

31. Accept and file Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP) 2024 Annual Report, and take related actions ()



County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors

Agenda Item Submittal

From: Office of Response, Recovery and Resilience

Subject: CAAP 2024 Annual Report

Meeting Date: February 25, 2025

Formal Title: Accept and file Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP) 2024 Annual Report, and take related actions

Recommended Actions

1. Accept the report on CAAP 2024 Annual Report findings; and
2. Direct the Office of Response, Recovery and Resilience (OR3) to return in June with CAAP updates and a prioritized list of projects

Executive Summary

The Office of Response, Recovery, and Resilience (OR3), in collaboration with the CAAP Working Group and Steering Committee, presents the results of the 2024 Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP) Annual Report. The report highlights progress in key areas including electrification mandates, waste reduction initiatives, and wildfire resilience projects. Notable funding achievements have supported community adaptation and energy efficiency efforts addressing climate priorities despite ongoing resource challenges. The County remains dedicated to fostering collaboration and advancing sustainability goals to ensure long-term climate resilience.

Discussion

Background

In December 2022, the Board of Supervisors adopted the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP) and aligned its goals with California's greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction targets for 2030 and 2045. The May 2024 report to the Board provided an update on the progress achieved in 2023 and introduced the Accountability & Measurement (A&M) System, which integrates CAAP objectives into departmental operations and supports actions to meet these state mandates. This system established a standardized monitoring and reporting process to track implementation across departments. The County continues to embed climate action objectives into standard operations, prioritizing resources for impactful GHG mitigation and adaptation efforts. This dynamic approach allows the County to align its efforts with state-mandated GHG reduction goals for 2030 and 2045 while adapting to the evolving climate landscape.

This report represents the first annual report in an ongoing cycle, providing a full accounting of the County's progress at the start of each calendar year. Future updates, aligned with the County's Operational Plan, will occur each June. By establishing a consistent cycle of planning, implementation, evaluation, and refinement, the County ensures CAAP objectives remain adaptable to emerging challenges and opportunities while maintaining focus on long-term goals.

Each department leading a CAAP objective contributed to this report by summarizing their progress on mitigation and adaptation strategies. These updates detail efforts to integrate climate goals into daily operations, highlighting both successes and challenges. The iterative approach fosters continuous improvement by embedding

lessons learned into subsequent actions. Input from the CAAP Working Group and the Commission on the Environment further informed this report, ensuring it reflects collaborative insights and community engagement.

This report presents:

- CAAP Priority Objectives 2024 progress across energy efficiency, waste reduction, wildfire resilience, water sustainability, and transportation
- Progress report for department-led initiatives and interdepartmental collaboration
- State and Federal Grant Progress
- Contribution of Local & Regional Partnerships
- Detailed Progress on CAAP Priority Objectives
- CAAP Strategic Focus in 2025

CAAP Priority Objectives - 2024 Achievements

The CAAP is guided by a set of priority objectives first established in the 2022 plan. These objectives focus on the most impactful strategies for GHG reduction and climate resilience. Departments lead efforts within their areas of expertise, coordinating with regional and state partners where necessary.

In June, updates will be provided on strategies completed, those requiring adjustment, and emerging opportunities. The County will continue to refine its approach to maximize resources and ensure meaningful progress on climate action. Below are the 2024 highlights and progress of our priority objectives.

- **Eliminate fossil fuel use in County facilities (Objective 2):**

The County engaged a consultant team to evaluate electrification opportunities for County buildings, identify priority energy efficiency upgrades, and explore financing options through partnerships with Central Coast Community Energy (CCCE). These efforts represent a significant step toward phasing out fossil fuel use and ensuring long-term sustainability in County facilities.

- **Eliminate fossil fuel use from the County vehicle fleet (Objective 8):**

The County expanded its electric vehicle (EV) fleet to include 90 fuel-efficient vehicles, of which 16 are fully electric. Additionally, eight new EV charging stations were installed, increasing access for staff and community members. Multiple grant applications were submitted to further support fleet electrification and infrastructure expansion.

- **Eliminate fossil fuel use from passenger and commercial vehicles (Objective 9):**

The County secured a \$14 million Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) grant to install 252 Level 2 EV charging ports in Disadvantaged Communities within Santa Cruz and surrounding counties. However, this critical funding is under review due to recent White House executive orders, which could potentially jeopardize its implementation.

