

# Sonoma County Safety Element Update & Environmental Justice Policy Frameworks

## Policy Framework Organization

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### Issues and Opportunities

#### Issue 1: General Policy Issue Area

This section provides a short summary of the policy issue that will be addressed in the Safety Element or Environmental Justice Element and identifies some of the key findings from the existing conditions analysis in the *Environmental Justice Technical Report* and *Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment*.

#### Key Existing Plans and Reports

This section lists some of the existing relevant planning documents or reports that explore or address the subject issue.

#### Desired Outcome

This section provides general statements of the desired outcomes of the Safety and Environmental Justice Elements relevant to the subject issues. Outcomes will be refined and expressed as “**Goals**” in the draft Safety and Environmental Justice Elements.

#### Community Input

This section lists feedback received during community engagement that is relevant to the subject issue. Listed feedback includes information about existing conditions as well as specific policy direction from the following engagement activities:

- Equity Working Committee (EWC)
- Stakeholder Focus Groups
- Pop Up Events
- Safety Element Online Survey

#### Potential Strategies

This section lists potential strategies to address the subject issue that could be refined into policies or implementation measures for the draft Safety and Environmental Justice Elements.

“**Policies**” are statements of intent or direction that contribute toward achieving the desired outcome or goal.

“**Implementation measures**” are specific activities, procedures, programs, or projects aimed at implementing a policy.



## Extreme Heat, Air Quality, Drought

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### Issues and Opportunities

#### Issue 1: Extreme Heat and Air Quality Protection

All communities in Sonoma County are significantly exposed to poor air quality from wildfire smoke and more frequent and severe extreme heat events, especially Environmental Justice (EJ) communities, which will experience disproportionate impacts due to systemic inequities. Exposure to both inequities and poor air quality will compound health issues for these communities. Heat-related illnesses can become life-threatening, increasing the demand for cooling centers, hospitals, and emergency personnel. Emergency services will face challenges providing adequate services due to power interruptions, staffing shortages, and lack of systems and infrastructure to provide equitable community access to emergency facilities.

#### Key Existing Plans and Reports

- Sonoma County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (MJHMP)
- Sonoma County Emergency Operations Plan – Extreme Temperature Response Annex
- Sonoma County Climate Change and Health Profile Report

#### Desired Outcome

All community members in Sonoma County have access to clean air and protection from extreme heat by directing additional resources and investments towards community members and workers who are most vulnerable to poor air quality and extreme heat impacts.

#### Community Input

##### Equity Working Committee (EWC) Strategy Ideas:

1. Programs to promote worker safety in extreme heat.
2. Provide financial assistance with utility costs during extreme heat/cold events.
3. Threshold criteria for when the County will provide cooling and warming centers.
4. Resource provision at cooling/warming/evacuation centers such as battery/electricity for C-PAP machines, insulin refrigeration in case the power gets shut off, and N95s, etc.
5. Free public transit during extreme heat/cold events for easier transportation (e.g. to the Russian River, to warming/cooling centers).
6. More public green space, shade for relief from heat should be provided.
7. Playgrounds should have shade trees (particularly those within or near high density residential developments) and should be designed with heat in mind to prevent burning.

##### Safety Element Focus Groups:

1. Ensure homes are weatherized and have air conditioning at low and no cost.



2. Invest in workforce support, especially for undocumented workers, in the form of Disaster Pay if directly impacted. For example, if work is lost due to a disaster, if food is lost due to a power outage, if a parent misses work because of a child's asthma from poor air quality.
3. Financial assistance for monthly rental and/or utility payments when unable to work due to disaster or recovery.
4. Provide Hazard Pay for workers doing hazardous waste clean-up after a disaster, as well as improve health and safety requirements, enforcement, and communication of workers' rights for workers dealing with hazardous materials.
5. Provide resources to trusted community-based centers to meet eligibility requirements to be a cooling/heating center before the location is needed. Barriers to remove include: criteria regarding number of electrical outlets, number of seats, unsuitable parking.
6. Create hyper-local, culturally responsive assistance centers in locations folks already trust. Local Assistance Centers were not trusted previously because impacted community members did not feel safe and messaging from the County indicated that LACs are for folks who can apply for Federal and State funds, whereas if you are undocumented or you don't qualify, assistance can't be provided.
7. Mandate more geographically dispersed safety centers, prepare in advance to have at least one center in each of the 9 cities.
8. Update policies for when to open heating/cooling centers to trigger if only one day of extreme heat/cold. Currently there needs to be at least 3 days in the calendar forecast to trigger opening, but if it's over 100 degrees for just 2 days there are no resources available.
9. Policies (1) to clearly define what air quality triggers the Deputy Health Officer to say air quality is a health concern and how that is informed by the California Department of Public Health (currently gray area) and (2) protocol for how the County acts on that air quality trigger to communicate air quality warnings, and provide assistance, to employees and the public who work outdoors.

**Pop Up at the Sonoma Valley Emergency Preparedness Fair 2023:**

1. 11 respondents (35.5%) rated their level of access to air conditioning as "Poor." Four respondents (12.9%) rated it as "Moderate." 16 respondents (51.6%) rated it as "Good."

**Environmental Justice Stakeholder Focus Groups:**

1. Several participants noted that senior citizens are vulnerable to poor living conditions, extreme heat, and extreme cold.
2. Participants generally felt that rising housing costs are a barrier to many community members. Some lower-income homes have unsafe conditions and are overcrowded.
3. Participants shared general concerns regarding air quality and how pesticide pollution and wildfire degrade air quality in the area.

**Potential Strategies**

1. Explore ways to incentivize landlords to improve indoor air quality and indoor temperature control. Deploy program in areas of highest needs.



2. Broaden the functionality and expand the locations of resilience centers, beginning in systemically impacted communities. Improve transportation access to resilience centers. Adjust operating hours and thresholds triggering opening of resilience centers.
3. Increase green spaces, shading, and access to water in areas with populations made sensitive by systems and EJ Communities.
4. Promote the use of temporary clean air refuge centers for outdoor workers.
5. Coordinate with Cal/OSHA to increase enforcement and trainings and establish thresholds for work stoppage orders for outdoor and warehouse workers. Resource community-based organizations to support increased employer compliance.
6. Explore funding streams to implement hazard pay during hazard events.
7. Improve communication between departments within the County, and public agencies across the County, for better service provision.

## **Issue 2: Water Reliability and Consumption**

Climate hazards can damage water supply infrastructure like pipelines and pump stations, impacting water reliability in the county. This has direct consequences for communities, critical services, wildfire mitigation, and agriculture. Extended drought conditions further exacerbate water supply problems, leading to increased water costs and diminished water quality, disproportionately affecting EJ communities. Groundwater levels have also declined due to lower-than-average rainfall and overdraft, resulting in reduced availability, well issues, higher water pollutant concentrations, and potential seawater intrusion in the southern parts of the County.

### **Key Existing Plans and Reports**

- Sonoma County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (MJHMP)
- Sonoma Water Local Hazard Mitigation Plan
- Sonoma Water Urban Water Management Plan
- Sonoma Water Climate Adaptation Plan

### **Desired Outcome**

All community members and emergency service providers in Sonoma County have access to affordable, safe, and reliable water sources as a result of investing in populations and providers most at risk of water quality and quantity issues.

### **Community Input**

#### **Equity Working Committee (EWC) Outcome Ideas:**

1. Transparency, clarity, and awareness about water supply
  - a. Concerns: there is misinformation about water supply
2. Equal access to information about water supply



- a. Concerns: the Press Democrat and Sonoma Water post information about water supply and water levels, but not everyone has access to the newspaper or the internet. The Sonoma Water website is also difficult to navigate.
3. Transparency of water usage from different industries and water rights
4. Affordable water rates
5. Adequate noticing about changes to local water regulations that affect well owners
6. Fair pricing of water that does not penalize larger families
7. Provide free water conservation buckets to households (The City of Santa Rosa currently provides this service).

**Equity Working Committee (EWC) Strategy Ideas:**

1. Utilize school districts and local churches (particularly those that provide Spanish speaking services) for messaging about water supply and drought conditions.
2. Engaged County staff should attend community events to share information about water.
  - a. Concerns: Staff that conduct outreach need to be adequately prepared and ready to engage with all populations.
3. Expand messaging about incentives for water conservation and efficiency (example: Sonoma Water's quarterly newsletter).
4. Send early messaging about drought conditions before we've reached emergent conditions; do not utilize fear tactics.

**Sonoma County Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD) Food Access Committee Pop Up:**

1. Policy that prioritizes water for food production.
2. Address water access (including infrastructure) as a barrier to food production in remote areas.

**Safety Element Focus Groups:**

1. Provide uninterrupted access to water during hazards.
  - a. Concerns were raised over disruptions to water and other utility provision during hazards.
2. Address harmful algal blooms in potable water related to climate change.
3. Identify water resources beyond what is supplied municipally to increase water reliability.

**Pop Up at the Sonoma Valley Emergency Preparedness Fair 2023:**

1. Three respondents (9.7%) rated their level of access to reliable and clean water as "Poor." Six respondents (19.4%) rated it as "Moderate." 22 respondents (70.9%) rated it as "Good."

**Safety Element Survey:**

1. Some residents are installing additional water storage tanks for rainwater capture, emergency use and fire suppression, in addition to "go bags" with a small supply of drinking water.

2. Concerns: Loss of water pressure during emergencies, loss of access to water for drinking and pets during emergencies, high water bills, drought increasing water cost, well water flow and quality issues, unfair water rights for wineries, vineyards, and corporations (they waste/use more than their fair share), not enough water being stored for later use, water use restrictions, water delivery trucks damage roads due to extra weight, insufficient water for wildlife and year-round residents, water restrictions lead to dead vegetation which increases fire risk, second-homes/vacation homeowners using more than their fair share of water to water large lawns and ornamental gardens, long-term supply given compounding climate hazards.
3. Suggested strategies:
  - a. Implement tax breaks for water recycling.
  - b. Provide additional water storage reserves, especially in wet years.
  - c. Incentivize or prioritize residents installing composting toilets and greywater systems. Support greywater use in residences – simplify the permitting process for greywater system installation, require all new construction to use greywater, provide property tax breaks for greywater use.
  - d. Repair (dredge) existing water supplies, maintain water infrastructure more regularly and create more storage.
  - e. Increase use and accessibility of recycled water, especially around all institutional uses.
  - f. Building groundwater infiltration basins, - pay for easements to place these wherever needed possibly on existing ag lands.
  - g. Ban lawns or limit lawn sizes.
    - i. Related Strategies: stop watering golf courses and parks
  - h. Consider impact of cannabis farming on water demand, controls or limits on cannabis and wine industry use of water.
  - i. Provide assistance for low-water landscaping.
  - j. Provide more information on groundwater supply issues and future preparations.
  - k. Make watersheds more resilient, stop cutting down trees, plant more trees, make watersheds more resilient to heavy storm flows.
  - l. Programs for renters to conserve water (more than checking for leaks in the toilet).
  - m. Greater use of permeable surface, reduced hardscaping in developed areas to allow more water infiltration. Build roads so they are designed to capture and filter runoff. Change design guidelines to require permeable surfaces for parking lots and sidewalks. Try to design Sonoma County to be a “Sponge County”.
  - n. Do not charge and tax well users unfairly, or provide an option to receive county provided water service.



