



County of Monterey Planning Commission

Item No.4

Board of Supervisors
Chambers
168 W. Alisal St., 1st Floor
Salinas, CA 93901

Agenda Item No.4

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REF220017 - GENERAL PLAN ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ELEMENT

- a. Receive a status update on the draft Environmental Justice Element to the County of Monterey General Plan and an overview of the draft Environmental Justice Element available for public review; and
- b. Provide direction to staff.

Project Location: Unincorporated County of Monterey

Proposed CEQA Action: Find the presentation statutorily exempt from CEQA under CEQA Guidelines section 15262 as an early discussion of possible future actions not involving commitment to a project.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Planning Commission:

- a. Receive a status update on the draft Environmental Justice Element to the County of Monterey General Plan and an overview of the draft Environmental Justice Element available for public review; and
- b. Provide direction to staff.

SUMMARY

The County of Monterey has developed a draft Environmental Justice Element (EJE), pursuant to California Senate Bill (SB) 1000, in which the County seeks to recognize the communities in unincorporated Monterey County disproportionately affected by degraded environmental conditions that may lead to disparate impacts and adverse health outcomes, with the ultimate goal of ensuring a more just and improved quality of life for all residents.

The **draft Environmental Justice Element is available for public review and comment starting March 11, 2026 through May 11, 2026** and can be accessed at the County's website at <https://www.co.monterey.ca.us/GeneralPlanUpdates> The EJE provides descriptions of key baseline conditions in unincorporated Monterey County related to:

- Civic Engagement.
- Pollution Exposure.
- Access to Public Facilities and Services.
- Access to Healthy Food.
- Access to Physical Activity and Recreation.
- Access to Safe, Sanitary, and Affordable Homes.
- Exposure to Unique or Compounded Health Risks.

In preparation of this draft Environmental Justice Element, the County prepared an *Environmental Justice Existing Conditions Assessment* to identify areas with greater pollution and hazard exposure and reduced access to public goods and services that improve the quality of life for residents (**Appendix A to Exhibit A**). Additionally, the baseline conditions of this Environmental Justice Element include discussions of *Community Survey Results* (**Appendix B to Exhibit A**). Following the baseline conditions for each of these topic areas, the draft Environmental Justice Element establishes goals and policies intended to mitigate inequities for people who are disproportionately impacted by environmental hazards and health impacts.

A series of targeted in-person engagement activities will be conducted in disadvantaged communities to ensure meaningful participation from residents and other stakeholders throughout this public review period of the draft EJE.

At the March 11, 2026 Planning Commission meeting, staff will present a status update regarding the steps and timeline for developing the EJE, as well as present an overview of the key findings, goals and policies in the draft element for preliminary Planning Commission and public consideration and input.

DISCUSSION

On September 27, 2022, Housing and Community Development staff commenced efforts to amend various General Plan Elements including the Sixth Cycle Update to the Housing Element and an update to the Safety Element. Concurrent updates to the Housing and Safety Elements prompted staff to also begin the preparation of a draft Environmental Element (EJE) to comply with Senate Bill (SB) 1000.

Requirements of SB 1000

SB1000 amended Government Code Section 65302 to require a local jurisdiction to prepare an EJE upon adoption or revision of two or more General Plan elements concurrently on or after January 1, 2018. Development of an EJE is prompted by the presence of “disadvantaged communities”. SB1000 defines “disadvantaged communities” as those disproportionately burdened by multiple sources of pollution and with population characteristics that make them more sensitive to pollution. After preliminary review of these criteria, Staff identified that development of an EJE would be required due to the updates required for the Housing Element and Safety Element.

In preparation of a draft EJE, the County prepared an *Environmental Justice Existing Conditions Assessment* (**Appendix A to Exhibit A**) to identify areas in unincorporated Monterey County with greater pollution and hazard exposure, reduced access to public goods and services, and utilized the screening methods provided by State guidance to determine the location of disadvantaged communities in unincorporated Monterey County. The Assessment identified the following disadvantaged within the unincorporated areas of the County: Boronda, Bradley, Castroville, Chualar, Las Lomas, Lockwood, Moss Landing, Pajaro, Pine Canyon, San Ardo and San Lucas.

In response, the County of Monterey has prepared a draft EJE with specific emphasis on the above identified communities. The draft represents the first countywide policy document focused on advancing environmental justice across the unincorporated County. A draft EJE was

prepared as a standalone element, rather than integrating environmental justice goals and policies among existing General Plan elements to address the statutory requirements of SB 1000 and to better address the policy topics related to environmental justice. The EJE carries the same weight as other mandatory General Plan elements and must remain internally consistent with the Land Use, Housing, Safety, Circulation, and Conservation Elements.