- **Increase the use of public transportation, walking, or bicycling (Objective 10):**

The County advanced several multi-modal transportation initiatives, including the Coastal Rail Trail, Soquel Drive Buffered Bike Lane, and Green Valley Multi-Use Path. These projects improve active transportation infrastructure and support reduced vehicle miles traveled (VMT). The Countywide Collaborative Bike Share Program was also launched in partnership with the City of Santa Cruz, Capitola, Cabrillo College, and the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC), expanding access to sustainable transportation options.

- **Protect and manage local aquifers (Objective 12):**

The County secured a \$2 million Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) grant to evaluate the feasibility of a wastewater treatment system in Boulder Creek. This project aims to enhance groundwater sustainability and reduce reliance on limited water resources.

- **Reduce the carbon footprint of the landfill (Objective 14):**

Through partnerships with local cities and compost contractors, the County enhanced organic waste reuse programs to divert food and yard waste from landfills. Grant funding was secured to support infrastructure upgrades, addressing one of the key contributors to GHG emissions.

- **Reduce wildfire risk in at-risk communities (Objective 20):**

The County initiated Phase 1 (program design and permitting) of a \$20 million Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant to fund community wildfire mitigation measures. Funded projects in Phase 2 will include hazardous fuel reduction, defensible space, and home hardening efforts to protect vulnerable communities.

- **Adapt to community needs through effective monitoring (Objective 25):**

To improve transparency and engagement, the County launched a climate action portal to connect stakeholders and community members with available programs,

funding opportunities, and progress updates.

- **Reduce the carbon footprint of the food system (Objective 28):**

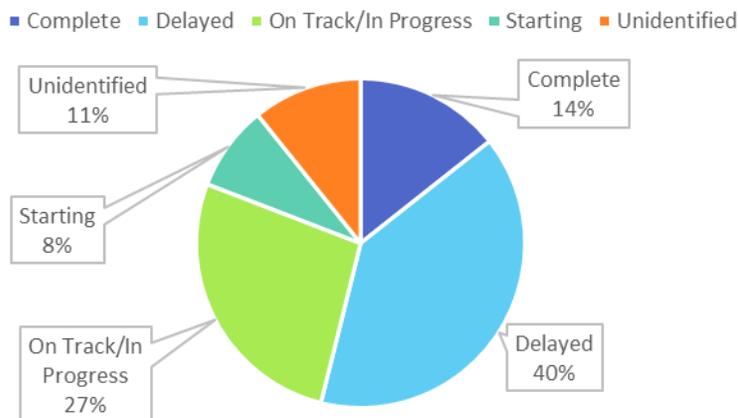
In collaboration with Second Harvest Food Bank and other partners, the County expanded food recovery programs and conducted a countywide assessment to divert edible food from the waste stream to food-insecure communities. These efforts align with the County's commitment to equity and sustainability.

Operationalizing CAAP: Measuring Progress from a Departmental Perspective

The scale and complexity of the County's climate initiatives require extensive coordination across departments, with staff balancing ongoing program implementation, policy development, and grant administration to achieve CAAP objectives. The progress outlined in the previous sections reflects the significant workload shouldered by County departments, as well as the collaborative efforts needed to drive forward key mitigation and adaptation strategies.

Across five departments, there are a total of 167 climate action strategies. Of these, 24 strategies have been completed, and 45 remain on track or in progress. Additionally, 14 strategies are in the early stages of implementation. However, 66 strategies have experienced delays, highlighting the challenges of securing resources, navigating regulatory challenges, and addressing unexpected obstacles. Eighteen strategies remain unidentified as the objectives to implement these strategies require further development or clarification.

