

53. Accept and file the Commission on the Environment report for calendar years 2023 and 2024, and take related actions ()



County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors

Agenda Item Submittal

From: Board of Supervisors

Subject: Biennial Report of the Commission on the Environment

Meeting Date: June 10, 2025

Formal Title: Accept and file the Commission on the Environment report for calendar years 2023 and 2024, and take related actions

Recommended Actions

- 1) Accept and file the report prepared by the Commission on the Environment highlighting their activities during calendar years 2023 and 2024; and
- 2) Direct the chair to thank the members of the Commission on the Environment for their work on behalf of County government.

Executive Summary

Accept and file the report prepared by the Commission on the Environment highlighting their activities during calendar years 2023 and 2024.

Discussion

The purpose of this report is to highlight the activities, accomplishments, and future goals of the board during calendar years 2023 and 2024.

Financial Impact

The recommended action does not have a financial impact.

Strategic Initiatives

N/A

Submitted By:

Felipe Hernandez, Chair

Recommended By:

Carlos J. Palacios, County Executive Officer

Artificial Intelligence Acknowledgment:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) did not significantly contribute to the development of this agenda item.



County of Santa Cruz

COMMISSION ON THE ENVIRONMENT

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COMMISSION ON THE ENVIRONMENT 2023 and 2024 BIENNIAL REPORT

1. Role of the Commission on the Environment

The Commission on the Environment acts as an advisory body to, and resource for, the County Board of Supervisors. The Commission is charged with recommending policies and action programs designed to improve and protect the environment. In accordance with its purpose as presented in Chapter 2.54.050 of the County Code, the Commission shall:

- (A) Advise the Board of Supervisors on ways to implement the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP) to reduce the causes of climate change and adapt to climate change hazards that affect the County;
- (B) Advise the Board of Supervisors and work with other commissions in reviewing and updating County policies to provide a comprehensive course of action to implement the CAAP in both the public and private spheres;
- (C) Serve as an information clearinghouse to the Board of Supervisors and other County commissions about proposed and pending legislation, both State and Federal, regarding climate change mitigation and adaptation;
- (D) Advise the Board of Supervisors on potential areas of cooperation with other public and private agencies and organizations to plan and implement effective climate action and adaptation policies in Santa Cruz County;
- (E) Advise the Board of Supervisors on ways to realize climate justice and equity defined in the CAAP by addressing both environmental impacts and hazards and access to environmental benefits for all, regardless of income, gender, race, age and other characteristics; and
- (F) Exercise any other responsibilities concerning environmental issues or initiatives that may be set forth in the Commission's bylaws, or that may be directed by the Board of Supervisors.

2. Meeting Dates, Time and Location

According to the Commission on the Environment Bylaws, meetings are held six times a year generally on the fourth Wednesday of each month, convening at 5:00 p.m. The Commission met in 2023 on January 25, March 22, May 24, July 26, September 27, and November 8, and conducted a special meeting on April 19. The Commission met in 2024 on January 24, March 27, May 22, July 31, September 25, and November 10. In 2023, the meetings were all held in person and the meeting on November 8 was held at the Watsonville Civic Center. In 2024, the meetings in January, March, and May were held in person, the meetings in July, September, and November were held in hybrid format, and the meeting in September was held at the Watsonville Civic Center.

3. Commission Structure

The Commission is composed of ten members who are residents of the County. Each member

of the Board of Supervisors appoints two commissioners. There were changes in Commission membership in 2023 and 2024 as reflected in the tables below. There are currently no vacancies on the Commission.

Membership of the Commission is presented in the following tables:

2023	Commissioner	Term Expires
District 1	Tracey Weiss	April 1, 2029
	Deirdre Scholar	April 1, 2025
District 2	Lisa Woonink	April 1, 2025
	John Hunt	April 1, 2025
District 3	Rachel Kippen (term expired)	April 1, 2023
	Ross Clark (term expired)	April 1, 2023
	Marina Ramon	April 1, 2027
	Judit Camacho	April 1, 2027
District 4	Maria Perez	April 1, 2027
	Robert Culbertson	April 1, 2027
District 5	Gine Johnson	April 1, 2025
	Kris Damhorst	April 1, 2029

2024	Commissioner	Term Expires
District 1	Katherine Lee (resigned March 2025)	April 1, 2025
	Deirdre Scholar (resigned January 2024)	April 1, 2025
	Tracey Weiss	April 1, 2029
District 2	John Hunt	April 1, 2029
	Lisa Wooninck	April 1, 2029
District 3	Marina Ramon	April 1, 2027
	Judit Camacho (resigned May 2024)	April 1, 2027
	James Nakahara (appointed January 2025)	April 1, 2029
District 4	Maria Perez	April 1, 2027
	Robert Culbertson	April 1, 2027
District 5	Gine Johnson	April 1, 2025
	Kris Damhorst	April 1, 2029

4. Commission Staff

The Commission is staffed by the Community Development and Infrastructure Department (David Carlson, Resource Planner).