### **Potential Strategies**

1. Partner with Sonoma Water to expand access to information on water supply and water quality by creating an information hub that clearly provides up to date information in an easy to understand format, and provides regular communications with the community through both online and traditional communication channels.
2. Incentivize water conservation and efficiency techniques without displacing renters or sensitive populations. Prioritize resources to provide conservation assistance to low-income households.
3. Improve water supply, prioritizing areas with inadequate supply for fire emergency response needs and high fire hazard.
4. Collaborate with water providers to strategize ways to avoid inequitable outcomes in water rate structure changes, water supply deficiencies, and water distribution disruptions induced by climate change, such as with the development of a Water Equity Action Plan.
5. Create a program to assist well owners with testing and remediation of their wells for contamination. Implement drought contingency supplies for those dependent on well water.
6. Consider expanding use of greywater systems and composting toilets, and incentivizing recycled water use.
7. Update design guidelines to prioritize permeable surfaces, recycled and greywater use, rainwater capture, water-efficient landscaping, and water conservation.
8. Utilize nature-based solutions for increasing the resilience of the watershed.



## Emergency Preparedness & Response

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### Issues and Opportunities

#### Issue 1: Alerts and Evacuation

Emergency communications and timely evacuations are an essential part of emergency operation planning and community safety. Barriers to evacuation can stem from deficiencies in the electrical grid, transportation system, telecommunication systems, language barriers, emergency facilities and services, evacuation locations, as well as inequitable access and distribution of resources. Inability to evacuate in a timely fashion during a hazardous event can create direct impacts to health and safety and exacerbate chronic health problems with EJ communities at highest risk. Most Safety Element Survey respondents reported having taken steps to prepare for wildfires; however, over 40% reported financial constraints as one of the largest barriers to adequate preparation. Historically there have been several climate hazard events that prompted evacuations including but not limited to recent fires of Tubbs, Nuns, Walbridge, Glass, and Kincade. Wildfire evacuations have typically affected northeast and eastern portions of the County.

#### Key Existing Plans and Reports

- Sonoma County Emergency Operations Plan (EOP)
  - Evacuation Plan Annex
  - Community Alert & Warning Annex

#### Desired Outcome

Community members, especially those that face systemic inequities, can evacuate safely and timely due to resilient infrastructure, accessible and effective emergency alerts, and improved access to financial resources before, during, and after disasters for recovery.

#### Community Input

##### **Equity Working Committee (EWC) Outcome Ideas:**

1. Easy, accessible information about transportation resources available for evacuation.
2. Clear understanding of where there are evacuation transportation needs within the County and plan to respond to those needs during emergency events.
3. Emergency preparedness, not reactivity
4. Cell coverage is spotty; need other source of information distribution
5. Early and more communications about potential emergency events and the potential need to respond

##### **Equity Working Committee (EWC) Strategy Ideas:**

1. Provide neighborhood evacuation drills.
2. Develop specific standards for alerts about controlled burns.





3. Nixle alerts need to be more widely distributed (people live and work in different areas).
4. Promote emergency support resources, particularly who to call for help in different scenarios (911).
5. Require mobile home parks to create evacuation plans.
6. Create a Farmworker Safety Commission (similar to County's Commission on Human Rights).
7. Perform regular alert system testing in various languages to ensure alerts go through in preferred languages.
8. Develop a campaign on evacuation planning (not just Know Your Zone). Address "what to expect" during evacuation, difference between evacuation warning and order, how to prepare to evacuate, how to find resources to help you evacuate, etc. Train community members on this information to support intra-community preparation.
9. Create Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with transportation service providers for evacuation needs and make them publicly accessible.

**Pop Up at the Sonoma Valley Emergency Preparedness Fair 2023:**

1. Eight respondents (25.8%) rated their level of access to transportation options as "Poor." Four respondents (12.9%) rated it as "Moderate." 19 respondents (61.3%) rated it as "Good."
2. Seven respondents (22.6%) rated their level of access to emergency preparedness and evacuation information as "Poor." 14 respondents (45.2%) rated it as "Moderate." 10 respondents (32.3%) rated it as "Good."

**Environmental Justice Stakeholder Focus Groups:**

1. Several participants reported that undocumented community members are afraid of accessing public funds or support due to concerns about how it may impact their citizenship.
2. Participants agreed that language barriers, educational disparities, and low access to Wi-Fi and online knowledge act as major barriers to resource access.
3. Several participants stated that public transit is unreliable and does not offer proper connections to all communities.
4. One participant noted that a lack of sidewalks in unincorporated areas makes accessing resources challenging for community members.
5. Several respondents reported collecting funding to improve transportation systems (transit, bicycle, and pedestrian) in the County.
6. Several participants noted that barriers exist including language, documentation, lack of cultural responsiveness, and fear of ineligibility due to resident status.
7. Several participants noted that there is inadequate electric vehicle infrastructure.
8. Several participants noted that there is inequitable distribution of parks; very few transportation options to reach parks; inadequate bike lanes; and unsafe bicycle and pedestrian facilities.
9. One participant stated that transportation is limited.



**Safety Element Focus Groups #2 and #3:**

1. One participant noted there is a need for more comprehensive evacuation planning and transportation planning.
2. One participant noted that wildfires and evacuations during a wildfire are major concerns. The participant noted limited transportation options for individuals with disabilities.

**Safety Element Focus Group #4:**

1. Communications - Alerts & Trusted Sources for Information
  - a. Investment in relationship building is critical. The best way to get Information out is through word of mouth, which requires having trusting relationships. Neighborhoods are currently siloed, community members feel burned out.
  - b. Compensation to folks who have trusted relationships and can help get information out, systems to get critical information to the community cannot depend on uncompensated volunteers, it's not sustainable. Create and share with COAD and the community a list of organizations who respond during disaster, whether paid or unpaid.
  - c. Communications must be provided in preferred languages.
  - d. Procedures to test alert systems before a disaster (Napa County is an example).
  - e. There is a lack of a safe and culturally responsive central place where community members can get information they trust.
  - f. Existing resource at COAD that can be built off of is a communications protocol for how to respond to needs, but this is not being met at the County level. Having COAD inside the County's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is a huge improvement for information access.
  - g. Create partnership processes/protocol between County and Cities to streamline information sharing and make sure Cities are passing information along in timely manners. Often people turn to the City to get information, but the City is waiting on information from the County.
2. Evacuations
  - a. Provide safe places for immigrants to shelter during a disaster where the threat (perceived or otherwise) of Federal/ICE agents is not present.
  - b. Recognize that the Sheriff does not make community members feel safe, look for other administrative methods to ensure safety when employers make workers work beyond evacuation lines.

**Feedback from Safety Element Survey:**

1. For respondents who had not signed up for emergency alerts, people who responded in Spanish more commonly indicated that they were not aware of the alert system existing, or were unsure if the alerts were available in Spanish.
2. When asked about evacuation challenges during past hazard events 414 people responded and 139 skipped this question. Key themes included: heavy traffic impeding evacuation, faced



impediments from a disability, confusion about proper evacuation routes and knowing which routes were safe or affected by the fire, finding a place to evacuate to with many hotels being full or expensive.

### Potential Strategies

1. Prepare the community, with priority on communities most at risk, for evacuation through methods such as the promotion of signing up for emergency response alert systems, community leader trainings, neighborhood evacuation plans and drills, and emergency preparedness educational materials.
2. Retrofit critical communications services to better evacuate the community and increase strategic redundancy in emergency evacuation communications systems by exploring the use of back-up power, distribution of information through radio channels, distribution of information through pre-established relationships with community-based organizations, promoting ownership of hand-cranked radios, and other means.
3. Address language and accessibility barriers to emergency alert programs and emergency preparedness resources by ensuring County emergency response operations follow the County of Sonoma's Language Access Policy, require contractors hired by the County follow the County's Language Access Policy, and coordinate with community-based organizations to increase awareness of resources, such as available translation services, and exploring the use of visual or non-language audible emergency alert options such as, but not limited to, sirens.
4. Conduct evacuation needs assessments to identify what areas and populations within the county need transportation assistance during evacuations and leverage partnerships with transportation providers to help address identified needs.
5. Regularly evaluate and improve the Agricultural Pass Program, prioritizing worker health and safety.
6. Implement strategies to address disruption in pay and enhance evacuation protocols for workers inside evacuation zones.
7. Invest in building trust and relationships with community-based organizations (CBO) before emergencies occur so that communication systems, language access needs and a shared understanding of resources available (such as legal support, transportation support, evacuation centers) and community needs are already established before disaster strikes. Through these relationships, support building CBO capacity to support their community members during a disaster.



## All Hazards/General Public Safety

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### Issues and Opportunities

#### Issue 1: Equitable Community Safety

Climate change impacts will affect virtually all populations in a community, but systemically vulnerable communities will be disproportionately impacted due to inequitable systems and structures. The Cloverdale area, southwest of Santa Rosa, and around Fethers Hot Springs-Agua Caliente have the highest concentration of populations made sensitive by systems. EJ Communities throughout the County, with the highest concentrations in the west, south, and central regions, are also at risk of disproportionate impacts from climate change. Inequitable access and active barriers to resources, critical services, and resilient infrastructure hinders the ability of populations made sensitive by systems populations to prepare for, cope with, and recover from climate impacts. Barriers identified by Safety Element Survey respondents include financial constraints, fear of rent increases, physical limitations or disabilities, social isolation, and language barriers.

#### Key Existing Plans and Reports

- Sonoma County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (MJHMP)
- Sonoma County Emergency Operations Plan (EOP)

#### Desired Outcome

County resources, funds, infrastructure investments, and services are equitably allocated based on greatest sensitivity and need.

#### Community Input

##### **Equity Working Committee (EWC) Outcome Ideas:**

1. Increased access to health care during and post-emergency events.
2. Culturally responsive emergency planning and response (DHS did a good job during Covid).
3. Prioritize not just equity, but diversity and inclusion in all emergency planning and response.
4. A safe and accessible pedestrian and bicycle network for people with disabilities.

##### **Equity Working Committee (EWC) Strategy Ideas:**

1. Build neighborhood/community-level capacity by training community leaders on disaster preparedness so they can provide resources and support within the neighborhood as trusted members of the community.
2. Promote emergency preparedness resources.
3. Staff involved with emergency planning should be more diverse and speak different languages.
4. Better support and involvement of Sonoma COAD and similar organizations in emergency planning processes and during response, particularly for communications.
5. Provide warming centers.



**Pop Up at the Sonoma Valley Emergency Preparedness Fair 2023:**

1. Eight respondents (25.8%) rated their level of access to transportation options as “Poor.” Four respondents (12.9%) rated it as “Moderate.” 19 respondents (61.3%) rated it as “Good.”
2. Seven respondents (22.6%) rated their level of access to emergency preparedness and evacuation information as “Poor.” 14 respondents (45.2%) rated it as “Moderate.” 10 respondents (32.3%) rated it as “Good.”

**Environmental Justice Stakeholder Focus Groups:**

1. Several participants reported that undocumented community members are afraid of accessing public funds or support due to concerns about how it may impact their citizenship.
2. Participants agreed that language barriers, educational disparities, and low access to Wi-Fi and online knowledge act as major barriers to resource access.
3. One participant stated that, in some cases, public officers dissuade community members from accessing resources.
4. Several participants encouraged the County to continue to ask for input from community groups and residents.
5. Several participants advocated for maintaining an open line of communication where community organizations may voice the demands of community members, ask questions, and share concerns.
6. One participant suggested creation of a grant program for community groups to use to support their staff and the communities each group is connected to.
7. One participant noted it’s important to reward people for their efforts and provide stipends to nonprofit organizations who are working directly with impacted communities.
8. Several participants agreed that tapping into schools and educational programs are effective ways to reach parents and other community members.
9. One participant encouraged the County to connect with colleges and research groups who would be willing to share their research.
10. Several participants noted that barriers exist including language, documentation, lack of cultural responsiveness, and fear of ineligibility due to resident status.
11. Several respondents noted that community members are unable to participate fully and understand all services offered due to time constraints.
12. Several participants noted that there is a need to pair different supportive services together.
13. Several participants noted that there is general success partnering with community-based organizations. Several participants stated that having partners within the County and collaborating with community partners have been instrumental for success.