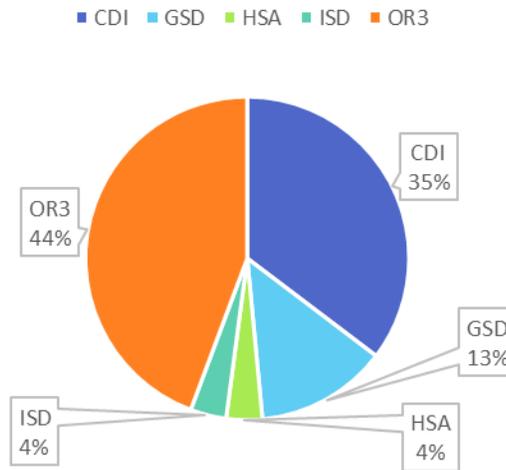
Chart 1. Strategies by Completion Status



The distribution of these strategies across departments underscores the breadth of work being carried out to implement the CAAP. The Office of Response, Recovery, and Resilience (OR3) leads the effort with 74 strategies, followed by the Community

Development & Infrastructure (CDI) Department with 59 strategies. The General Services Department (GSD) is responsible for 22 strategies, while both the Health Services Agency (HSA) and the Information Services Department (ISD) each manage six strategies.

Chart 2. Strategies by Lead Department



While some initiatives fall within a single department's purview, many demand broader collaboration across County departments, whether it's aligning climate policies with land use and transportation planning, integrating resilience measures into infrastructure projects, or streamlining implementation across different agencies. This interconnected approach ensures that climate action is embedded into the County's operations and decision-making processes.

Collaboration is also essential in overcoming challenges, as departments navigate legal, financial, and operational constraints to deliver on climate goals. A strong example of this is how a member of the CAAP Working Group from CDI responded to the Ninth Circuit Court ruling that temporarily halted the County's residential natural gas ban. Rather than seeing the decision as a barrier to building electrification, the team identified an alternative path forward, focusing on leveraging existing building code requirements to encourage electrification through major remodels within the urban area. This creative problem-solving approach demonstrates the value of cross-departmental collaboration in adapting to shifting policy landscapes.

Another area where departmental resources are heavily committed is grant writing and grant management. Securing and implementing grants is a critical funding mechanism for CAAP objectives, but the current process is labor-intensive, requiring significant staff capacity to develop competitive applications, track reporting requirements, and manage awarded funds. The opportunity ahead is to explore more efficient ways to approach grant funding, whether through regional partnerships, multi-department coordination, or dedicated grant support resources to relieve pressure on individual departments.

Securing Resources: State and Federal Grant Progress

The scale of the climate crisis requires significant investment, and achieving the goals outlined in the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP) comes at a substantial cost that cannot be covered by the County's general fund alone. To address this challenge, the County must strategically align resources, partner with regional, state, and federal agencies, and aggressively pursue grant funding. These efforts are essential to

implementing both government-led and private-sector greenhouse gas (GHG) mitigation, adaptation, and resilience projects.

The County's success in securing \$89,913,184 in grant funding in 2024 reflects its commitment to implementing CAAP Objectives 29 and 26. Objective 29 underscores the importance of advocating for state and federal climate policies that align with local priorities, securing funding opportunities, and supporting grant applications through legislative engagement. Meanwhile, Objective 26 emphasizes strengthening regional collaborations to develop competitive proposals that address shared climate goals. Together, these objectives guide the County's approach to grant-seeking efforts and ensure alignment between local initiatives and broader policy frameworks. The grants highlighted below demonstrate how the County has translated these objectives into action. By leveraging partnerships, advancing legislative engagement, and pursuing collaborative opportunities, the County has moved climate projects from planning to implementation. However, some awarded grants remain at risk due to federal administrative actions. The County is actively working with its federal delegation to mitigate these uncertainties and preserve critical resources

Grant Highlights by Sector

Energy

- **Charging and Fueling Infrastructure (CFI) Discretionary Grant – \$14M (Federal Highway Administration)**

Funds the installation of 252 Level 2 EV charging ports across 44 equity-focused sites in disadvantaged communities. This funding is currently on hold due to federal energy policy changes. (Supports Objective #9: Eliminate fossil fuel use in transportation.)

Transportation

- **Coastal Rail Trail 10/11 Active Transportation Program Grant – \$67.6M (California Transportation Commission)**

Supports the design, right-of-way acquisition, and construction of 4.2 miles of multi-use trail from 17th Avenue to State Park Drive. (Supports Objective #7: Reduce vehicle miles traveled.)

