



Interdepartmental Climate Action Task Force Report #2

OCTOBER 19, 2021

JOHN KOPCHIK, DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND
DEVELOPMENT AND BRIAN BALBAS, DIRECTOR, PUBLIC WORKS

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

Executive Summary

This report provides an update on the work of the Interdepartmental Climate Action Task Force (Task Force) established by the Board of Supervisors in September 2020, via the Climate Emergency Resolution.¹ Since its first report in March 2020, the Task Force has been focused on establishing the Sustainability Fund and continuing to augment the new virtual services described in the first report, and developing strategies for engaging County departments in the best practices of the County's Green Business Program. There is significant overlap between these best practices and the ideas for further action by County departments identified by the Task Force in its first report.

History

The Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors adopted a Climate Emergency Resolution (Resolution) on September 22nd, 2020 which declared a climate emergency in the County. This resolution outlined the threat to economic and social-well-being, health, safety, and security of the county, and stated that action is needed by all levels of government. The Resolution established an interdepartmental task force consisting of all Department heads, or their senior deputies, to coordinate their efforts focusing on the implementation of the County's Climate Action Plan. The Task Force was convened by the Department of Conservation and Development (DCD) in partnership with the Department of Public Works (Public Works).

The Task Force raised several ideas to the Board in its first report in March 2021. The Board welcomed the report, and expressed support for continuing to provide County services and meetings online where possible after COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, establishing a Sustainability Fund through annual investment (or structured as a revolving fund), as well as advocating with the State for online advisory body meetings to be permitted to continue even after shelter-in-place orders are lifted. The Board encouraged the Task Force to focus on establishing the Sustainability Fund and finding opportunities to achieve climate goals in County operations.

Sustainability Fund

Since the March report was presented, Public Works and DCD have collaborated to develop a report on how other jurisdictions have established and implemented similar funds and develop recommendations on how a Sustainability Fund could be implemented in Contra Costa County. Public Works presented these findings to the Sustainability Committee at its July 26, 2020, meeting. The Sustainability Committee agreed with staff recommendations on the Fund's structure, as well as governance. The Committee concurred that the Department of Public Works should manage the Fund, including the identification and implementation of projects, as well as tracking savings. This information should be reported annually. Additionally, the Committee agreed that the Task Force can serve as an advisory committee to the Fund. The Committee recommended that the amount requested be revised to \$2.5-\$5 million, with the initial focus on installing the first tranche of electric vehicle charging stations, an ongoing priority.

¹ Documents and presentations related to the Task Force can be found at this site: <https://www.contracosta.ca.gov/8333/Interdepartmental-Climate-Action-Task-Fo>

Green Business Program Best Practices

Over the spring and summer, staff from Public Works, DCD, the County's Green Business Program (which is housed in the Health Services Department), and Human Resources identified areas where best practices from the Green Business Program overlapped with ideas the Task Force had generated in its first report. These best practices also align with the County's Climate Action Plan. Staff presented these opportunities to the Task Force on September 9, 2021.

The Green Business Program best practices can serve as a guide for County departments. Susan Psara from the Health Services Department outlined this in a presentation on what the Best Practices are and how departments can adopt them.² These practices include:

- Employee participation;
- Energy conservation;
- Waste reduction;
- Environmentally preferable purchasing;
- Pollution prevention;
- Reducing the use of toxics;
- Smart transportation;
- Water conservation; and
- E-waste recycling.

Public Works has developed a guide to services it provides, with contact information for staff who can help departments make improvements to their facilities.³ This is accessible for the Task Force members to use and implement within their respective departments.

At the September 9 meeting, the Task Force spent time brainstorming on additional things the County can do to address the changing climate and its impact on County employees and County residents.⁴ Task Force members discussed specific challenges their departments face in pursuing the Green Business Program best practices, as well as ideas on how to assess each department's status. Key themes that were raised included:

- Importance of reminders on how to properly participate in programs;
- Prioritizing public health issues in light of the pandemic;
- Logistical issues with green products such as recycled paper;
- Departmental resistance to change, and
- Funding.

Some ideas for moving forward included developing universal metrics and implementing them before the changes happens so that progress can more accurately be tracked, as well as increasing funding to support this transition. The Task Force members brought many perspectives to the table and made it obvious that the Green Business Program is not a one-size fits all model. There needs to be flexibility, assistance, and support across sectors in order for the overall effort to be successful.

² See Attachment 1 for presentation.

³ See Attachment 2 for Public Works services guide.

⁴ See Attachment 3 for brainstorming ideas.

Next Steps

The final question raised during the September 9 Task Force meeting was “should we hold ourselves to the Green Business Standards?” The consensus was overwhelmingly “yes.” Moving forward, the Task Force will look internally for how each department can adopt the Green Business Program Best Practices.⁵ Task force members agreed that each department will identify staff who are interested in serving as sustainability champions. Departments can receive assistance from Public Works for this implementation, and they are now aware of how to do so.