**Sonoma COAD Food Access Committee:**

1. Need an established protocol for emergency food provision during disaster events.

2. The Department of Emergency Management (DEM) should establish food procurement memorandums of understanding (MOUs) ahead of disaster events.
3. Increase funding for shelf-stable food.
4. Local agricultural production is monoculture, focused on grapes and apples. If we grow more options for food locally, this protects us against supply and distribution issues during large-scale disaster events.
5. There needs to be a clear pipeline to provide food to areas in need during emergencies.
6. The food system and climate resilience are inextricably related.
7. There are vulnerable senior populations living in the coast that struggle with daily healthy food access and even more so during disaster events.

**Safety Element Stakeholder Focus Groups #1:**

1. One participant noted that Sonoma County should more clearly communicate climate hazard risks to the public.
2. One participant noted that Sonoma County should focus on communicating near term climate change impacts, not too far out, like to 2050.
3. One participant noted that Sonoma County should center messaging around impacts being felt now, not just what is projected. The County should pair this with solutions and grants/incentives.

**Safety Element Stakeholder Focus Groups #2:**

1. A primary concern of participants is how climate change would further exacerbate major hazards and hazardous conditions.
2. Several participants noted that major hazard events particularly impacted low-income and special needs populations.
3. Several participants expressed concern that loss of housing stock during hazard events drives the cost of housing up. One participant voiced that loss of housing has a direct impact on people's health.
4. One participant voiced concern about the mental health impacts and trauma of experiencing a hazard event. One participant stated there is a need for mental health counseling for people after hazard events.
5. One participant noted that limited ability to collaborate on climate vulnerability and climate adaptation plans.
6. One participant noted conflicting solutions to various climate issues being a barrier.
7. Several participants cited response times to hazards are often longer than hoped for or anticipated.
8. One commenter noted that there is difficulty finding contractors to assist as costs for labor and materials continue to rise.



9. Several commenters noted sources of potential financing. These sources included the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Sonoma County Energy Independence Program Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE), Federal Highway Administration, and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).
10. One participant noted that climate change is discussed as part of the General Rate Case submitted to California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC).
11. One participant stated that the County should assist with aligning and coordinating climate efforts between jurisdictions.
12. One commenter asked how the County is applying an equity lens to their safety and hazard planning. Several participants mentioned the Office of Equity should be engaged in the process, due to their greater involvement in equity work in the County.

**Safety Element Stakeholder Focus Group #3:**

1. One participant noted that there are many people who work, but do not live, in Sonoma County and therefore may face particular challenges during climate hazard scenarios.
2. One participant noted that maintenance of rivers and creeks is necessary to reduce flooding impacts.
3. One participant noted that a multi-lingual radio (KBBF Radio 89.1) is something that has been relied on by many community members and should be integrated into planning efforts for hazard event communication.
4. One participant stated that Community Alliance with Family Farmers offers occasional training that includes climate change adaptations such as drought tolerant approaches, carbon sequestration, soil stabilization, etc.
5. One participant stated that data needs to look at block levels, rather than census tracts, due to extreme differences found between block groups.
6. One participant noted that there needs to be better communication regarding changes to the permitting process.
7. One participant stated that additional input from organizations and residents would be useful, and that participants should be paid for providing their expertise.
8. One participant stated that the County should be in touch with the Regional Climate Protection Agency (RCPA) and advocated for the need of sustainability officers in different industries.

**Safety Element Stakeholder Focus Group #4:**

1. Overarching requests to invest more in preparation before disaster by developing relationships with communities most impacted by systemic inequities especially within the context of climate change.
  - a. Lack of integration of learnings into systems from past disasters so that the government can adequately meet the needs of communities. Community members most impacted are not seeing very much change when it comes to learning from past disasters and preparing for upcoming ones.



- b. Emergency Funding Structures remain unchanged. Organizations who are not in relationship with communities most impacted continue to receive the majority of the funding, the same people respond, and support doesn't end up getting into the community.
2. Policies need to include feedback loops for bi-directional information sharing and transparency to build trust and Accountability.
3. Documentation
  - a. Remove the requirement to provide proof of documentation when providing emergency assistance where possible.
  - b. Establish relationships with local consulates before disasters in order to more effectively provide support with getting documentation if it's been lost in a fire, flood or other disaster.
  - c. Build on existing pathways to fund undocumented folks who are providing disaster work in community.
4. Contracting
  - a. Streamline contracting processes, leverage the Federal funding model that allows 5% of federal/states/local funding to be used for disaster prep with up to 50% going to community in various ways, reduce barriers for becoming a vendor to the County, invest in mutual aid networks, help local, small CBOs build capacity prior to disasters.
5. Funding
  - a. Adapt qualifications for funding to include orgs that provide recovery efforts. Legal support for immigrants and renters who face eviction, community health services and promoters' services.
  - b. Better tracking of/accountability for organizations given disaster funded for interpretation services.
  - c. Increased funding for food assistance programs is needed.
6. Transparency, Training and Enforcement of Rights
  - a. Training and transparency of community member rights during and after a disaster is needed, especially for farm workers.
  - b. Resources for improved oversight of employers to ensure rights are being respected, with timely penalties for violations and when retaliation is experienced. This is especially critical for undocumented or H1-B workers.
7. Disaster & Hazard Pay
  - a. Invest in workforce support, especially for undocumented workers, in the form of Disaster Pay if both directly impacted. For example, if work is lost due to a disaster, if food is lost due to a power outage, if a parent misses work because of a child's asthma from poor air quality.





- b. Financial assistance for monthly rental and/or utility payments when unable to work due to disaster or recovery.
  - c. Provide Hazard Pay for workers doing hazardous waste cleanup after a disaster, as well as improve health and safety requirements, enforcement, and communication of workers' rights for workers dealing with hazardous materials.
8. Create hyper-local, culturally responsive safety spaces.
9. Create and apply equity metrics to internal policies and processes that don't just incentivize, but actually penalize, if certain communities are left behind.
10. County of Sonoma Pilot program to provide support for storm-related income loss and unexpected expenses regardless of immigration status.

**Safety Element Survey:**

1. Of 553 respondents, most had signed up for emergency alerts, some had prepared an emergency response kit, and over 30% believed they do not need to take any precautionary measures related to flooding. A small number of respondents reported installing sump pumps or French drains.
2. Most renters had not asked their landlord to make improvements/upgrades for flood or fire readiness. Amongst renters, the most common reasoning was a worry of the landlord getting mad or raising rent, followed by not knowing what improvements landlords should make.
3. Of 553 respondents, over 60% believe that it is very important to prepare for climate change, nearly 20% believe it is important to do so, and the remainder of respondents either didn't believe it is important to do so or weren't sure.
  - a. Over 40% of respondents cited financial constraints as a barrier to preparing for climate change, 28% cited no barriers and that they were adequately prepared, over 15% responded that they did not know how to prepare, nearly 15% responded that they are renters and are unable to make home upgrades. Approximately 22% of respondents provided written responses, key themes included: being in the process of preparing but not being prepared yet, needing affordable alternatives, and not believing in climate change.
4. When asked who in the community they thought were most impacted by recent climate change hazard events and who the county should prioritize with assistance key themes included: people with low incomes, people experiencing homelessness, seniors, people with disabilities, farm workers, people who speak languages other than English, undocumented people, people with inadequate access to transportation, people located in hazard zones, people were impacted by extreme heat, fires, power outages, floods, and being out of work.
5. When asked where they would turn for resources if impacted by a hazard most people said they would turn to family or friends, and few said they would turn to the County or non-profits. Over 15% of respondents said they were unsure about where to go for resources.
6. When asked what resources or programs they would like to see the County provide to help people in Sonoma County better prepare for climate change key themes included: easier access to information, more community-building events, financial resources such as grants or other



assistance, updated emergency notification system, adjusted land use standards to accommodate the changing climate, resources available in multiple languages to eliminate language barrier.

### **Potential Strategies**

1. Provide resources for hazard prevention including information on funding options and effective resilience improvements. Engage with collaborative networks and community-based organizations in emergency planning, response, and recovery by providing resources and application assistance for funds to enhance community communication and increase access to emergency resources, especially for individuals facing financial, physical, social, documentation, and language barriers.
2. Collaborate with health care providers to augment physical and mental health care capacity in areas with EJ Communities or high concentrations of populations made sensitive by systems during emergencies.
3. Integrate diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) principles into EOC operations, hiring practices, staff trainings, and community engagement and outreach protocols in alignment with the Sonoma County Strategic Plan Racial Equity and Social Justice Pillar for departments engaged in emergency and safety related programs.
4. Increase capacity and redundancy through strategic coordination and partnerships before disasters occur, including with community-based organizations, Fire Districts, DEM, and the Sheriff's Office.
5. Strategically increase County staffing using a DEIB approach and increase peak capacity of emergency services to respond to anticipated increased demand during climate hazards events and other disasters.



## Resilient Landscapes (Wildfire)

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### Issues and Opportunities

#### Issue 1: Wildfire impacting landscapes

Parks, natural resources, and agricultural land in Sonoma County are highly vulnerable to wildfire. Since 2015, wildfires have burned over 400,000 acres in Sonoma County. Projected annual burned acreage is expected to increase along the eastern edge of Sonoma County within existing and new wildfire zones. Increasing wildfire frequency and severity will result in species mortality, loss of habitat, and loss of available food sources and seed bank. Habitat loss may not recover depending on the type of land cover that is destroyed in a wildfire and quick succession fires can prevent or delay the recovery of natural systems. Potentially affected land cover types primarily include conifer and hardwood forests along with some shrub and grasslands. Hood Mountain Regional Park & Open Space Preserve is located entirely within a very high fire hazard severity zone and several parks interspersed along the County edges are located within moderate and high fire hazard severity zones. Agricultural land that is most at risk of wildfire is located mainly at the eastern and northern edges of the County. Other agricultural areas at risk of wildfire are located throughout the County and southeast of the City of Healdsburg. Wildfires can destroy crops and disrupt rangeland operations while wildfire smoke may stress the health of crops and livestock. These impacts to crop yield and livestock can impact Sonoma County's economy, and directly negatively impact the livelihoods of agricultural workers and operators.

#### Key Existing Plans and Reports

- Sonoma County General Plan 2020 Public Safety Element
- Sonoma County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (MJHMP)
- Sonoma County Community Wildfire Protection Plan
- Sonoma County's Climate Resilient Lands Strategy
- Sonoma County Emergency Operations Plan – Wildfire Burn Scar Debris Flow Response

#### Desired Outcome

Existing General Plan Safety Element Goal, modified – Prevent unnecessary exposure of people and property to risks from wildland and structural fires, with priority on outdoor workers, shelterless populations, and populations most at risk of exposure during fires.

#### Community Input

##### Environmental Justice Stakeholder Focus Groups:

1. Several participants stated that farmworkers are particularly impacted by the wildfire season and high housing costs in Sonoma.
2. Participants shared general concerns regarding air quality and how pesticide pollution and wildfire degrade air quality in the area.
3. Several participants noted that there is limited ability for homeowners to harden homes to fires or floods.



4. Several participants noted that there is additional relocation assistance needed.

**Safety Element Stakeholder Focus Group #1:**

1. Drought, wildfire, and flood are primary hazards of concern. One participant noted that drought is a concern because it often exacerbates wildfire risk. One participant noted that wildfire is a concern because recovery efforts and timelines are significantly high, especially compared to other hazards such as extreme heat.
2. Several participants shared that Sonoma County staff experienced communication challenges during previous wildfire and power outage events due to loss of power and wireless broadband system.
3. One participant noted that wildfire impacts critical infrastructure and structures which require long-term efforts to recover.
4. One participant noted that the CEQA process can slow down project timelines, which may limit preparedness and recovery efforts.
5. One participant noted that projects and programs around home hardening, fuel breaks, fuel reduction, fire breaks, prescribed burns (Sonoma County Regional Parks managing agricultural and open spaces) will help the County mitigate wildfire risk.