Water

- **Boulder Creek Water Quality & Recovery Grant – \$2M (Environmental Protection Agency)**

Evaluates a potential sewer system in Boulder Creek with the capacity to treat

wastewater for reuse in fire protection, habitat restoration, and other beneficial uses. (Supports Objective #12: Protect and manage local water resources.)

- **Santa Cruz Coastal Lagoons & East Cliff Drive Resiliency Grant – \$650K (State Coastal Conservancy)**

Funds nature-based solutions to increase coastal resilience and mitigate sea-level rise impacts. (Supports Objective #12: Protect and manage local water resources.)

- **Big Basin Emergency & Resilience Grant – \$850K (Department of Water Resources)**

Supports emergency operations and resilience efforts for the Big Basin Water District.

Waste

- **SB 1383 Local Assistance Grant Program – \$524K (CalRecycle)**

Expands organic waste diversion programs to reduce landfill emissions and comply with state waste reduction mandates. (Supports Objective #14: Reduce the carbon footprint of landfills and expand organic waste diversion.)

Natural & Working Lands

- **Sea Level Rise Vulnerability Assessment Grant – \$780K (California Coastal Commission)**

Funds coastal hazard assessments and updates the Local Coastal Program for improved climate adaptation planning. (Supports Objective #25: Improve climate adaptation planning and response.)

- **Integrated Climate Adaptation & Resiliency Program (iCARP) Grant – \$649K (Governor's Office of Land Use & Climate Innovation)**

Supports regional climate resilience planning to address climate risks and improve long-term adaptation strategies. (Supports Objective #25: Improve climate adaptation planning and response.)

Wildfire Prevention

- **Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) Wildfire Risk Reduction – Phase 1 – \$1.1M (Federal Emergency Management Agency)**
Funds policy development, environmental and historic preservation reviews, and planning for Phase 2 wildfire risk reduction efforts, including defensible space and home hardening. (Supports Objective #19: Reduce wildfire risk through improved forest health management.)

- **California Fire Safe Council Grant – \$100K (CAL FIRE)**

Funds GIS-based wildfire resilience strategies to help prioritize fuel reduction projects. (Supports Objective #19: Reduce wildfire risk through improved forest health management.)

- **Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) – \$250K (Federal Emergency Management Agency)**

Supports the development of a Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan to enhance County-wide disaster preparedness and risk reduction efforts. (Supports Objective #20: Reduce wildfire risk to structures in at-risk communities.)

Government Operations

- **Greyhound Rock Environmental Education Center Grant – \$865K (State Coastal Conservancy)**

Funds the planning and design of an education center with low-cost accommodations for underserved communities, promoting climate awareness and resilience education. (Supports Objective #21: Establish all-hazard disaster-resiliency community centers across the County.)

- **UCSC Internship Program Grant – \$40K (University of California, Santa Cruz)**

Supports the Climate Resilience Internship Program, developing local workforce capacity for CAAP implementation. (Supports Objective #29: Engage in state and federal climate policy and expand workforce training.)

Local & Regional Partnerships

Collaboration beyond County departments has been essential to securing funding, expanding resources, and implementing regional initiatives. External partnerships with organizations such as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Central Coast Community Energy (3CE), Regional Climate Policy Working Group (RCPWG), Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG), University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC), and the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation have

driven major advancements in sustainable infrastructure, climate adaptation planning, and community engagement.

NOAA awarded a \$71.1 million grant to the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation to support regional climate resilience efforts over the next five years. A portion of this funding, \$5 million, will go toward the Watsonville Slough Ecosystem Restoration Project, which focuses on restoring wetlands, mitigating flood risks, and improving access for disadvantaged communities. The County is a key partner in this effort, working to implement nature-based solutions that enhance resilience to climate change and sea-level rise.

A highlight of regional collaboration is RCPWG's leadership in securing the \$14 million Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) grant for the installation of 252 Level 2 EV charging ports in disadvantaged communities. However, this funding remains at risk due to ongoing federal policy changes. The County is actively working with its federal delegation to safeguard this resource and ensure these projects move forward as planned.

