulations anticipated in December 2025.

**Planning Staff:** Phil Angelo, Senior Planner

(831) 784-5731, AngeloP@CountyofMonterey.gov

Mike Novo, Management Specialist

Katie Scariot, Assistant Planner

#### SUMMARY:

Moss Landing is a small unincorporated coastal town in North County along Highway 1 northwest of Castroville and centered on Moss Landing harbor and the mouth of Elkhorn slough. The community is unique and contains a wide variety of land uses and natural features, including a harbor with commercial fishing and recreational boating activity, a residential neighborhood, marine research facilities, antique shops, energy and industrial operations, state beaches, dune habitats, and the Elkhorn and Moro Cojo sloughs.

The community is in the County's coastal zone in the North County Land Use Plan area. With the community's important resources and mixture of uses, specific policies were developed. This resulted in the original Moss Landing Community Plan, adopted as Chapter 5 of the North County Land Use Plan in 1982. Similar to our inland 2010 General Plan and Area Plans, the North County Land Use Plan is intended to be the overarching policy document, while the Moss Landing Community Plan provides supplemental and more detailed direction for Moss Landing.

The County began the process of updating the Moss Landing Community Plan in 2008. The update process has been challenging. This report attempts to synthesize down some of the history of the update process to provide decision makers and the public background of the project. As a status report it also focuses on background, process, and future steps, rather than the content of each plan section. A Community Advisory Committee was formed and provided detailed input on the direction of the update and the vision for the community in 2009. Various drafts and concepts were considered between 2009 and 2017. Staff conducted a series of community meetings during 2018 and 2019 to review and solicit feedback.

In 2020, the Planning Commission conducted multiple workshops to review and revise the policies of the plan. The resulting 2020 draft retained the vision from 2009 and incorporated significant changes to the structure and text of the plan. Since 2020, County planning staff worked to refine the plan to focus on structural and grammatical clarity while minimizing alteration to the policy from 2020. Presently, staff is drafting updates to the Coastal Implementation Plan Part 2, Chapter 20.144 to develop the implementing regulations to be considered concurrently with the plan update.

One of the most substantial changes in the new draft is the re-addition of a policy that calls for the preparation of a Shoreline and Harbor Adaptation Plan, evaluating long-term climate change adaptation approaches for the community. Due to lack of funding in 2020, staff had recommended a similar policy be removed from the plan in 2020, however drafting such a plan is now both state mandated and the County secured grant funding from the California Coastal Commission for this work.

Staff continue to work diligently to complete the plan update and implementing regulations. A summary of key outstanding items in the Moss Landing Community Plan is included below:

- **Public Comment** - As staff has re-engaged the public on the update process, multiple comment letters have been received related to the plan, Notice of Preparation for the Environmental Impact Report (EIR), and draft regulations that the County has released. This includes comments by individuals and public agencies, including the California Coastal Commission and the Moss Landing Harbor District. Changes to the plan text are being considered to address them.
- **Battery Storage** - The January 2025 fires at the battery energy storage facility at the Moss Landing power plant have brought into urgent focus land use planning and industrial hazard issues associated with these facilities, not just in Moss Landing but statewide. As disaster recovery is on-going, data collection on the effects of the fire is being conducted and multiple pieces of state legislation being considered. Policies that address this issue are being considered while attempting to maintain momentum on the broader plan update effort.
- **Harbor Shoreline and Adaptation Plan** - In 2023 Senate Bill (SB) 272 was adopted which amends the Public Resources Code to require that Sea Level Rise adaptation be considered within Local Coastal Programs with specific requirements. The drafted policies of the plan have been updated to recommend a phased approach to implementation of this law. The community plan would include policies addressing how development would be evaluated for climate change hazards, with preparation of a more detailed Harbor and Shoreline Adaptation

Plan after community plan adoption. The County has entered into a grant agreement with the California Coastal Commission that would fund a portion of the current work on the Moss Landing Community Plan, and the preparation of the Harbor and Shoreline Adaptation Plan.

- **Design Guidelines** - The latest draft of the Community Plan has a policy calling for the preparation of Design Guidelines for the community. An initial draft was prepared in 2015 but these need to be reviewed and public input conducted to make sure they are robust and reflect the aesthetic vision of the community. Staff are planning to do this work concurrently with the plan update.

Next steps in the Moss Landing Community Plan Update are summarized below, as well as rough anticipated timelines.

- Fall of 2025 - Release of the Draft Environmental Impact Report for review and comment.
- December 2025 - January 2026 - Return to the Planning Commission with the draft plan for review and recommendation.
- January-March 2026 - Board of Supervisors Hearing(s).
- March-June 2026 - California Coastal Commission Review.
- July-August 2026 - Return to Board of Supervisors for final plan adoption.