**Safety Element Stakeholder Focus Group #2:**

1. A primary concern of participants is how climate change would further exacerbate major hazards and hazardous conditions.
2. Several participants noted that major hazard events particularly impacted low-income and special needs populations.
3. Several participants expressed concern that loss of housing stock during hazard events drives the cost of housing up. One participant voiced that loss of housing has a direct impact on people's health.
4. One participant voiced concern regarding hazard event impacts to business operations continuity and staff safety.
5. Several participants cited response times to hazards are often longer than hoped for or anticipated.
6. One commenter noted that there is difficulty finding contractors to assist as costs for labor and materials continue to rise.
7. One participant stated that the County should assist with aligning and coordinating climate efforts between jurisdictions.

**Safety Element Stakeholder Focus Group #3:**

1. Primary climate concerns were extreme heat, drought, wildfire, and flooding and how climate change will worsen these hazards.
2. One participant stated that future developments should not be sited in hazard areas in order to reduce risk.



3. One participant noted that wildfires and evacuations during a wildfire are major concerns. The participant noted limited transportation options for individuals with disabilities.
4. One participant shared that Greenbelt is developing a social vulnerability index in relation to wildfire. The index will be available in May/June as a part of a project with Agriculture and Open Space.
5. One participant noted that the Transportation Commission is interested in compact development and developing outside of the wildland interface.

**Safety Element Stakeholder Focus Group #4:**

1. Replicate the Bayer Farm model: Bayer Farm in Roseland worked really well as a resource hub during the 2017 fires by providing a space to gather, providing food, and a space to cook for folks living out of their cars. This was fully made possible by community organizations, and the government could have greatly amplified the impact. What didn't work about this model was that the governing agency of the park prohibited the use of the kitchen despite the dire need.

**Feedback from Safety Element Survey:**

1. Of 553 respondents, the majority indicated that they had signed up for emergency alerts, prepared an emergency supply kit and maintained vegetation around their home. Extremely few respondents felt that they did not need to take any precautionary measures related to wildfire.
2. A small number of respondents took additional measures such as purchasing additional renters or home insurance, installing water storage tanks, hoses or pumps, backup generators, making home smoke filters, starting or joining a neighborhood Firewise council, becoming CERT trained, and downloading resources such as WatchDuty or getting a GMRS radio.
3. Numerous respondents expressed that costs were a barrier to emergency/wildfire preparation.
4. Most renters had not asked their landlord to make improvements/upgrades for flood or fire readiness. Amongst renters, the most common reasoning was a worry of the landlord getting mad or raising rent, followed by not knowing what improvements landlords should make.

**Potential Strategies**

1. Existing Safety Element Objective, modified - Continue to use complete data on wildland and urban fire hazards to ensure fire prevention or suppression practices are effective.
2. Existing Safety Element Objective - Regulate new development to reduce the risks of damage and injury from known fire hazards to acceptable levels.
3. Existing Safety Element Objective, modified – Implement the Sonoma County Hazard Mitigation Plan to help reduce damages from wildland fire hazards.
4. Improve relocation and assistance for households who lost homes, were displaced, cannot rebuild, or have lost income due to emergency circumstances after a wildfire event.
5. Promote community preparation for wildfire hazards for homeowners, renters, and community organizations/neighborhoods.
6. Support and coordinate with local and regional agencies in efforts to utilize alternative fire prevention measures such as prescribed fire for fuels reduction.



7. Explore ways to streamline the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review process for fuel reduction projects.
8. Target programs to elevate the awareness of impacts of wildfire on low-income and special needs populations, and provide additional assistance aimed at increasing their resilience.
9. Safeguard business operations continuity programs and staff safety programs that enhance preparedness of businesses (emergency action plans, evacuation plans).

## Other Natural Disasters

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### Issues and Opportunities

#### Issue 1: Geologic and Seismic Hazards

There are at least four known faults with potential impacts in Sonoma County including the San Andreas Fault, the Rodgers Creek Fault, the Healdsburg Fault, and the Mayacamas Fault. According to the Sonoma County Emergency Operations Plan Earthquake Annex, a large seismic event could put a number of critical facilities at risk, including water treatment facilities, wastewater treatment facilities, hazardous material sites, hospitals, fire stations, police stations, dams, schools, bridges, port facilities, and airports. A major seismic event could lead to the loss of life, property damage, and slow the movement of goods through damaged roads or other facilities.

#### Key Existing Plans

- Sonoma County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (MJHMP)
- Sonoma County Emergency Operations Plan – Earthquake Annex
- Sonoma County Emergency Operations Plan – Damage Assessment Plan Annex

#### Desired Outcome

All community members and emergency service providers in Sonoma County are protected from the impacts of earthquakes and other seismic events to the greatest extent feasible and the County has developed a comprehensive protocol for handling major seismic events.

#### Community Input

No comments regarding earthquakes or seismic events were recorded during the engagement process. While it was brought up during the Safety Element Stakeholder Focus Groups, it was not a topic of discussion.

#### Potential Strategies

1. Seismically retrofit County-owned facilities on a prioritization schedule to ensure operational functions continue following a seismic event.
2. Seek grant funding opportunities to support existing building retrofits for all critical facilities.
3. Assess existing critical facility construction to identify hazards in reinforced and unreinforced masonry that can be addressed through Code Enforcement action.
4. Promote evaluation of needed seismic strengthening in private soft-story buildings, wood framed cripple walls, and masonry chimneys.
5. Ensure development standards are up to date and consider earthquake and liquefaction risk in building siting and design.



6. Require utility lines crossing active fault traces to withstand the expected movement of the earth in these locations. Utility lines as defined here include, but are not to be limited to, electricity, water, internet, natural gas and sewer.
7. Implement and as appropriate update a public education program regarding response to seismic hazards for residents, businesses, and schools.

## **Issue 2: Flood Resilience**

Precipitation changes are expected to affect the occurrence of hazards events, including wildfire, drought, landslides, and riverine stormwater flooding. Historically, the northern coastal mountains of Sonoma County experience the largest precipitation events across the San Francisco Bay Area region and can expect up to a 37 percent increase in rainfall volume by the end of the century. Major flood events in Sonoma County are generally associated with the Russian River, Sonoma Creek, Petaluma River, and Laguna de Santa Rosa. Climate change may cause more intense and frequent flood events resulting in increased strain on emergency services, stressed water drainage systems, property damage, habitat loss, injuries to people, the spread of water-borne disease, mental and behavioral stress, and loss of income.

### **Key Existing Plans**

- Sonoma County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (MJHMP)
- Sonoma County Russian River Flood Plan
- Climate Ready Sonoma County: Climate Hazards and Vulnerabilities
- Sonoma County Emergency Operations Plan – Damage Assessment Plan Annex
- Sonoma Water Climate Adaptation Plan

### **Desired Outcome**

All community members and emergency service providers in Sonoma County are protected from the impacts of flooding to the greatest extent feasible and the County has developed a robust protocol for handling major flooding events.

### **Community Input**

#### **Safety Stakeholder Focus Group #1:**

1. Primary concerns from interviewees included drought, wildfire, and flood.
2. Several concerns were raised regarding the accuracy of FEMA special flood hazard areas as characterized by FEMA

#### **Safety Stakeholder Focus Group #2:**

1. Several participants noted that major hazard events particularly impacted low-income and special needs populations.
2. Several participants expressed concern that loss of housing stock during hazard events drives the cost of housing up.





3. One participant voiced concern regarding hazard event impacts to business operations continuity and staff safety.
4. One participant voiced concern about the mental health impacts and trauma of experiencing a hazard event.
5. One participant voiced concern regarding algae blooms in potable water due to climate change.

**Safety Stakeholder Focus Group #3:**

1. Several participants expressed concern regarding drought, wildfire, and flooding and how these events will be worsened by climate change.
2. One participant noted that maintenance of rivers and creeks is necessary to reduce flooding impacts.
3. One participant noted there is a need for urbanized areas to be better prepared to handle flooding.

**Potential Strategies**

1. Require new critical facilities to be constructed in areas not at risk of wildfires and flooding.
2. Seek additional funding opportunities through FEMA grant programs such as the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant program to address future risks from natural disasters such as wildfires, drought, earthquakes, extreme temperature, and flooding.
3. Ensure that new development meets National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) and associated Low Impact Development (LID) standards that limit peak runoff to pre-development rates.
4. As appropriate, use open space and recreational areas to serve as floodplains that reduce downgradient flooding and aid in groundwater recharge.
5. Preserve and restore the natural and beneficial values served by floodplains to the extent feasible, consistent with public health, safety, and welfare.
6. Explore rewilding opportunities with co-benefits for flood resilience and natural resource conversation.
7. Implement and as appropriate update a public education program regarding resources for flood resilience in homes and response to floods for residents, businesses, and schools.



## Sea Level Rise Resilience

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### Issues and Opportunities

#### Issue 1: Sea Level Rise (SLR) and Saltwater Intrusion

Sea level rise is a significant threat to the safety and well-being of various population groups in Sonoma County particularly those situated close to the Sonoma Coast and San Pablo Bay shoreline. Certain Environmental Justice Communities such as the ones living in the Petaluma Airport/Arroyo Park and Jenner/Cazadero neighborhoods (census tracts 1506.12 and 1543.04), would be disproportionately affected by its impacts. The direct effects of sea level rise, such as the loss of recreational areas and potential flooding of Bodega Bay by 2100, threaten the county's natural resources and habitats. Housing needs could be impacted due to populations relocating from areas affected by sea level rise, potentially leading to economic losses due to property and land damage. Coastal erosion would be exacerbated by sea level rise, which could render some beaches inaccessible, impacting tourism resources and altering coastal habitats and ecosystems. Critical facilities, including Sonoma Valley wastewater treatment plants and storm drainage systems, are at risk of inundation, posing public health concerns. The county's agricultural lands are also threatened due to the risk of saltwater intrusion into farmlands located in low-lying areas.

#### Key Existing Plans and Reports

- Sonoma County Local Coastal Plan (LCP) amended in 2001
- Sonoma County LCP Update adopted on July 17, 2023 – *Pending California Coastal Commission Certification*
- Sonoma Regional Parks Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan (CARP) – *Under development*
- Sonoma County's Climate Resilience Comprehensive Action Plan – *Under development*

#### Desired Outcome

Communities and habitats are resilient to the impacts of sea level rise, and losses of all kinds (life, property, economic, ecological, and recreational) are avoided as much as possible, while public safety is protected and resources are prioritized for populations most at risk.

#### Community Input

##### **Safety Element Stakeholder Focus Group #2:**

1. A primary concern of participants is how climate change would further exacerbate major hazards and hazardous conditions.
2. Several participants expressed concern that loss of housing stock during hazard events drives the cost of housing up. One participant voiced that loss of housing has a direct impact on people's health.
3. One participant noted concerns regarding the loss of campgrounds and open space in the County due to sea level rise.