5. Attendance

Commissioner attendance for 2023 and 2024 is summarized in the following tables:

2023	Commissioner	Jan.	Mar.	May	July	Sept.	Nov.
District 1	Tracey Weiss	X	X	X	A	X	X
	Deirdre Scholar	X	X	X	X	A	A
District 2	Lis Woonink	X	X	A	X	X	A
	John Hunt	X	A	X	X	A	X
District 3	Rachel Kippen	X	X				
	Ross Clark	X	X				
	Marina Ramon			X	X	X	X
	Judit Camacho			X	X	X	X
District 4	Maria Perez	v	v	A	X	X	X
	Robert Culbertson	X	X	X	X	X	a
District 5	Kris Damhorst	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Gine Johnson	v	X	A	X	A	X

2024	Commissioner	Jan.	Mar.	May	July	Sept.	Nov.
District 1	Katherine Lee	v	v	v	X	X	X
	Tracey Weiss	X	A	X	A	X	X
District 2	John Hunt	X	X	X	X	A	X
	Lisa Wooninck	X	X	X	A	X	X
District 3	Marina Ramon	A	X	X	X	X	X
	Judit Camacho	A	X	X	v	v	V
District 4	Maria Perez	X	X	X	A	X	X
	Robert Culbertson	X	X	X	X	X	X
District 5	Kris Damhorst	X	X	X	X	A	X
	Gine Johnson	X	S	X	X	X	X
X Present at the meeting A Excused absence from the meeting v vacant							

6. Biennial Goals and Accomplishments

In 2023 and 2024, the Commission continued to focus on issues pertaining to climate change within the County and the Monterey Bay Region by supporting municipal planning and regional program development. This participation served to educate, promote a collaborative dialogue and encourage the development of cooperative projects among local government staff, businesses, academic institutions and non-profit organizations involved with climate change policies and programs within the Monterey Bay Region.

Regular Commission meetings throughout 2023 and 2024 provided informational opportunities on topics relevant to building awareness and context for the adoption of appropriate local policies and programs to address climate change, environmental justice and equity. Presentations to the Commission also identified existing resources as well as opportunities for State and Federal funding and local cooperation.

Milestones are listed below. Commission minutes available to the public on the Commission webpage reflect actions taken by the Commission.

2023

- The Commission developed a Work Plan for 2023-2024
- Received information on County recovery efforts from severe winter storms
- The Commission expressed concerns about and received information on recent state decision regarding solar net energy metering.
- Staff from OR3 provided updates on the status of the CAAP project, particularly the equity guardrails and equity matrix, and development of a measurement and accountability system.
- Discussion of the idea of potential Commission involvement in a podcast initiative about environmental issues in the county
- Commissioner Damhorst provided updates on the activities of Central Coast Community Energy Community Advisory Committee and Operations Board
- The Commission received a presentation from representatives of the Valley Women's Club regarding the County's franchise agreement with PG&E and submitted an advisory letter to the Board of Supervisors recommending evaluation of the annual franchise fees paid to the County by PG&E to ensure that the County is receiving the correct amount per the current agreement.
- The Commission participated in the "A Santa Cruz Like Me" project to increase participation on commissions and committees by under-represented groups. Commissioner Perez participated in the workshop in Watsonville on the initiative.
- Commissioner Hunt participated in an inter-commission work group (Fish and Wildlife Commission and Water Commission) on issues related to the significant tree ordinance and ongoing impacts to riparian corridors from camping.
- The Commission received a presentation from CDI staff on the early planning phase of the Buena Vista Landfill project.
- The Commission received a presentation from representatives of CORA on organic and regenerative agriculture and submitted an advisory letter to the Board of Supervisors promoting the Agricultural Resilience Incentive Program for implementation in Santa Cruz County and to include healthy soils management practices as a strategy in the next revision of the CAAP.
- The Commission received a presentation from representative of Regeneración Pajaro Valley on their activities funded by a Transformative Climate Communities state grant.

2024

- Commissioner Damhorst provided information to the Commission regarding recently enacted state legislation SB 54 Plastic Producer Responsibility
- The Commission had extensive discussion regarding their role in implementation of the CAAP.
- The Commission adopted a revised mission statement as presented by staff which led to amendments to Santa Cruz County Code Section 2.54 and Commission Bylaws
- .
- The Commission adopted a schedule of presentations by key Departments involved with implementation of the CAAP.
- The Commission received presentations from various County Departments regarding CAAP objectives and implementation strategies
- The Commission received a presentation by staff from the Board of Supervisors and Health Services Agency on a proposed tobacco waste initiative (

- Commissioner Hunt presented to the Commission on the NOAA \$71.1 million grant for projects in California to make the state's coast more resilient to climate change and other coastal hazards
- Commissioner Damhorst provided updates on the activities of Central Coast Community Energy Community Advisory Committee and Operations Board
- The Commission initiated additional outreach to draw more public participation in the meetings through social media and press releases in addition to traditional postings and mailing of the agendas.

Commissioner participation in local community meetings

One or more Commissioners attended community meetings to discuss issues related to environmental protection and cooperative opportunities that held potential for establishing local climate change policies and programs as well as identifying funding sources.

7. Future Goals

The Commission's work plan reflects the Commission's intent to continue its efforts to inform the Board on climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives; the County's Sustainability Policy and Regulatory Update project; plastic pollution mitigation; state and federal legislation; sustainable transportation policies, programs and projects; environmental justice and equity; and the ongoing work of various local community groups with specific recommendations for local policies and programs that are feasible and effective.

8. Recommendations

The Commission will develop a work plan for the next two year period and continue to focus on plans and initiatives to implement mitigation and adaptation priorities in the County Climate Action and Adaptation Plan, including a focus on environmental justice and equity. Other Commission work in the next two years will include continuing to advise the Board of Supervisors and make recommendations on ways to improve and protect the environment to ensure the long term environmental sustainability of the County. It is therefore recommended that the Board of Supervisors accept and file the 2023-2024 biennial report of the Commission on the Environment.