Key Contributions from External Partnerships

- **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)**
 - Awarded \$71.1 million to the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation for regional climate resilience efforts.
 - Supported \$5 million in funding for the Watsonville Slough Ecosystem Restoration Project, improving flood mitigation, water quality, and habitat restoration.
 - Providing funding for the CAAP Climate Resilience Fellowship and interns through a partnership with California State University Monterey Bay, Hartnell College and UCSC.
- **California Marine Sanctuary Foundation**
 - Recipient of NOAA's \$71.1 million grant, working with regional partners to implement large-scale adaptation projects, including the Watsonville Slough Ecosystem Restoration Project.
- **Central Coast Community Energy (3CE)**
 - Provided \$420,000 in rebates to support County electrification and energy efficiency efforts.
 - \$215,000 in building electrification rebates to help fund the transition away from fossil fuel-based systems.
 - \$130,000 in EV infrastructure rebates to support the expansion of electric vehicle charging stations.
 - \$75,000 in energy efficiency incentives to promote clean energy adoption in County facilities.
- **Regional Climate Policy Working Group (RCPWG)**
 - Led efforts to secure the \$14 million FHWA EV charging infrastructure grant,

- expanding access to charging stations in disadvantaged communities, although this funding is currently in jeopardy.
- Advocates for regional climate funding and coordinates joint planning for resilience initiatives.
- **Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG)**
 - Facilitated regional collaboration on transportation and climate planning.
 - Supported joint grant applications, including the \$67.6 million Coastal Rail Trail project, enhancing sustainable transportation infrastructure.
- **University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC)**
 - Provided \$40,000 for the Climate Resilience Fellowship Program, supporting workforce development and CAAP project implementation.
 - Collaborated with the County on the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) project, focusing on addressing growth challenges and enhancing climate resilience in areas where development meets natural landscapes. This project integrates academic expertise with local planning to advance innovative climate solutions.
- **Ecology Action**
 - Supported sustainable transportation initiatives and community outreach efforts.

These partnerships demonstrate the County's strategic alignment of resources, leveraging regional, state, and federal support to achieve CAAP objectives. The inclusion of NOAA, the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation, and projects such as the Watsonville Slough Ecosystem Restoration highlight the importance of integrating scientific expertise, large-scale funding, and local planning frameworks to develop innovative and effective climate solutions.

Detailed Progress on CAAP Priority Objectives

The following tables provide a more detailed and comprehensive look at the County's progress on its CAAP objectives. These tables highlight where progress has been made in 2024, identifying areas of success, ongoing challenges, and future opportunities. Key advancements, such as electrification of County facilities, expansion of electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure, wildfire resilience efforts, and water sustainability initiatives, are detailed.

The tables are divided into four categories: mitigation objectives (County operations and policy) and adaptation objectives (County operations and policy). For each category, objectives are linked to measurable actions, and areas where significant progress has been achieved are explicitly detailed. These tables serve as both a reflection of the work completed and a roadmap for continued implementation of CAAP strategies.

Table 1. Priority Mitigation Objectives – County Operations

Priority Mitigation Objectives County Operations	
CAAP Priority Objective – County Operations	Year 2 Results
Obj #5 (OR3) By 2030, achieve 100% clean energy provided by Central Coast Community Energy.	<p><i>In progress</i> - Central Coast Community Energy (3CE) is on track to provide 100% clean energy by 2035, with renewable projects underway to meet forecasted energy needs. 3CE has reduced its electricity emissions from 730 lbs./MWh in 2023 to 433 lbs./MWh in 2024, a 40.7% decrease.</p> <p>The County maintains robust participation in 3CE governance. Supervisor Monica Martinez is expected to represent Santa Cruz County on the 3CE Policy Committee, with Supervisor Felipe Hernandez acting as the Alternate. County Administrative Officer Carlos Palacios will continue to serve on the Operations Board and Virginia Johnson will continue as Chair of the Community Advisory Committee.</p>