### Potential Strategies

1. Rely on web-based tools and best available science to identify areas along Sonoma County's shoreline that will likely be exposed to projected sea level rise and assess where aquifers, communities, low-lying farmlands, and infrastructure may be susceptible to saltwater intrusion and potential groundwater rise.
2. Adopt natural and/or artificial methods to improve and/or restore groundwater recharge in farmlands adjacent to the shoreline and vulnerable to impacts of saltwater intrusion due to sea level rise.
3. Regulate groundwater extraction and protect the groundwater basin, by:
  - a. Regulate development to limit or prevent extraction and avoid overdraft from aquifers that are potentially vulnerable to seawater intrusion. Encourage measures to recharge shallow aquifers that are depleted.
  - b. Require appropriate studies and monitoring if new or increased well production is proposed to increase public water supply within the County limits and/or subject to issuance of a coastal development permit, designed to ensure that the increased production does not have adverse effects.
  - c. Identify opportunities to relocate wells away from hazards and/or areas where falling groundwater levels or seawater intrusion may occur. Require new wells to be sited away from areas where saltwater intrusion could occur.
4. Implement Local Coastal Plan Policies and Programs including but not limited to:
  - a. Policy C-PS-4e: Use the best available science and technical analyses available in combination with site-specific information when evaluating land use or development proposals in areas subject to sea level rise and other coastal hazards.
  - b. Policy C-PS-4g: Restrict rebuilding or coastal redevelopment of structures in vulnerable areas that have experienced repetitive damage from storms, flooding, landslides, or the impacts from sea level rise.
  - c. Program C-PS-4-P3: Study, monitor, develop, and implement a plan to mitigate the impacts to groundwater from saltwater intrusion resulting from sea level rise and storm events based on the best available science. (July 2023 Local Coastal Plan Adoption Draft)



## Resilient and Equitable Infrastructure

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### Issues and Opportunities

#### Issue 1: Broadband and Telecommunications Access

According to the Sonoma County Broadband Action Plan (2021), the County currently lacks a comprehensive, cohesive, and diverse broadband network. Underserved communities are usually located in low density and high-cost rural areas where wireline deployment can be expensive and cost prohibitive due to lower demand. Notably, over 20% of households in the Jenner/Cazadero EJ Community (census tract 1543.04), which includes the Stewarts Point Rancheria, lack access to internet. Damage to communication infrastructure, such as cell towers, during wildfires or landslides, would hinder emergency communications, potentially impacting the health and safety of emergency personnel and community members.

#### Key Existing Plans and Reports

- Office of Equity's Language Access Plan and Policy, and Community Engagement Plan and Toolkit (2024)
- Access Sonoma Broadband Action Plan (2021)

#### Desired Outcome

Improved broadband and telecommunication systems with an emphasis on providing service to low-income communities, those with special needs (elderly, those with mobility issues, etc.), and residents in the rural portions of the county.

#### Community Input

##### Environmental Justice Stakeholder Focus Groups:

1. Participants agreed that language barriers, educational disparities, and low access to Wi-Fi and online knowledge act as major barriers to resource access.

##### Pop Up at the Sonoma Valley Emergency Preparedness Fair 2023:

1. 23 percent of residents reported having "Poor" access to emergency preparedness and evacuation information. 45 percent reported having "Moderate" access, and 32 percent reported having "Good" access.

##### Safety Element Survey:

1. When respondents were asked what communication challenges, if any, they faced during past hazard events, 411 people responded and 142 skipped this question. Key themes included: poor cell phone reception, loss of power and internet access, being on the road and not having immediate access to news, not knowing where to find information, and information gaps with language barriers.

##### Safety Element Focus Group #2:



1. Several participants noted the need for resilient utility systems (electricity and broadband) during hazard events. One commenter stated that the Economic Development Board works to provide broadband services to residents.

#### **Safety Element Stakeholder Focus Group #3:**

1. Several participants noted lapses in communication during past hazard events. One participant noted inadequate access to broadband and Wi-Fi as a barrier. Another participant noted that many people who do not have landline telephones and cell phones often die during emergencies if electricity is not available.

#### **Potential Strategies**

1. Ensure alternative channels of communication for emergency personnel and community emergency notification in the case of telecommunication disruption.
2. Where telecommunication is available, ensure that backup power is available at cell towers to avoid sweeping outages during emergencies.
3. Identify areas with the greatest need for additional telecommunication and broadband infrastructure/services to direct funding towards establishing service for residents and identify alternative methods of providing information and resources to these areas.

#### **Issue 2: Infrastructure and Utility Resilience (Sewer, Roadways, Bridges, etc.)**

Sonoma County's infrastructure will face significant challenges due to climate change, particularly in the context of emergency preparedness response. For example, extreme heat would impact occupants of buildings that are not adequately weatherized. This would lead to increased emergency service calls and put a strain on medical services and emergency responders. With climate change, the electrical infrastructure could be at risk of being overwhelmed by peaks in demand, resulting in blackouts or public safety power shutoffs. These power outages have significant cascading impacts on communication networks and populations rendered vulnerable by systems and would impair the ability of critical service providers to function effectively. In addition, the County is vulnerable to the impacts of wildfires, landslides, heatwaves, and flooding, which could impact emergency preparedness response. Wildfires, for instance, would pose a risk of direct structural damage to buildings located within wildfire hazard zones, including critical facilities such as fire stations and evacuation shelters. Landslides, flooding, and sea level rise could damage major arterial routes, impacting evacuation routes, and thus, emergency evacuation could be adversely impacted. These climate risks could impact the ability of community members to evacuate during emergency orders and prevent emergency personnel from entering emergency evacuation zones.

#### **Key Existing Plans and Reports**

- Sonoma County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (MJHMP)
- Sonoma County Emergency Operations Plan – Public Safety Power Shutoff Annex
- Sonoma County General Plan 2020 Public Safety Element
- Sonoma County Capital Improvement Plan



### Desired Outcome

Transportation and utility systems adequately meet the needs of, and protect the wellbeing of, all community members and emergency personnel, especially community members most sensitive to climate change.

### Community Input

#### **Environmental Justice Stakeholder Focus Groups:**

1. One participant stated that their organization is making efforts to install microgrids to reduce residents' reliance on PG&E and create easier access to the internet.
2. Several participants noted that a lack of funding and staffing shortages were general concerns.
3. One participant stated that there is a lack of data on community needs and some workers do not have the background needed to serve communities most effectively (cultural competence).
4. One participant noted a lack of representation in elected officials; poor treatment of BIPOC residents by elected officials and community leaders

#### **Safety Element Stakeholder Focus Group #1:**

1. Of the primary hazards associated with climate change in Sonoma County, hazards of concern for participants were drought, wildfire, and flood. One participant noted that drought is a concern because it often exacerbates wildfire risk. One participant noted that wildfire is a concern because recovery efforts and timelines are significantly high, especially compared to other hazards such as extreme heat.
2. Several participants shared that Sonoma County staff experienced communication challenges during previous wildfire and power outage events due to loss of power and wireless broadband system.
3. One participant noted that daily operations of the County were impacted when staff got pulled into recovery efforts from past hazard events.
4. Several participants noted that overlapping hazard events have led to County employee fatigue and burnout.
5. One participant noted that wildfire impacts critical infrastructure and structures which require long-term efforts to recover.
6. Several participants noted that staff training and staff time were barriers that limited the ability of the County to prepare for and respond to hazards.
7. One participant noted that pursuing and implementing grant funding is time consuming, making acquiring resources to prepare for and respond to hazards challenging.
8. One participant noted that the CEQA process can slow down project timelines, which may limit preparedness and recovery efforts.
9. One participant noted that uncertainty of future climate hazards projections influences how infrastructure is retrofitted and developed to limit impacts.

#### **Safety Element Stakeholder Focus Group #2:**

2. A primary concern of participants is how climate change would further exacerbate major hazards and hazardous conditions.
3. Several participants noted the need for continuous utility (connectivity, water, electricity) provisions during hazard events and efforts to address these concerns.
4. Several participants noted limited funding and staffing constraints.
5. One participant noted limited ability to collaborate on climate vulnerability and climate adaptation plans.
6. One participant noted conflicting solutions to various climate issues being a barrier.
7. Several participants cited response times to hazards are often longer than hoped for or anticipated.
8. One commenter noted that there is difficulty finding contractors to assist as costs for labor and materials continue to rise.
9. Several commenters noted sources of potential financing. These sources included the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Sonoma County Energy Independence Program PACE, Federal Highway Administration, and FEMA.
10. One participant noted that climate change is discussed as part of the General Rate Case submitted to California Public Utilities Commission.
11. Several participants noted the need for resilient utility systems (electricity and broadband) during hazard events. One commenter stated that the Economic Development Board works to provide broadband services to residents.
12. One participant stated that the County should assist with aligning and coordinating climate efforts between jurisdictions.

#### **Safety Element Stakeholder Focus Group #3:**

2. One participant expressed concern regarding utility reliability, particularly water reliability, during and after hazard events.
3. Several participants noted lapses in communication during past hazard events. One participant noted inadequate access to broadband and Wi-Fi as a barrier. Another participant noted that many people who do not have landline telephones and cell phones often die during emergencies if electricity is not available.

#### **Safety Element Stakeholder Focus Group #4:**

1. Hiring Practices and Representation - Communities with the closest proximity to the impact of disasters must be represented in safety related leadership roles and positions of authority before disasters happen. Hiring and retention policies within safety related departments needs to reflect this goal.
2. Replicate the Bayer Farm model: Bayer Farm in Roseland worked really well as a resource hub during the 2017 fires by providing a space to gather, providing food, and a space to cook for folks living out of their cars. This was fully made possible by community organizations, and the government could have greatly amplified the impact. What didn't work about this model was that the governing agency of the park prohibited the use of the kitchen despite the dire need.



### Potential Strategies

1. Assess, harden and weatherize, and track weatherization of critical facilities to increase resilience across all hazard types, prioritizing facilities and resilience centers serving EJ communities.
2. Address gaps in backup power generation for critical services and community members with medical equipment and medication that require electricity/refrigeration.
3. Maintain defensible space around critical infrastructure.
4. Prioritize resilient road design, improvements, and maintenance.
5. Engage and empower rural communities by expanding self-sufficiency resources for disaster-isolated communities.
6. Identify funding sources and prioritize improvements to increase infrastructure resilience to flooding.
7. Prioritize equity in the capital improvement process (CIP).

### **Issue 3: Gaps in Service (Active and Public Transportation)**

Sonoma County Transit Authority's (SCTA) Sonoma County Vision Zero Action Plan reported that rural areas, equity priority communities (census tracts that have likely been disadvantaged and faced historic underinvestment), and areas of concentrated poverty are disproportionately affected by traffic safety concerns. These areas represent a lower percentage of the County's roadway mileage but a higher percentage of the County's fatal and injury crashes. Equity priority communities also have a disproportionately high number of the County's high injury intersections, defined as intersections with an elevated risk of crashes resulting in an injury or fatality. Low rates of commute via active transportation in the planning area may be an indicator of inadequate infrastructure, including sidewalks and bikeways. Additionally, the setting of unincorporated Sonoma County indicates that the planning area may not be adequately served by much of the existing bicycle infrastructure. As of 2018, approximately 2.1 percent of Sonoma County residents use public transit and 9.7 percent use carpool or ridesharing programs. Residents in the planning area are likely to rely on both transit in the unincorporated County as well as inner city services.

### Key Existing Plans and Reports

- Sonoma County Transit Authority (SCTA) Comprehensive Transportation Plan
- Sonoma County Vision Zero Action Plan
- Sonoma County 2010 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan

### Desired Outcome

All residents, especially EJ Communities, equity priority communities, rural communities, and areas disproportionately affected by traffic safety concerns, are able to enjoy safe and affordable active and public transportation opportunities.





### Community Input

#### **Equity Working Committee (EWC) Strategy Ideas:**

1. Provide transportation vouchers to encourage people to attend County meetings in person.
2. Improve active transportation options by prioritizing resources toward closing gaps in EJ Communities' Complete Streets system through the County's Capital Improvement Plan and other active transportation planning activities, including Vision Zero.

#### **Pop Up at the Sonoma Valley Emergency Preparedness Fair 2023:**

1. Eight (26%) respondents reported having "Poor" access to transportation, four (13%) reported having "Moderate" access, and 19 (61%) reported having "Good" access.

#### **Environmental Justice Stakeholder Focus Groups:**

2. Several respondents reported collecting funding to improve transportation systems (transit, bicycle, and pedestrian) in the County.
3. Several participants noted that there is inequitable distribution of parks; very few transportation options to reach parks; inadequate bike lanes; and unsafe bicycle and pedestrian facilities.
4. One participant stated that transportation is limited.