The community plan update and associated regulations would be an update to the County's Local Coastal Program, which would require certification by the California Coastal Commission before they could go into effect. This is typically a multi-step process where the Planning Commission makes a recommendation on the Local Coastal Program amendment, the Board of Supervisors adopts a resolution of intent to adopt the amendment, the County transmits the amendment to the California Coastal Commission for review and consideration. Assuming the California Coastal Commission certifies the amendment as being consistent with the Coastal Act, it would then be taken back to the Board of Supervisors for final approval.

The schedule assumes up to two months of hearings at the Planning Commission, three months of hearings at the Board of Supervisors, and three months for the California Coastal Commission review. If any of these junctions push by several months, we would be looking at a plan adoption of the end of 2026 or early 2027.

Items that may impact this timeline for bringing a draft plan to the Planning Commission for consideration includes policy work in the Moss Landing Community Plan related to battery energy storage facilities and addressing potential comments related to the community plan EIR that may require additional analysis.

#### DISCUSSION:

A discussion of the community plan update background, summary of outreach received, and remaining issues is included in **Exhibit A**.

#### CEQA:

Receipt of a status report on the project is an administrative activity of government that is not a project

per CEQA Guidelines section 15378 and therefore not subject to CEQA. Updating the community plan is being analyzed in an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) is currently being prepared, and we're working toward releasing it for public review in August-September of 2025. The County released a revised Notice of Preparation (NOP) for the EIR on December 6, 2024. The revised NOP served as a renewed notice that we're preparing this environmental document with updated information on the project, as previous NOPs for the Moss Landing Community Plan update were distributed in 2013 and 2015. We conducted a public meeting soliciting input on the scope and content of the EIR on December 13, 2024. After release of the NOP and the scoping meeting, we received nine written comments. (**Exhibit B**).

The revised NOP is available on the County web page for the project and gives a general description of the project components being analyzed. While the heart of the project is updating the Moss Landing Community Plan, it details that the project also includes limited updates to other chapters of the North County Land Use Plan, primarily to ensure internal consistency between the community plan and other chapters of the North County Land Use Plan; and updates to the Monterey County Coastal Implementation Plan, which contains the implementing regulations for the North County Land Use Plan.

The EIR is also analyzing two specific development applications on a project level, the Moss Landing Road street and storm drain improvement project, and the remaining development of the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute (MBARI) campus, which is limited to a dock house and an alteration to the end of an existing dock. This is a result of the community plan update's unique history. Very early in the update process it was determined that an EIR would be the appropriate environmental document to prepare, which was going to analyze multiple development applications at an individual project level together with the plan at a programmatic level. Coupling programmatic and project specific environmental review created multiple challenges, including that the scope of the individual projects shifted over time. Many of the individual projects have built or are no longer being proposed, leaving the Moss Landing Road improvements and remaining the MBARI facilities as the only remaining projects being analyzed at a project specific level.

#### OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

Several agencies have been involved in the Moss Landing Community Plan update process and have jurisdiction over the area. The following is a list of agencies that County staff have received comments from and/or reached out to regarding the plan update.

- California Coastal Commission (CCC) - Would need to certify the Local Coastal Program Amendment containing the updates to the North County Land Use Plan, including the community plan, and the updates to the Monterey County Coastal Implementation Plan.
- Moss Landing Harbor District - Are a special district formed in 1947 who own and operate Moss Landing Harbor District.
- California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) - Manage the state highway system, including Highway 1 which runs through the community.
- Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC) - Are the County's regional transportation agency.
- Pajaro/Sunny Mesa Community Services District - Are the water purveyor for the majority of

the community.

- Castroville Community Services District - Provide maintenance of the sewer lines serving the community, which connect into the Monterey One treatment plant.
- California State Parks, Monterey District - Manage Moss Landing State Beach and Salinas River State Beach.
- San Jose State University - Own and operate Moss Landing Marine Labs (MLML).
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife - provide regulatory oversight protecting fish, wildlife, and plan resources and their habitats; and manage the Moss Landing Wildlife Area adjacent to Elkhorn Slough.

Prepared by: Phil Angelo, Senior Planner 831-784-5731

Reviewed by: Sarah Wikle, Principal Planner

Approved by: Melanie Beretti, AICP, Chief of Planning

The following attachments are on file with the HCD:

Exhibit A - Discussion

Exhibit B - Compiled Public Comments

cc: Front Counter Copy; Moss Landing Community Plan Interested Parties List; Phil Angelo, Senior Planner; Sarah Wikle, Principal Planner; Melanie Beretti, AICP, Chief of Planning; Mike Novo, Mike Novo, Management Specialist; Katie Scariot, Assistant Planner; GPZ090005 project files.