Priority Mitigation Objectives County Operations	
CAAP Priority Objective – County Operations	Year 2 Results
Obj # 8 (GSD) Eliminate fossil fuel use from the County vehicle fleet.	<p><i>In progress</i> - The County is advancing efforts to eliminate fossil fuel use from its fleet. To date, 90 vehicles have been replaced with fuel efficient vehicles as part of the standard replacement schedule, and 16 fleet vehicles are fully electric, an increase from four low range electric vehicles previously.</p> <p>In 2024, eight additional EV chargers were installed, increasing the total charging stations to 16.</p> <p>GSD has implemented the Metro Splash Pass Program, making 27% of employees eligible for free bus passes, with plans to expand access to all County employees.</p>
Obj # 2 (GSD) Eliminate fossil fuel use in new and existing County facilities with efficient electric equipment.	<p><i>In progress</i> - The County has secured a consultant contract with ENGIE to support building electrification and sustainability, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluating facility electrification opportunities, • assessing the replacement of building transformers, and • identifying priority upgrades such as water heater replacements.
Obj #14 (CDI- Recycling Solid Waste Section) Reduce carbon footprint of landfill.	<p><i>In progress</i> - The County and its waste management partner are transitioning to alternative fuel vehicles, replacing several diesel forklifts with electric models. EVs are expected to be used for staff and on-site transportation, while hydrogen fuel options are being researched for large equipment due to the lack of viable electric alternatives for long-distance waste hauling.</p> <p>Future EV purchases depend on facility upgrades, with the Ben Lomond Transfer Station project set to begin in 2025 and Buena Vista Redevelopment currently at 60% design, with construction starting in 2028. EV charging infrastructure delays are anticipated as station construction takes priority.</p>
Obj #29 (OR3) Engage in State and federal legislation to achieve climate goals.	<p><i>In progress</i> - OR3, as a founding member of RCPWG, has engaged Farallon Consultants to develop a prioritized list of mitigation and adaptation projects aligned with member agencies' climate plans.</p> <p>RCPWG submitted two major FHWA grants totaling \$34 million for community and highway corridor charging stations. The Community Charging Grant was awarded \$14 million to fund 252 Level 2 charging ports in Disadvantaged Communities within the cities of Capitola and Watsonville and the counties of San Benito and Santa Cruz. The grant contract is currently pending due to delays at the federal level.</p>

Table 2. Priority Mitigation Objectives - County Policy

Priority Mitigation Objectives County Policy	
CAAP Priority Objective – County Policy	Year 2 Results
<p>Obj #7 (CDI– Sustainability and Advanced Planning) Reduce vehicle miles traveled through higher density zoning for housing development along transit corridors and optimize use of remote work.</p>	<p><i>In progress</i> - The Housing Element Rezone Program, addressing 75 parcels in two phases, is progressing with Phase 1 approved in November 2024 and Phase 2 set for mid-2025. The Housing Element, certified by the State in April 2024, provides updated guidance for housing development.</p> <p>The County has adopted the Access and Mobility Element and Active Transportation Plan and is working to establish a Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) Mitigation Bank to reduce traffic-related environmental impacts. The agreement to manage the bank, involving collaboration with other local jurisdictions, is awaiting responses from potential partners. A study on the mitigation bank has been presented to the Board of Supervisors, with a final report expected in March 2025.</p> <p>The Board has approved sustainable policy code amendments, and GSD is hiring a consultant to complete a comprehensive development impact fee study.</p>
<p>Obj #9 (GSD) Eliminate fossil fuel use from passenger and commercial vehicles.</p>	<p><i>Under Review</i> – OR3 is currently working on this Objective through the RCPWG to develop regional charging station infrastructure across the region for public use, thus promoting the use of EV vehicles for passenger and commercial use. Please see Objective #29.</p>
<p>Obj #11 (ISD) Increase internet connectivity access.</p>	<p><i>In progress</i> - The Broadband Strategic Plan has made significant progress, identifying gaps in cable internet coverage and determining that a broadband district is currently not feasible.</p> <p>Approximately 95.4% of County households have access to broadband at 100 Mbps download/20 Mbps upload speeds. In 2023, 40,454 households were eligible for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), with 28% enrolling before the program ended.</p> <p>The Information Services Department (ISD) has partnered with the California Emerging Technology Fund to expand affordable internet access and conducted outreach with the Human Services Department (HSD).</p> <p>Additionally, two California Public Utilities Commission grants are expected to improve broadband availability in underserved areas, including San Lorenzo Valley, Summit Road, and Corralitos.</p>
<p>Obj #1 (CDI - Planning) Eliminate fossil fuel use in new buildings.</p>	<p><i>In progress</i> - In 2023, 78 new units were electrified in urban areas, including affordability-restricted units and accessory dwelling units (ADUs).</p> <p>CDI, OR3 and the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG) are working together to develop and</p>