### Potential Strategies

1. Continue to explore opportunities with SCTA to support expanded in-county and inter-county transportation services in Sonoma County, prioritizing service expansion in EJ communities, for community members with limited access to cars, or those in need of accessible transportation assistance. Prioritize implementation of recommendations in SCTA's Comprehensive Transportation Plan as resources allow.
2. Improve the safety and connectivity of active transportation networks, particularly in EJ communities and neighborhoods that have been historically underinvested in for safe street and transportation infrastructure.
3. Encourage residents to take advantage of existing transportation system opportunities (new bike lines, SCTA discounts, etc.) by increasing community awareness of these resources through language and culturally appropriate communications campaigns and coordination with community-based organizations.
4. Improve active transportation safety education for both drivers and non-drivers, including accurate and culturally appropriate translations in non-English languages and ADA accessible educational materials.
5. Encourage the use of active transportation modes such as walking and biking with an emphasis on reaching SCTAs Vision Zero Action Plan goals, through a communications campaign in multiple languages.



## Healthy Environments (Pollution Burden)

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### Issues and Opportunities

#### Issue 1: Pollution Exposure

Thirteen EJ Communities in Sonoma County scored above the 75th percentile for pollution exposure among all census tracts in California. The areas most impacted by pollution from solid waste sites are in the central and southern portions of the county. The Taylor Mountain EJ Community has significant levels of Diesel Particulate Matter. The Russian River Valley, Shiloh South, and Sonoma City South/Vineburg have moderately elevated levels of pesticides. Lead exposure from housing also varies across EJ Communities with the East Cloverdale EJ Community scoring notably high.

#### Key Existing Plans and Reports

- Sonoma County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (MJHMP)
- Sonoma County General Plan 2020 Public Safety Element

#### Desired Outcome

All residents of Sonoma County, especially EJ communities, are safe from pollution exposure and its effects.

#### Community Input

##### **Equity Working Committee (EWC) Outcome Ideas:**

1. Protect farmworkers from pollution (air quality from wildfires, pesticide exposure, impaired water).
2. Address noise pollution.

##### **Equity Working Committee (EWC) Strategy Ideas:**

1. Policies to prevent fumes from pesticides from entering households.
2. Policies to protect groundwater from fertilizer, pesticides/herbicides.
3. Disaster pay for farmworkers in hazardous conditions.
4. Free lead tests to households (the City and County of San Francisco provide free lead tests).
5. Partner with the Russian River Alliance, Sonoma County Health Action and other established groups on clean up activities.

#### Potential Strategies

1. Use land use strategies to ensure existing and new sources of pollution, specifically solid waste sites, Diesel Particulate Matter, and pesticides, are reduced and located away from EJ communities.
2. Establish buffer zones around residential areas or other sensitive land uses in EJ communities for new uses that have the potential to harm the environment or residents.



3. Explore opportunities to add greenery such as native perineal plants and native trees to the sides of freight-supporting highways near EJ communities and any residential areas within the County.
4. Work with the Sonoma County Food Recovery Coalition and Zero Waste Sonoma to develop a county-wide food recovery program where edible food can be donated to food recovery groups to help reduce food waste in landfills in the county.
5. Partner with local agricultural community members to reduce pesticide pollution, especially sensitive uses and EJ communities, through connecting them to grant opportunities and resources to implement best practices.
6. Work with agricultural providers near EJ communities to implement organic growing practices by offering incentives and promotional programs.
7. Work with the California Department of Transportation (CalTrans) to reduce or eliminate the use of pesticides and synthetic herbicides along roadways within the county.
8. Work with the Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH), aka Cal/OSHA, to enforce health and safety standards, support workers to know their rights, and protect workers from retaliation should they submit a health complaint.
9. Reduce or eliminate the use of pesticides and herbicides on County-owned parks, publicly accessible open spaces, and near schools.

## **Issue 2: Clean Water and Environmental Stewardship**

EJ Communities in Sonoma County have relatively moderate pollution impacts from impaired water bodies, although drinking water contamination is not considered impacted. The Petaluma Airport/Arroyo Park census tract has the highest score for groundwater threats heavily impacted by underground leaking storage tanks.

### **Key Existing Plans and Reports**

- Sonoma County General Plan 2020 Open Space and Resource Conservation Element
- Sonoma County General Plan 2020 Water Resources Element
- Sonoma County Local Coastal Plan, amended in 2001
- Sonoma County Local Coastal Plan adopted on July 17, 2023 – *Pending California Coastal Commission certification*

### **Desired Outcome**

Achieve safe groundwater and surface water standards, particularly in EJ Communities.

### **Community Input**

#### **Equity Working Committee (EWC) Outcome Ideas:**

1. Safe drinking water for everyone.
2. Accountability for pollution of groundwater.



3. Prevent pollution run off during storms.

**Equity Working Committee (EWC) Strategy Ideas:**

1. Incentivize well water testing in EJ Communities.
2. Create a pesticides/herbicides testing program for groundwater and well water.
3. Ensure robust enforcement to make sure spills are cleaned up and not hidden.
4. Grant program to filter water and improve quality in homes.
5. Policies that prevent contamination rather than mitigate.
6. Incentive programs to remove or better manage underground storage tanks.
7. Utilize CBOs for community water contamination outreach.
8. Partner with native communities, and community organizations like the Russian Riverkeeper and the Russian River Alliance on programs.

**Potential Strategies**

1. Partner with local organizations and schools to hold regular cleanup events at and around local creeks and waterways.
2. Develop a multi-lingual outreach campaign that educates and trains residents and businesses on preserving and maintaining healthy watersheds.
3. Partner with native communities and community organizations such as, but not limited to, the Russian River Alliance to conduct environmental stewardship outreach programs.
4. Identify ways to minimize agricultural pollution spray and runoff, including organic farming methods, bioswale and groundcover vegetation plans, and field location and orientation.
5. Explore opportunities to minimize runoff from roadways such as, but not limited to, roadway greening, adding stormwater retention/detention ponds, or sediment traps.
6. Identify funding sources for and to incentivize well water testing programs that could aid residents in identifying toxins in their water.
7. Seek funding to support EJ communities to remove toxins in water when identified.
8. Identify funding sources to develop a displacement reduction incentive program for landlords to address water source safety issues on rental properties.
9. Connect with regulatory agencies and environmental stewardship groups to identify ways to enforce water protection policies and report illegal polluter activities efficiently.
10. Encourage residents to apply for and utilize the State Water Resources Board Replacing, Removing, or Upgrading Underground Storage Tanks (RUST) Program to reduce accidental water source contamination due to unsafe UST conditions.



## Healthy Public Facilities and Physical Activity

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### Issues and Opportunities

#### Issue 1: Parks and Open Space Access

The EJ Communities located at the West Cotati/Penngrrove, Taylor Mountain, Downtown Cotati, and Fethers Spring/Agua Caliente West census tracts are all considered deficient in open space. Privately owned land restricts access to these surrounding open space areas and a lack of developed open space areas may create parking, trail access, and safety challenges. Barriers to accessing parks and open space include lack of transportation options, poor outdoor air quality, and limited time to access facilities.

#### Key Existing Plans and Reports

- Sonoma County Regional Parks Strategic Priorities 2023-2025
- Tolay Lake Regional Park Master Plan
- Maxwell Farms Regional Park Master Plan
- Sonoma County Integrated Parks Plan (SCIPP)

#### Desired Outcome

Ensure all residents of Sonoma County have access to safe and affordable parks and open space by prioritizing increased access to safe parks and open space in Sonoma County EJ Communities.

#### Community Input

##### **Equity Working Committee (EWC) Outcome Ideas:**

1. Make parks financially accessible for lower-income communities.
2. Provide/improve transportation options to/from parks for all, especially people with disabilities.

##### **Equity Working Committee (EWC) Strategy Ideas:**

1. Free Sonoma County Parks Pass for food-insecure, low-income households.
2. Make parks more physically accessible through improved transportation options to/from, and inclusion of features for people with disabilities.
3. Ensure park/trail maintenance and planning consider improvements for people with disabilities.
4. Conduct park planning outreach and engagement at local food pantries, churches, etc.
5. More green space and trees should be required for higher density residential housing and in industrial areas.
6. Maintain existing parks.
7. Improve active transportation connections to parks.

#### Potential Strategies

1. Evaluate existing “Complete Streets” gaps in EJ Communities that connect to parks and open space, and prioritize resources to provide necessary improvements.

2. Identify parks and recreational facilities in need of accessibility features or updates, and prioritize funding for improvements at these facilities.
3. Identify parks and other areas suitable for and in need of additional tree canopy and develop a financing and maintenance strategy to ensure equitable access to tree coverage.
4. Assess existing parks and open spaces to identify safety concerns and implement a safety plan to encourage the use of parks by residents.
5. Work with EJ Communities to identify financial barriers and explore opportunities to increase access to fee waivers and improve use of free access days.
6. Encourage the use of park spaces for community events and activities, hosted by local businesses and organizations.
7. Assess and streamline internal permitting requirements for local businesses, organizations, and residents to use existing park facilities for events and large gatherings.
8. Ensure that all park and park permitting information is provided in the county's most-spoken languages including, but not limited to, English and Spanish.
9. Identify underutilized rights-of-way within EJ Communities and work with EJ communities to prioritize their conversion into privately owned parklets or other recreational facilities.
10. Identify private and public partners in or accessible to EJ Communities, such as LandPaths and the Sonoma Land Trust, conducive to joint use agreements of open space.



## Community Health

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### Issues and Opportunities

#### Issue 1: Physical Health

Areas with poor air quality due to the presence of Diesel Particulate Matter (DPM), toxic releases, pesticides, or wildfire smoke, as well as poor indoor air quality, may increase the risk of respiratory diseases such as asthma. The Wright EJ Community in southwest Santa Rosa and Bellevue EJ Community in Santa Rosa east of Highway 101 score above the 75th percentile for asthma and cardiovascular disease.

#### Key Existing Plans and Reports

- Portrait of Sonoma County 2021
- Sonoma County Community Health Dashboard

#### Desired Outcome

Improve the public health outcomes related to air quality for residents of EJ Communities.

#### Community Input

##### Equity Working Committee (EWC) Outcome Ideas:

1. Consistent health-related resources across jurisdictions to support more fair health outcomes.
2. Improve bicycle and pedestrian safety.
3. Improve inequitable health outcomes.

##### Equity Working Committee (EWC) Strategy Ideas:

1. Update the EJ Element based on changes in community conditions.
2. Communicate and align Sonoma County jurisdictions on health policy, programs, and planning.
3. Conduct outreach, particularly with the working class, to understand extent of health issues.
4. Provide accessible green space within/near high-density residential areas.

#### Potential Strategies

1. Create a County-wide program to raise awareness about local outdoor and indoor asthma risks and mitigation strategies to reduce risk.
2. Seek funding to support low-income and EJ communities with implementing mitigation strategies to reduce asthma risk and improve air quality.
3. Create a County-led home safety education program providing residents with information on the risk of lead from housing, retrofits for maintaining healthier households, and programs to support other at-home mitigation practices.
4. Partner with schools to develop an in-school early detection asthma screening program.



5. Broaden availability and accessibility of County-sponsored public recreation programs, such as free yoga in the park or a children's sports camp, to provide opportunities for physical activity for all members of the community.





## Healthy Food Access

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### Issues and Opportunities

#### Issue 1: Food Insecurity and Food Deserts

The food insecurity rate in Sonoma County is 8.3 percent, slightly below California's overall rate of 10.5 percent, and six communities in Sonoma County are identified food deserts, all of which are Environmental Justice (EJ) Communities. Approximately 41,080 people in Sonoma County are considered food insecure. Out of those classified as food insecure, 42 percent are eligible for federal Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. Between 2011 and 2018, the number of missed meals in Sonoma County was lowest in 2018. However, there was still a shortfall of 14 million meals in 2018 between what low-income residents could afford and the assistance provided by non-profit organizations, government programs like CalFresh, school meals, group meals for seniors, and home-delivered meals.