The draft EJE's structure similarly to the County's other 2010 General Plan elements, except as modified to ensure compliance with SB 1000. The draft EJE includes a discussion of baseline conditions related to specific topic areas, followed by goals and policies that are specific to that topic area. To implement the draft EJE, the County is also working to develop a draft Implementation/Action Plan. These items are discussed in more detail below.

Policy Framework and Structure of draft EJE

The purpose of the draft EJE is to address the “unique or compounded health risks” in disadvantaged communities by identifying goals and policies to reduce health risks in disadvantaged communities, promote civic engagement in decision-making processes, and prioritize improvements that address the needs of disadvantaged communities.

The draft EJE provides descriptions of key baseline conditions in unincorporated Monterey County related to civic engagement; pollution exposure; access to public facilities and services; access to healthy food; access to physical activity and recreation; access to safe, sanitary, and affordable homes; and exposure to unique or compounded (e.g., climate-related) health risks. Following the baseline conditions for each of these topic areas, the draft EJE advances the following core goals which guide the structure of the EJE:

- **Civic Engagement:** Promote inclusive civic engagement and expand opportunities for equitable and meaningful community involvement in county policies, services, and resource allocation.
- **Pollution Exposure:** Keep pollution out of the air, land, water and communities and expand efforts to reverse disparate and adverse health and environmental impacts of pollution exposure
- **Access to Public Facilities and Services:** Expand public facilities, amenities and services to provide equitable access and benefit for all residents.
- **Access to Healthy Food:** Provide consistent access to healthy and affordable food options to improve nutritional status and provide food security for all individuals, regardless of economic status.
- **Access to Physical Activity and Recreation:** Create, expand and maintain safe and equitable access to opportunities and places for recreation, physical activity and mobility to improve health, emotional and social well-being, and connectivity for all members of the community.
- **Access to Safe, Sanitary, and Affordable Homes:** Increase the availability of and

access to affordable, safe, sanitary, healthy and stable housing for all residents, especially households that have high housing cost-burden or those currently, or at risk of, being unhoused.

- **Exposure to Unique or Compounded Health Risks:** Improve community resilience and preparedness for wildfires, flooding, drought, extreme heat, and sea-level rise by implementing coordinated risk reduction measures to avoid disproportionate adverse health and economic impacts.

Within each goal topic a series of policies are included and designed as statements that guide decision-making and indicate the commitment of the County to a particular course of action. Together, the goals and policies form the framework of the draft EJE by translating broad environmental justice goals into actionable direction for the County. The draft element establishes broad goals and policies that guide land use planning, infrastructure investment priorities, public health considerations, and community engagement practices.

Action/Implementation Plan

The County prepared the draft EJE in alignment with the State’s General Plan Guidelines and the California Department of Justice’s “Best Practices for Implementing SB 1000,” which emphasize that environmental justice policies must be paired with clear implementation mechanisms to translate policy commitments into action. Policies should include a timeline, identify the entity responsible for implementing the policy, and when necessary or applicable identify a funding source. To this end, the County is in progress developing a draft Environmental Justice Action/Implementation Plan that will accompany the draft EJE as supplemental document. The draft Action/Implementation Plan will:

- Specify the targeted actions to meet goals and policies;
- Identify the department or entity responsible for each action;
- Establish priority levels and sequencing of actions;
- Provide a timeline for implementation;
- Identify potential or anticipated funding sources where applicable; and
- Include performance metrics to measure progress toward achieving the goals.

At this time, staff are bringing forward the draft EJE for review, as it has been vetted through a comprehensive outreach process to date. Staff are seeking initial feedback on the draft EJE and providing an additional opportunity for public review and engagement through this workshop and additional “boots-on-the-ground” engagement planned throughout the public review period for the draft EJE. Concurrently, staff will continue coordinating with stakeholders to refine the draft Action/Implementation Plan and once the public review period is complete for the draft EJE, staff will incorporate feedback received and bring an updated draft EJE and draft Action/Implementation Plan to the Planning Commission for a public workshop.