Priority Mitigation Objectives County Policy	
CAAP Priority Objective – County Policy	Year 2 Results
	<p>provide trainings on reach codes, incentives and educational trainings in support of building electrification.</p> <p>CDI has developed a code requirement in support of electrification in construction of new residential buildings in urban areas. However, enforcement of this requirement has been suspended due to a successful legal challenge in another jurisdiction.</p>
Obj #3 (CDI – Planning) Eliminate fossil fuel use in existing residential buildings.	<i>In progress</i> - A total of \$1,970,000 in rebates was developed in partnership with 3CE and Monterey Bay Air Resources District (MBARD) across four programs to support appliance electrification.
Obj #4 (CDI – Planning) Eliminate fossil fuel use in existing commercial buildings.	<p><i>Delayed</i> - Implementation of this objective has been delayed due to resource constraints for necessary research and stakeholder engagement. The complexity of the commercial building sector, with its diverse building types and tenant arrangements, presents additional challenges in developing effective energy efficiency programs.</p> <p>In 2025, CDI staff will initiate preliminary research to identify viable options for improving energy efficiency in existing commercial buildings.</p>

Table 3. Priority Adaptation Objectives - County Operations

Priority Adaptation Objectives County Operations	
CAAP Priority Objectives – County Operations	Year 2 Results
Obj #22 (GSD) Build and rehabilitate County infrastructure to accommodate extreme weather.	<p><i>In progress</i> - GSD has initiated the development of scoring criteria to evaluate GHG emissions from County-owned facilities, including identifying associated construction costs.</p> <p>Additionally, a project assessment is being completed to add solar panels and potentially a generator to the Felton Branch Library.</p>
Obj #25 (OR3) Adapt to community needs and legislative requirements through effective monitoring and evaluation.	<p><i>In progress</i> - The County is evaluating resource needs for climate action and adaptation programs, including staffing, evaluation and monitoring, while seeking opportunities to enhance support within existing priorities. Current efforts include developing a climate action portal to engage stakeholders and the community and identifying funding for monitoring and evaluation as feasible within the next budget cycle.</p> <p>The Climate Policy Internship Program remains under</p>

Priority Adaptation Objectives County Operations	
CAAP Priority Objectives – County Operations	Year 2 Results
	review in alignment with County objectives.
Obj # 21 (OR3) Establish all-hazard disaster-resiliency community centers across the County.	<p><i>In progress</i> - In 2024 the County and OR3 opened places where people could cool off during extreme heat events and are managing shelters for unhoused residents during cold weather this winter.</p> <p>The County is sharing information through its website, social media, and other public platforms, and plans to create a guide to improve communication during emergencies.</p>

Table 4. Priority Adaptation Objectives - County Policy

Priority Adaptation Objectives County Policy	
CAAP Priority Objectives – County Policy	Year 2 Results
Obj #19 (OR3) Reduce at-risk communities from wildfire risk through improved forest health management.	<p><i>In progress</i> - OR3 is aligning with the Regional Prioritization Plan (RPP) for the Santa Cruz Mountains to prioritize fire and forest health projects eligible for future funding through Proposition 4.</p> <p>Collaborating with the Fire Safe Council and Resource Conservation District (RCD) of Santa Cruz County, OR3 is supporting fuel reduction projects and helping landowners and communities access funding opportunities.</p> <p>Efforts also focus on enhancing evacuation routes and strengthening partnerships with Firewise groups, while preparing for BRIC implementation in 2026.</p>
Obj #20 (OR3) Reduce wildfire risk to structures in at-risk communities.	<p><i>In progress</i> - The 2025 Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (MJHMP) will enhance collaboration between OR3 and County water agencies.</p> <p>OR3 is advancing Phase 1 of the BRIC program, focusing on technical and environmental studies to evaluate project feasibility.</p> <p>Collaborating with the RCD and the Fire Safe Council, OR3 has finalized a draft wildfire resilience strategy that will be further expanded with stakeholder engagement.</p>
Obj #12 (HSA - Environmental Health) Protect and manage local county aquifers.	<p><i>In progress</i> - The County is improving water well rules to protect groundwater and public health, while adding new wells for monitoring and water quality testing. Limited groundwater replenishment and the need for additional projects remain challenges.</p>
Obj #13 (CDI- Public Works) Increase the use of reclaimed wastewater and	<p><i>In progress</i> - The County received a \$2 million grant from the (EPA) to study the possibility of building a sewer system in</p>

Priority Adaptation Objectives County Policy	
CAAP Priority Objectives – County Policy	Year 2 Results
stormwater for irrigation and general use.	Boulder Creek. This system could be designed to treat wastewater for reuse, providing recycled water for fire protection, habitat restoration, or other beneficial uses. Implementation of the grant will begin in 2025.

