

Resolution Number 25-04

County of Sonoma
Santa Rosa, California

July 10, 2025
GPA25-0001

**RESOLUTION OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF THE
COUNTY OF SONOMA, STATE OF CALIFORNIA, FINDING THE
PROPOSED ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ELEMENT
CONSISTENT WITH THE SONOMA COUNTY GENERAL PLAN
AND RECOMMENDING THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
APPROVE A GENERAL PLAN AMENDMENT ADOPTING THE
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ELEMENT**

WHEREAS, California Government Code Section 65300 requires each city and county to adopt a general plan; and

WHEREAS, Government Code Section 65302(h) requires and establishes the legislative framework to incorporate environmental justice into the general plan for cities and counties that have disadvantaged communities in their jurisdiction as defined by Government Code Section 65302(h)(4)(A); and

WHEREAS, Government Code Section 65302(h) requires identification of disadvantaged communities and inclusion of goals, policies, and objectives in the general plan that reduce the unique or compounded health risks in disadvantaged communities, including the reduction of pollution exposure; promote public facilities, food access, safe and sanitary homes, and physical activity; promote civic engagement in the public decision-making process; and prioritize improvements and programs that address the needs of disadvantaged communities; and

WHEREAS, cities and counties with disadvantaged communities must adopt an environmental justice element, or related goals, policies, and objectives integrated in other elements, upon the adoption or next revision of two or more elements concurrently on or after January 1, 2018; and

WHEREAS, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors adopted the Sonoma County General Plan 2020 ("General Plan 2020") by Resolution No. 08-0808 on September 23, 2008, and certified the Final EIR for General Plan 2020 by Resolution No. 08-0807 on the same date; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Supervisors adopted an update to the General Plan Housing Element by Resolution No. 23-0429 on August 23, 2023; and

WHEREAS, in 2022, in advance of the planned comprehensive update to the General Plan, the County began work on an update to the Sonoma County General Plan 2020 Public Safety Element ("Safety Element Update") and preparation of a new

Environmental Justice Element, in accordance with Government Code Sections 65302(g) and (h), to comply with state requirements for general plan updates; and

WHEREAS, the County conducted extensive community engagement and outreach since December 2022, including working directly on key project components with a community advisory group (the “Equity Working Committee”), attending community events, hosting focus groups, and joining community and municipal advisory council meetings and community group meetings; and

WHEREAS, the purpose of the Equity Working Committee was to center the experiences of under-resourced and under-represented communities and develop more equitable policy; and

WHEREAS, the Equity Working Committee included community representatives from all supervisorial districts who have varied personal and professional expertise in community change advocacy, housing, emergency preparedness, and conservation; and

WHEREAS, the County coordinated with the Equity Working Committee to develop a methodology to identify disadvantaged communities in the unincorporated county that is unique to Sonoma County and consistent with the State’s definition and guidance published by the Governor’s Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation in its General Plan Guidelines; and

WHEREAS, the methodology highlighted 22 census tracts that meet the State’s definition of disadvantaged communities, and are identified in the draft Environmental Justice Element as the County’s “Environmental Justice Communities”; and

WHEREAS, on June 19, 2024 the County sent invitations to consult under Government Code Section 65352.3 and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to California Native American tribes, and no Tribe requested consultation; and

WHEREAS, on July 23, 2024, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors held an informational workshop in its regular public meeting time to discuss the proposed Safety Element Update and new Environmental Justice Element, and provide direction to staff on policy approaches; and

WHEREAS, the County has prepared an Environmental Justice Element that substantively addresses all requirements provided under Government Code Section 65302(h); and

WHEREAS, the County published a draft of the new Environmental Justice Element for a public review period from March 28, 2025 to April 30, 2025; and

WHEREAS, the County solicited public input on the draft Environmental Justice Element during the public review period through an online survey, a virtual community workshop held on April 22, 2025, and written public comment; and

WHEREAS, the County considered and incorporated community feedback where appropriate; and

WHEREAS, consistent with Government Code Section 65352, on April 23, 2025 the County sent a notice of the pending general plan amendment and availability of the draft Environmental Justice Element to listed public entities and all California Native American tribes provided by the Native American Heritage Commission; and

WHEREAS, in accordance with applicable provisions of law, on July 10, 2025, the Planning Commission held a duly noticed public hearing on the Environmental Justice Element to review and make a recommendation on the Element to the Board of Supervisors. In the hearing the Planning Commission heard and received all relevant testimony and evidence presented orally or in writing regarding the Environmental Justice Element; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission has had an opportunity to review this Resolution and finds that it accurately sets forth the intentions of the Commission regarding the Environmental Justice Element; and

NOW, THEREFORE, the Planning Commission resolves as follows:

- A. The Environmental Justice Element, including its appendices, substantively addresses all requirements provided under Government Code Sections 65302(h):
 - 1. The Environmental Justice Element identifies disadvantaged communities in the unincorporated County (called “Environmental Justice Communities”) and describes the process for identifying those areas.
 - 2. The Environmental Justice Element and its appendices incorporate information about environmental burdens affecting Environmental Justice Communities from a variety of federal, state, and local data sources.
 - 3. The Environmental Justice Element establishes goals, policies, and implementation measures to address disproportionate pollution burden and advance health in Environmental Justice Communities and across Sonoma County. The Element addresses pollution exposure; access to public facilities, services, and community amenities; health and physical activity; healthy food access; safe and sanitary housing; and civic engagement in the public decision-making process.
- B. The Environmental Justice Element is consistent with and supportive of the overall goals and objectives of the other elements of the General Plan as follows:
 - 1. The draft Environmental Justice Element goals, policies, and implementation measures complement goals and policies in the Land Use Element, such as:
 - i) Policy LU-6b: Site specific environmental factors shall be considered in making discretionary decisions on development permits, to the extent that the County has discretion to consider these factors in its review of a particular project. Site specific factors which create health or safety problems or result in unmitigated significant environmental impacts may at times reduce densities that are allowed by the Land Use Map and zoning.
 - ii) Policy LU-8a: Require that new development comply with applicable waste