Community Engagement

Robust community engagement has been crucial to developing targeted EJE goals and policies, since communities are better able to identify priorities and the specific barriers to achieving those priorities. The County has established an Environmental Justice Citizen Advisory

Committee (EJCAC) with representation from each of the County’s disadvantaged communities and organizations engaged in promoting environmental justice. At the April 12, 2023, Planning Commission meeting, staff presented options, and the Planning Commission provided recommendations on EJCAC membership, scope of outreach, and engagement options throughout the development and future implementation of the draft EJE. Staff then developed an approach to community engagement, hosting preliminary community meetings and pop ups in disadvantaged communities in an effort provide the community with a general introduction of the EJE and solicit community members to be a part of the EJCAC. The EJCAC is composed of 23 members that were selected for having local or experienced knowledge of environmental challenges within the identified disadvantaged communities in unincorporated Monterey County. The benefits from establishing the EJCAC include: members having a forum to provide informed feedback on various EJE topics from disadvantaged communities throughout unincorporated Monterey County, share targeted input on goal and policy development in the EJE, and share other key information with staff on specific needs around EJE in their communities. To date there have been three EJCAC meetings. During these meetings, the EJCAC:

- Provided input on the Community Survey and outreach strategies;
- Reviewed and “ground-truth” the Existing Conditions Report, including pollution exposure, access to services, food access, recreation, housing conditions, and climate-related health risks; and
- Provided feedback on draft Environmental Justice goals and policies to ensure alignment with community concerns.

Ongoing coordination with the EJCAC is planned as staff will be seeking input on the Implementation/Action Plan. In addition to the EJCAC process, the proposed EJE also builds upon over three years of outreach and engagement with the community. The full outreach and engagement summary details the goals, approach, and outcomes from the outreach and engagement activities are included in the draft EJE. (**Exhibit A**)

Timing and Next Steps

Staff are simultaneously working to update the Housing Element, and Safety Element. As part of the County’s commitment to maintain General Plan internal consistency and achieve certification of the Sixth Cycle Housing Element Update (HEU6), the draft EJE is being coordinated alongside these concurrent updates.

The anticipated timeline for completion of the draft EJE is as follows:

Spring 2026

- Public Draft Environmental Justice Element released and posted on the County’s website. Public review period from March 11, 2026, through May 11, 2026.
- Targeted outreach within disadvantaged communities during public review period, in coordination with community leaders, community organizations, participating in-person community event pop-ups, and library displays.
- Coordination with stakeholders/County departments/EJCAC on draft Action/Implementation Plan development.

Summer 2026

- Planning Commission - Workshop on draft EJE and draft Action/Implementation Plan
- Community Meeting #2 - Conduct a public community meeting to review the Draft Environmental Justice Element and draft Action/Implementation Plan
- Release CEQA Document for 30 day Public Review - Publish the Draft Environmental Document (Mitigated Negative Declaration)

Fall 2026

- Evaluate and respond to written comments received on the draft EJE and associated environmental document.
- Planning Commission Hearing
- Board of Supervisors Hearing for Adoption

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This presentation is statutorily exempt from CEQA under CEQA Guidelines section 15262 as an early discussion of possible future actions that do not involve commitment to a project. Environmental review of the EJE will occur in conjunction with formal consideration of adoption. Any future projects, programs, or capital improvements implemented pursuant to the EJE will be subject to separate and independent CEQA review, as required by law.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT/COMMITTEE ACTIONS:

Multiple County departments are involved in the development of the draft EJE including the Health Department's Environmental Health Bureau and its Planning, Evaluation and Policy Unit; Civil Rights Office; County Administrative Office's Sustainability Program, Homeless Services, and Office of Community Engagement and Strategic Advocacy; Agricultural Commissioner; Department of Emergency Management; Department of Economic Development; Department of Education; Department of Social Services; and the Public Works, Facilities and Parks Department, and the Office of County Counsel.

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Approved by: Melanie Beretti, AICP, Chief of Planning

The following attachments are on file with HCD:

Exhibit A - Draft Environmental Justice Element with Appendix A-Existing Conditions Assessment and Appendix B-Community Survey Results

Cc: Monterey County Department of Emergency Management, Monterey County Environmental Health Bureau, Monterey County Civil Rights Office, Monterey County District 3, Monterey County District 2; Monterey County District 1; Monterey County District 4; Monterey County District 5; General Plan Updates Distribution list; Planning Commission notification distribution list; Monterey County Health Department; Monterey County Office of Education; Public Works, Parks, and Facilities; Office of Sustainability; Homeless Services;

Department of Social Services; Department of Economic Development; Monterey County Department of Education; Agricultural Commissioner Office; Department of Emergency Management; CalTrans (cori.marsalek@dot.ca.gov <<mailto:cori.marsalek@dot.ca.gov>>, Ingrid.Mcroberts@dot.ca.gov <<mailto:Ingrid.Mcroberts@dot.ca.gov>>); TAMC (doug@tamcmonterey.org <<mailto:doug@tamcmonterey.org>>; ariana@tamcmonterey.org; todd@tamcmonterey.org).