CAAP Strategic Focus in 2025

As Santa Cruz County looks ahead to 2025 and beyond, the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP) will continue to evolve with a strategic focus on collaboration, transparency, and resilience. Now that progress is underway, the County can better identify resource availability and prioritize actions to address emerging climate challenges.

While identifying new funding opportunities, the County is also encountering losses due to shifting federal priorities and external pressures. The CAAP Working Group is actively internalizing these changes to better understand protections and risks, which will inform recommendations to the Board.

The passage of Measure Q and Proposition 4 in November 2024 provides significant new funding opportunities that will shape the County’s strategic climate priorities. Measure Q, a \$87 parcel tax, is projected to generate \$7 million annually for wildfire risk reduction, water conservation, and habitat preservation. Proposition 4, a statewide \$10 billion climate bond, offers additional funding streams for safe drinking water, wildfire prevention, and climate resilience projects. These resources will allow the County to accelerate key CAAP objectives while expanding partnerships to implement high-impact projects.

However, a key challenge in securing state and federal grants has been meeting the local match requirement, which often limits the County’s ability to pursue competitive funding opportunities. Measure Q is designed to address this challenge as one of its stated priority uses is to serve as a source for local match obligations, removing a major obstacle and increasing the County’s competitiveness for additional climate action grants.

Looking ahead to 2025, the County’s CAAP departments, in collaboration with the Working Group and Steering Committee, will focus on the following strategic objectives:

- **Prioritizing Projects:** The CAAP Working Group and Steering Committee will develop an updated list of priority projects in June 2025. This list will align initiatives with Measure Q and Proposition 4 funding criteria, ensuring that vegetation management, fire prevention, water infrastructure improvements, and other high-impact projects receive targeted funding.

- **Enhancing Collaboration:** The County will continue to engage state agencies, local organizations, and community partners to maximize the impact of funded projects. Alignment efforts across departments and stakeholders will be key to achieving CAAP strategies, including adaptation and mitigation goals.
- **Addressing Resource Constraints:** The County recognizes the challenges posed by decreasing funding and limited internal capabilities. Resource constraints will be addressed directly by exploring new funding opportunities and adapting to evolving dynamics within the team.
- **Ensuring Accountability:** Robust monitoring and reporting mechanisms will track progress, ensuring that all investments align with CAAP goals and contribute to long-term climate resilience.

As the County moves forward, the alignment of efforts through Measure Q and Proposition 4 funding, combined with strategic priorities for 2025, will reinforce its commitment to addressing climate challenges at both local and regional levels. This section outlines the County's readiness to act, leveraging new resources while navigating ongoing risks and opportunities.

Financial Impact

The CAAP emphasizes strategic financial planning to ensure efficient resource allocation for climate initiatives. This report has no impact on the General Fund, as CAAP projects are funded through dedicated grants, partnerships, and targeted funding sources.

As stated above, the County secured over \$89,913,184 in external funding to advance electrification, waste reduction, wildfire resilience, and sustainability initiatives. Future hazard mitigation and climate adaptation efforts could be partially funded through Measure Q and Proposition 4 grant opportunities. Large scale vehicle electrification and building electrification of the private sector will require larger state, federal rebate and incentive programs.

Strategic Initiatives

Climate Action - Government Operations

Submitted By:

David Reid, OR3 Director

Recommended By:

Carlos J. Palacios, County Administrative Officer

Artificial Intelligence Acknowledgment:

ChatGPT, an Artificial Intelligence (AI) large language model tool, significantly contributed to the development of this agenda item, including Staff Report, in compliance with the County of Santa Cruz AI Appropriate Use Policy.