- discharge requirements and minimize pollution of storm water, surface water and groundwater.
- iii) Goal LU-11 and its Policies LU-11a, and LU-11f, aimed at protecting public health in land use decisions, protecting water and soil quality, and reducing harmful emissions:
 - (1) Goal LU-11: Promote a sustainable future where residents can enjoy a high quality of life for the long term, including a clean and beautiful environment and a balance of employment, housing, infrastructure, and services.
 - (2) Policy LU-11a: Encourage reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, including alternatives to use of gas-powered vehicles. Such alternatives include public transit, alternatively fueled vehicles, bicycle and pedestrian routes, and bicycle and pedestrian friendly development design.
 - (3) Policy LU-11f: Encourage conservation of undeveloped land, open space, and agricultural lands, protection of water and soil quality, restoration of ecosystems, and minimization or elimination of the disruption of existing natural ecosystems and flood plains.
2. Policies and implementation measures in the draft Environmental Justice Element related to community access to public facilities and amenities are consistent with goals and policies of the Public Facilities Element and Circulation and Transit Element, as follows:
- i) Goal PF-2: Assure that park and recreation, public education, fire suppression and emergency medical, and solid waste services, and public utility sites are available to the meet future needs of Sonoma County residents.
 - ii) Objective PF-2.1: Provide an adequate supply and equitable geographic distribution of regional and local parks and recreation services based on population projections.
 - iii) Goal CT-1: Provide a well integrated and sustainable circulation and transit system that supports a city and community centered growth philosophy through a collaborative effort of all the Cities and the County.
 - iv) Goal CT-2: Increase the opportunities, where appropriate, for transit systems, pedestrians, bicycling and other alternative modes to reduce the demand for automobile travel.
 - v) Policy CT-2x: In unincorporated communities, provide for pedestrian, bicycle, and other alternative transportation mode connections among commercial, service, public (such as schools, libraries, etc.), and transit facilities where compatible with community character and consistent with the Vehicle Code.
3. Policies and programs related to food access in the draft EJ Element align with the objectives of the Agricultural Resources Element to support the local food system and agricultural producers.
4. Policies and implementation measures in the draft Environmental Justice Element related to community health, safe and sanitary housing, and community engagement and participation are consistent with policies of the Housing Element, including:
- i) Policy HE-6d: Ensure that affected residents have the opportunity to participate in decisions that impact their health and well-being. Include residents, businesses, and organizations in all aspects of the planning

process. Utilize multilingual, culturally appropriate approaches to provide information, conduct outreach, and facilitate public participation, with reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities.

- ii) Policy HE-6f: Provide high quality and equitable public services, including public transportation, fire and police safety, crime prevention, parks, sidewalks, street lighting, and recreational facilities and programs in lower-resource areas through the use of place-based strategies and Master Plans.
- iii) Policy HE-6g: Ensure that the County's programs and policies continue to reduce or eliminate the unique or compounded health risks of its existing disadvantaged communities (low-income areas that are disproportionately affected by environmental pollution and other hazards).
- iv) Policy HE-6i: Focus affordable and farmworker housing code enforcement activities on the abatement of unsafe conditions and to expedite, where practicable, the rehabilitation and continued availability of housing units.

C. The proposed General Plan amendment is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3) (the common sense exemption) because CEQA applies only to projects which have the potential for causing a significant effect on the environment. The Environmental Justice Element is a programmatic document that will not result in any direct or indirect physical change in the environment or approval of any development project. It can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility the proposed general plan amendment will result in a direct or indirect physical change in the environment.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Planning Commission finds the Environmental Justice Element is consistent with the General Plan and recommends that the Board of Supervisors approve a General Plan amendment adopting the Environmental Justice Element, including its appendices, as provided in Exhibit A; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Planning Commission recommended revisions to staff-recommended policy language, to read as follows:

- A. Policy EJ-1a: In ongoing development of land use policy and regulations, employ land use strategies to discourage siting of new facilities that may substantially increase air, water, or soil pollution, individually or cumulatively, near Environmental Justice Communities and vulnerable populations.
- B. Policy EJ-1b: In the review of applications for new development, evaluate pollution impacts on nearby Environmental Justice Communities.
- C. Policy EJ-1f: Continue to support and lead efforts to increase solid waste diversion through policy, incentives, and outreach to protect community members and the environment from health-threatening pollutants and to reduce emissions.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Planning Commission recommended the addition of policies or programs to the Environmental Justice Element to 1) integrate tribal affairs experience within Sonoma County job classifications necessary to implement Goal EJ-10, and to 2) explore dedicated Environmental Justice Community and tribal seats to County Boards and Commissions.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Planning Commission designates the Secretary of the Planning Commission as the custodian of the documents and other material which constitute the record of proceedings upon which the decision herein is based.

These documents may be found at the office of the Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department, 2550 Ventura Avenue, Santa Rosa, CA 95403.

THE FOREGOING RESOLUTION was introduced by Commissioner Koenigshofer, who moved its adoption, seconded by Commissioner Reed, and adopted on roll call by the following vote:

Commissioner Kapolchok	Aye
Commissioner Reed	Aye
Commissioner Bahning	Aye
Commissioner Koenigshofer	Aye
Commissioner McCaffery	Aye

Ayes: 5 Noes: 0 Absent: 0 Abstain: 0

WHEREUPON, the Chair declared the above and foregoing Resolution duly adopted; and

SO ORDERED.