#### Key Existing Plans and Reports

- Sonoma County Healthy and Sustainable Food Action Plan
- Annual Sonoma County Hunger Index Reports

#### Desired Outcome

Community members have adequate access to nutritional and affordable food options in Sonoma County, and the County has redundancy built into the local food network to provide food under varied circumstances.

#### Community Input

##### **Sonoma COAD Food Access Committee Outcome Ideas:**

1. Diversified local farming with an increase in local food production.
2. More opportunities for community-level food production.
3. An actionable model or framework to implement micro-level solutions to identify and fill gaps which the current food system is not able to address.
4. A comprehensive commitment to measuring and sharing data around food insecurity.
5. A clear understanding of the needs and gaps in service.
6. An established protocol for emergency food provision during disaster events.
7. Reduced regulatory burden on food production.
8. Policy that prioritizes water use for food production.

##### **Sonoma COAD Food Access Committee Strategy Ideas:**

1. Leverage partnerships with health providers or community organizations to hold mobile food markets or banks.

2. Funding streams for research on food insecurity and gaps in food system to support policy and action.
3. Adopting a local preference policy to incentivize local food production.
4. Identify gaps in food service and where people are food insecure.
5. Update zoning and land use regulations to encourage community-level opportunities for food production (e.g. community or neighborhood gardens). Streamline permitting and build in consideration for scope, scale, and public benefit in review of projects.
6. Ease regulations on farmworker housing.
7. Partner with Sonoma County Regional Parks or the Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District to create programs for community gardens on park or open space land.
8. Require convenience stores, supermarkets, liquor stores, and neighborhood markets in food deserts to carry locally sourced fresh produce.
9. The Department of Emergency Management should establish food procurement memorandums of understanding (MOUs) ahead of disaster events. Increase funding for shelf-stable food.
10. Establish a public-private program for sharing data on food insecurity

**Other COAD Food Access Committee Comments:**

1. Local agricultural production is monoculture, focused on grapes and apples. If we grow more options for food locally, this protects us against supply and distribution issues during large-scale disaster events.
2. Food waste is a huge issue.
3. There are vulnerable senior populations living in the coast that struggle with daily healthy food access and even more so during disaster events.
4. We need to address seasonal worker's compensation during the off-season. There is a large amount of food insecurity during the winter which undeniably is connected to income during those months.
5. Seniors in the Sonoma Valley, particularly in the Springs, have high food insecurity.
6. We need to look at food as medicine.
7. Water access (including infrastructure) is a barrier to food production in remote areas.
8. Even in ostensibly affluent areas, there is food insecurity.
9. There needs to be a clear pipeline to get food to where it's needed during emergencies.
10. The food system and climate resilience are inextricably related.
11. Smaller, local markets need the infrastructure to hold fresh food, which requires funding.

**Pop Up at the Sonoma Valley Emergency Preparedness Fair 2023:**

1. Most respondents (84%) noted that they had good or moderate access to nutritious foods and groceries with fresh fruits and vegetables. However, 5 respondents (16%) noted having poor access.



### **Potential Strategies**

1. Implement the County's goals and policies contained within the Sonoma County Healthy and Sustainable Food Action Plan.
2. Consider utilizing State poverty levels, rather than federal, to more accurately determine meals missed on a regional level when calculating the Sonoma County Food Hunger Index.
3. Track and report progress on the number of meals missed on a bi-annual basis to assess the effectiveness of the County's food-based policies and initiatives.
4. Streamline the zoning requirements and permitting process for food-providing facilities such as farmers markets, corner stores, grocery markets, and local produce stalls to increase allowed locations of such facilities.
5. Identify opportunities to partner with local and regional community centers and agencies to establish community garden programs.
6. Collaborate with local public schools to develop "Edible School Yard" programs that support access to healthy produce and provide nutritional education.
7. Form partnerships with local organizations and create MOUs to supply emergency food to residents in need during disasters.
8. Provide information to residents of Sonoma County, particularly undocumented residents, about available State and federal food access services, including SNAP.
9. Assist in the SNAP application process by hosting County-led application support sessions where residents may work directly with Sonoma County Department of Social Services to apply for SNAP benefits.
10. Develop a food resource landing page on the County's website where residents can access a map and schedule of all food banks in the major cities and surrounding areas, links to County food resources, affordable nutrition tips, and other useful information.
11. Broaden access to local produce through the prioritization of locally sourced food, including farm-to-school programs, partnerships between local farms and stores, and seasonal farm stands.



## Safe and Sanitary Housing

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### Issues and Opportunities

#### Issue 1: Housing Quality

According to the Sonoma County Housing Element (2023) Technical Background Report, less than one percent of owner households and just over two percent of renter households lack kitchens or have plumbing deficiencies. In addition, HUD has identified 13 key aspects of quality housing which include: space and security, thermal environment, illumination and electricity, structure and materials, interior air quality, water supply, lead-based paint, access, site and neighborhood, and smoke detectors. Each of these issues taken alone or in combination with one another can have harmful effects on the comfortability and livability of a home.

#### Key Existing Plans and Reports

- Sonoma County General Plan Housing Element 2023-3031
- Sonoma County Housing Authority's Public Housing Authority Five-Year Plan
- Sonoma County Housing Authority 2024 One Year Action Plan
- 2012 Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing

#### Desired Outcome

Improve housing quality throughout the County by prioritizing resources in EJ Communities to improve residents' quality of life and ensure that every home has reliable necessities.

#### Community Input

##### Environmental Justice Stakeholder Focus Groups:

1. Several participants stated that farmworkers are particularly impacted by the wildfire season and high housing costs in Sonoma.
2. Rental and other financial housing assistance is only successful when people are able to locate housing.

#### Potential Strategies

1. Ensure that resident homes are structurally sound, comfortable, and prepared for changing climatic conditions.
2. Identify funding source to equip homes with free-to-residents smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors, or other fire suppression requirements that could lead to injury or death.
3. Equip residents with information necessary to repair or seek repair for homes.
4. Establish protections from retaliation for renters who request needed repair on homes.
5. Explore opportunities to partner with legal aid groups to provide EJ community members with legal representation if legal issues arise.



## Issue 2: Household Toxins

On average, census tracts within Sonoma County have percentile scores for lead risk from housing that measured at 36.4 percentile relative to all California census tracts. Children's lead risk from housing across EJ Communities in the County varied, with some census tracts in the southern portion of the County scoring as low as the 7th percentile and others scoring up to the 85th percentile. The EJ Community located at the East Cloverdale census tract in the northwestern portion of the County (census tract 6097154201) scored in the 85th percentile relative to all California census tracts.

### Key Existing Plans and Reports

- Sonoma County General Plan Housing Element
- Sonoma County Housing Authority's Public Housing Authority Five-Year Plan
- Sonoma County Housing Authority 2024 One Year Action Plan
- 2012 Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing
- Sonoma County Fund for Housing Policy

### Desired Outcome

Ensure that community members in Sonoma County, especially EJ community members, can live in safe, toxin-free homes for the betterment of their health and happiness.

### Community Input

#### **Environmental Justice Stakeholder Focus Groups:**

1. One participant noted that free legal council is provided to community members who need help with safe, clean, and comfortable housing.

#### **Equity Working Committee (EWC) Strategy Ideas:**

1. Programs should be designed with easy, incremental steps that households can take to evaluate lead exposure then remove lead, with incentives at each step to encourage follow through.
2. Pursue grants and other funding to create free (to residents) programs to test water for contaminants and hold landlords responsible for providing clean and safe drinking water at no cost to the tenant.
3. Pursue grants and other funding to create a program to help landlords pay for water safety upgrades. Priority should be given to landlords that rent to low-income households.
4. Provide more education and engagement about how recycling works to make it more effective.
5. Policies addressing lead and pesticides are most important.

### Potential Strategies

1. Improve public education and awareness of household toxins, including safe use of chemicals for cleaning, maintenance, crafts, and home projects.
2. Provide information on alternative products that are safer for household use.

3. Establish or promote programs to remediate homes found to have toxins.
4. Pursue grants and other funding to create programs to test water for contaminants at no cost to residents.
5. Pursue grants and other funding to create a program to help landlords pay for water safety upgrades with priority given to landlords that rent to low-income households.
6. Identify and work with organizations to assist residents and landlords in securing funding for private building rehabilitation, including removal of lead paint, interior air quality improvements, and gas appliance replacement.
7. Ensure that code enforcement holds landlords responsible for providing clean and safe drinking water at no cost to the tenant.
8. Establish renter protections for renters who submit reports of unsafe living conditions.

### **Issue 3: Overcrowding**

The presence of major overcrowding within the planning area may be a significant risk factor for poor health outcomes within the community. According to the State of Housing in Sonoma County (2022) report, the Springs neighborhood near the Fethers Springs/Agua Caliente West EJ Community (census tract 6097150305) in Sonoma Valley has the highest rate of overcrowding, with approximately 29 percent of households deemed to be overcrowded.

Nearly 30 percent of homes within the Fethers Springs/Agua Caliente West EJ Community are overcrowded. In addition, the EJ Community at the Jenner/Cazadero census tract (census tract 6097154304) in the northwestern region of the County has 16 percent of homes recorded as being overcrowded. The Jenner/Cazadero census tract is where Stewarts Point Rancheria is also located.

#### **Key Existing Plans and Reports**

- Sonoma County General Plan Housing Element 2023-3031
- Sonoma County Housing Authority's Public Housing Authority Five-Year Plan
- Sonoma County Housing Authority 2024 One Year Action Plan
- Sonoma County Regional Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice 2012
- Sonoma County Fund for Housing Policy

#### **Desired Outcome**

Aim to address overcrowding by alleviating the stressors that lead to overcrowded homes such as financial burdens and the lack of a wider variety of housing options particularly for lower-income households.

#### **Community Input**

##### **Environmental Justice Stakeholder Focus Groups:**

1. Participants generally felt that rising housing costs are a barrier to many community members. Some lower-income homes have unsafe conditions and are overcrowded.



### **Potential Strategies**

1. Provide targeted information and application assistance to EJ Communities on how to qualify, apply for, and be successful at securing rental assistance and first-time homebuyer assistance.
2. Address health impacts caused by overcrowding by working with landlords and homeowners to address code enforcement concerns, providing information and assistance to families regarding available health and sanitation resources, and engaging local community partners to identify the specific concerns, needs, and solutions of health impacts.

### **Issue 4: Unique Housing Needs and Homelessness**

The last Point-In-Time Count in Sonoma County, conducted in 2023, found 2,266 people experiencing homelessness. This constitutes a decrease of 22% from the count conducted in 2022. Around 19 percent of the community members experiencing homelessness were in the unincorporated County, many of which reside in West County and Santa Rosa. The primary cause of homelessness is related to job loss, approximately 19 percent. Of those experiencing homelessness, White (Hispanic and Non-Hispanic) persons account for 71 percent of the homeless population in Sonoma County. Black and Native American persons each separately represent 9 percent of unhoused individuals in Sonoma County. Knowledge of services available, understanding of eligibility requirements, and perceived stigma of receiving governmental assistance, among other reasons, were reasons that individuals cited that impacted their decision to seek available government assistance.

### **Key Existing Plans and Reports**

- Sonoma County General Plan Housing Element 2023-3031
- Sonoma County Homeless Coalition Strategic Plan
- Sonoma County Housing Authority's Public Housing Authority Five-Year Plan
- Sonoma County Housing Authority 2024 One Year Action Plan
- 2012 Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing
- County of Sonoma 2023 Point-In-Time Count Results
- 2014 Sonoma County's 10-Year Homeless Action Plan
- Sonoma County Residential Antidisplacement and Relocation Assistance Plan

### **Desired Outcome**

Prevent homelessness through a variety of supportive measures and ensure access to supportive programs for existing homeless individuals.

### **Community Input**

#### **Environmental Justice Stakeholder Focus Groups:**

1. Several respondents stated that housing for unsheltered individuals is most successful when paired with other supportive services.



**Potential Strategies**

1. Prevent homelessness through fair housing practices.
2. Employ a variety of methods and strategic partnerships to ensure existing homeless families and individuals receive adequate information and the opportunity to access supportive programs that may improve their current living conditions.
3. Coordinate across partners in the system of care to develop shared priorities and aligned investment.
4. Implement programs and policies from the Sonoma County General Plan Housing Element.





## Community Engagement and Language Access

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### Issues and Opportunities

#### Issue 1: Systemically Marginalized Communities

Historically marginalized groups have, and continue to be, underrepresented in public decision-making processes, in large part due to systemic inequities that create physical, social, and financial barriers to participation. Governmental and institutional systems often do not account for diverse and intersectional identities and lived experiences across race, ethnicity, culture, country of origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, ability, socioeconomic background, and citizenship status.

EJ Communities experience disproportionate pollution and environmental burdens and socioeconomic stress because of historic and systemic underrepresentation in planning and policy decisions. The EJ Communities identified and referenced throughout this report are not exclusive from the systemically marginalized groups listed below; EJ Communities may include persons that identify with one or more of the below identity markers. Sonoma County is home to many communities whose identity markers put them on the margins of public decision-making, which includes but is not limited to, tribal community members, communities of color, immigrants without documentation, individuals with disabilities, single-parent heads of households, LGBTQIA2S+ individuals, workers in low wage jobs, and individuals experiencing mental health struggles.

#### Key Existing Plans and Reports

- Sonoma County Community Engagement Plan and Toolkit
- Sonoma County Racial Equity Action Plan – *under development*
- Sonoma County Language Access Plan and Policy
- Sonoma County Community Development Commission Citizen Participation Plan 2020

#### Desired Outcome

The County provides equitable engagement opportunities for people from all systemically marginalized communities within Sonoma County.

#### Community Input

##### Environmental Justice Stakeholder Focus Groups:

1. One participant stated that, in some cases, public officers dissuade community members from accessing resources.
2. Several participants encouraged the County to continue to ask for input from community groups and residents.
3. One participant noted it's important to reward people for their efforts and provide stipends to nonprofit organizations who are working directly with impacted communities.
4. One participant encouraged the County to connect with colleges and research groups who would be willing to share their research.



5. One participant noted a lack of representation in elected officials; poor treatment of BIPOC residents by elected officials and community leaders.

### **Potential Strategies**

1. Consider various scheduling and location options when planning County engagement opportunities.
  - a. Prioritize meeting EJ communities “where they are” by exploring options to host pop-ups in frequented locations such as farmers markets, culturally responsive stores, main streets, and flea markets.
  - b. Offer a variety of times (ex: evening, weekend) when planning public engagement so as to offer flexibility with varying work schedules.
  - c. Explore opportunities to include childcare or play areas for children during all community engagement activities with or within EJ communities and/or offer childcare reimbursement.
2. Implement the strategies included in the County’s Racial Equity Action Plan once adopted, Community Engagement Plan and Toolkit, and Language Access Plan.
3. Identify additional funding sources to provide stipends for participants.
4. Use discretion when determining if police or emergency service officers are needed at public meetings to improve comfort of residents.

### **Issue 2: County Connections with Community Based Organizations (CBOs)**

Governmental civic engagement and decision-making processes continue to create barriers to access for residents in EJ communities. Residents in EJ Communities face a variety of systemic challenges when it comes to participating in civic engagement and the government decision-making process, including communities that have a higher proportion of residents who are elderly, non-English speakers, low-income residents, residents without documentation, or residents who lack sufficient broadband internet access. It is imperative to establish meaningful partnerships with CBOs to bridge the gaps in communication, build trust with residents, and remove systemic barriers to increase participation.

### **Key Existing Plans and Reports**

- Sonoma County Community Engagement Plan and Toolkit
- Sonoma County Racial Equity Action Plan – *under development*
- Sonoma County Language Access Plan and Policy
- Sonoma County Community Development Commission Citizen Participation Plan 2020

### **Desired Outcome**

Remove barriers to engaging in local government decision-making processes, and establish meaningful and long-lasting relationships with Community Based Organizations to increase engagement of EJ communities.



### Community Input

#### **Equity Working Committee Strategy Ideas:**

1. Embed CBOs in County decision-making process using the method used for the County Emergency Operations Center.
2. Create pathways for funding to support CBO capacity to work with the County.
3. Provide direct pathways of communication from CBOs to the Board of Supervisors and County leadership including CAO/Department heads.
4. Utilize CBOs to staff County Advisory Boards.
5. Provide technical assistance (particularly on grant applications) to increase CBO capacity to engage in County program implementation.
6. Create job opportunities and procurement opportunities for CBOs and BIPOC-led businesses through implementation of County plans or programs such as the EJ Element.
7. Streamline County contracting process for CBOs.
8. Provide stipends for participation in County efforts.
9. Compensate CBOs for partnering and staffing.
10. Conduct after-action/program evaluation sessions with CBOs to see what improvements can be made for future engagement opportunities.
11. Build relationships with frontline staff in the community.
12. Work with CBOs to create service hubs that include both County and CBO services.
13. Participatory budgeting.

### Potential Strategies

1. Establish criteria for selection, a budget, and memorandum of understanding protocols for CBO stipends for participation in engagement, focus groups, and other mutually beneficial activities.
2. Identify key CBOs who have trust within EJ communities, and meet the criteria for engagement partnership selection, and establish a formal partnership (ex: MOU) to collaborate on engagement regarding County operations.
3. Regularly ask for feedback from CBO partners, and invite CBO partners to evaluate the CBO partnership program to ensure it is fair, beneficial, and includes locally recognized and knowledgeable CBOs.
4. Identify community leaders that may be included in community meetings and engagement opportunities to ensure that residents are being represented by those that reflect them.

#### **Issue 3: Varying Age Demographics**

Understanding the age demographics within a community is essential to the development of engagement strategies that reach a broad group of residents. The largest age group represented in Sonoma County is the older adult aged population, which encompasses the age group from 55 to 59 years old. In addition, roughly one in every five people is 65 years or older. Twelve EJ Communities have



greater than 15 percent of their population at or above the age of 65, including all four EJ Communities within the central west region of the planning area. Three EJ Communities in the northwestern portion of the County have greater than 15 percent of their population at or above the age of 65. This includes the Jenner/Cazadero census tract EJ Community (census tract 6097154304), containing Stewarts Point Rancheria. EJ Communities with greater than 15 percent of their population at or below the age of 10 were present in all regions of the County except for the central west portion.

### Key Existing Plans and Reports

- Sonoma County Community Engagement Plan and Toolkit
- Sonoma County Racial Equity Action Plan – *under development*
- Sonoma County Office of Equity Language Access Plan and Policy
- Sonoma County Community Development Commission Citizen Participation Plan 2020

### Desired Outcome

Ensure that residents of all ages and abilities are able to meaningfully participate in the public decision-making process.

### Community Input

#### **Environmental Justice Stakeholder Focus Groups:**

1. Several participants encouraged the County to continue to ask for input from community groups and residents.
2. One participant noted it's important to reward people for their efforts and provide stipends to nonprofit organizations who are working directly with impacted communities.
3. Several participants noted that barriers exist including language, documentation, lack of cultural responsiveness, and fear of ineligibility due to resident status.

### Potential Strategies

1. Improve accessibility features for elderly or disabled individuals such as ensuring that adequate seating is available at public meetings, meetings are recorded for individual watch after if unable to attend in-person, brail or alternative language services are available upon request, and other similar measures.
2. Identify alternative ways to communicate with various age groups such as utilizing mobile notifications of County meetings, mailers, and flyers in frequently visited locations such as grocery stores or libraries.

#### **Issue 4: Limited or Non-English Speakers**

According to the Sonoma County Community Development Commission Language Action Plan, approximately 11.26 percent of the County are limited or non-English speakers. The CalEnviroScreen linguistic isolation indicator measures the percentage of households in each census tract in which no one over the age of 14 speaks English well. Four EJ Communities scored above the 60th percentile, and of those four, only the East Cloverdale EJ Community (census tract 6097154201) in the northwestern



portion of the County scored above the 75th percentile. Across the County, the primary language spoken by persons with limited English proficiency was Spanish. Numerous census tracts within the planning area also have significant portions of the population who speak “Asian and Pacific Islander Languages” as classified by the U.S. Census. The “Asian and Pacific Islander Languages” census label is a broad label that encompasses twenty-three languages, including Mandarin, Vietnamese, and Khmer.

### Key Existing Plans and Reports

- Sonoma County Community Engagement Plan and Toolkit
- Sonoma County Racial Equity Action Plan – *under development*
- Sonoma County Language Access Plan and Policy
- Sonoma County Community Development Commission Citizen Participation Plan 2020

### Desired Outcome

Improve the public engagement process by ensuring that residents with varying English proficiency skills and non-English speaking residents are able to participate with the assistance of translated documents and non-English speaking engagement opportunities.

### Community Input

#### **Environmental Justice Stakeholder Focus Groups:**

1. One participant noted that County translated documents aren’t always accurate, and some community organizations retranslate documents.

### Potential Strategies

1. Due to the various languages and language abilities of County residents, strive to provide adequate language services in all civic engagement activities.
2. Utilize and enforce strategies contained within the County’s Language Access Plan including identifying language needs, providing translation services, and producing documents in the County’s priority languages.

## **Issue 5: Intergovernmental Relations**

The first residents of Sonoma County were Native American tribes, including the Southern Pomo, Coast Miwok, and Wappo tribes. The Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of the Stewarts Point Rancheria, Dry Creek Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians, Cloverdale Rancheria of Pomo Indians, and Lytton Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians are the five federally-recognized Tribes whose ancestral land is within Sonoma County today. The State of California designates all lands under the control of federally recognized Tribes as disadvantaged (Senate Bill 535), which includes Stewarts Point Rancheria, Dry Creek Rancheria, and the Kashia Coastal Reserve within Sonoma County. It is crucial to build a trusting relationship with Tribal Nations in Sonoma County that promotes collaboration and cooperation between sovereign governments and prioritize the empowerment and equitable inclusion of Tribal Nations in the County decision-making process.



### **Key Existing Plans and Reports**

- Sonoma County Community Engagement Plan and Toolkit (2024)
  - Office of Equity's Brief on Intergovernmental Relations with Native Nations (2024)

### **Desired Outcome**

Ensure that the County continues to actively acknowledge, respect, and appreciate Tribal Nations within the County and strive to build lasting governmental relationships with Tribal Nations.

### **Community Input**

#### **Environmental Justice Stakeholder Focus Groups:**

1. Several participants encouraged the County to continue to ask for input from community groups and residents.
2. One participant suggested creation of a grant program for community groups to use to support their staff and the communities each group is connected to.
3. One participant noted it's important to reward people for their efforts and provide stipends to nonprofit organizations who are working directly with impacted communities.
4. Several participants noted that there is general success partnering with community-based organizations.
5. Several participants stated that having partners within the County and collaborating with community partners have been instrumental for success.
6. Tribal community engagement is high, but engagement alone is not enough.

### **Potential Strategies**

1. Publicly acknowledge the mistreatment, violence, and neglect of local Tribal Nations.
2. Document and train staff on protocol for Tribal communication and inclusion in coordination with Tribal leaders.
3. Provide Native-led culturally responsive education and training to County staff.
4. Involve Tribal communities in planning and resource allocation discussions regularly to build trust and partnership.
5. Increase investment in intergovernmental relationship cultivation.