Over the next 12 to 18 months, the Task Force anticipates that it will focus on helping department adopt best practices from the Green Business Program and establishing and implementing the Sustainability Fund. Health Services will work to increasingly shed a light on the human and population level health impacts of climate change and to do so with a lens towards equity. These activities will be the basis of the Task Force’s semiannual reports to the Board.

Attachments

Attachment 1: Green Business Program Best Practices Presentation

Attachment 2: Public Works Sustainability Best Practices fact sheet

Attachment 3: Task Force Brainstorming Ideas from September 9, 2021 meeting

⁵ The Task Force is recommending that departments adopt the Green Business Program best practices, not that departments be certified by the Green Business Program. Certification requires a level of detail and resources not available at this time. Additionally, the County funds the Green Business Program using fees collected through the hazardous mitigation program; these fees are intended to support business programs in the community, not necessarily government services.

ATTACHMENT 3: IDEAS GENERATED AT SEPTEMBER 9, 2021, CLIMATE ACTION TASK FORCE MEETING

Meeting participants brainstormed using an online whiteboard regarding things the County can do to address climate change and its impacts on County employees and County residents. Meeting participants also broke into small groups to talk about potential implementation barriers and how to assess progress. These ideas are presented below.

Things The County Can Do to Address the Changing Climate and Its Impacts on COUNTY EMPLOYEES

Employee Commute

Support programs that help to support staff who use alternative commute options - incentives for car pooling, etc.

Continue to support "telecommuting" and remote meetings, both staff meetings and committee meetings. (*many people offered support for telecommuting.*)

County-supplied shuttles from BART to downtown Martinez to encourage carless commutes.

Employee Education

Have community recycling awareness week (bulbs, batteries, paints and aerosols).

For the web site include what the County is already doing. A graphical checklist for Contra Costa County the organization.

Continue to raise awareness with staff, the public and agencies we work with.

Electric Vehicles

Grants for employees to buy electric cars.

Increase charging stations.

Add charging stations to County building parking lots.

More prolific Charging Station distribution.

Install more car charging sites.

Open the charging stations at County facilities to public use.

Employee Retirement Fund

Ensure that CCCERA isn't invested in any fossil fuel companies, and they have a green investment strategy.

Employee Participation

Have drives by department to increase awareness for recycling bottles, batteries, etc.

Hold Department competitions annually on progress.

Create friendly competition with other counties about being more green. This would be similar to the County departmental competition for the holidays.

Visibly benchmark Contra Costa organization to other Bay Area Counties.

Dedicate Earth Day for County staff, on a volunteer basis, to go out and educate the community and importance of going green.

Reduce Solid Waste

Single-use plastic ban for County operations.

Incorporate County employee recycling/waste reduction best practices into onboarding training.

Include more types of paper in recycling program.

Continue to decrease paper use.

Let's go paperless! Eliminate paper driven workflows. Use electronic options.

Reduce storage space utilization to a greater degree.

Leadership

Support from senior management.

Fund the Sustainability Fund.

Communication

Use dept PIO's to be a group working on messaging, flyers, et.al.

Use the all-employee email system to send out green reminders (proper recycling, green purchasing, etc.).

County Facilities

Convert gas water heaters in County buildings to electric.

Increase solar panels/farms at other county locations ie parking lots etc when retrofitting buildings, install heat pumps to replace heating, air conditioning, and heating water.

Don't forget about strategies that help sequester carbon out of the atmosphere. We need to both decrease greenhouse gas emissions as well as enhance removal of those gases from the atmosphere. (The half-life of some of those gases in the atmosphere is over 100 years)

Things The County Can Do to Address the Changing Climate and Its Impacts On RESIDENTS

Land Use

Increase tree replacement and tree planting requirements in all residential development projects.

Keep open space growth at a minimum so it is not fueling fires.

Incentives to plant CA native and drought-tolerant plants for commercial and residential.

Education

Hold regular community fairs with lots of tables and displays from other residents with their innovative ideas in their homes.

Educate residents about existing programs.
Better messaging on the importance to conserve water and recycle waste.
infographic demonstrating the County's energy source breakdown and the average resident's energy source breakdown.
Solar panel testimonials from residents for residents.
Mandates to be more sustainable...otherwise people will think it is a choice.

County Services and Leadership

Be a model agency related to sustainability.
Add recycle receptacles throughout the County.
Consider green building projects as new facilities are built
Crack down on polluting companies and reward more sustainable ones.
Offer paperless systems for County Services.

Active Transportation

Add more bike lanes.
Start a public bike/scooter program,

Potential Barriers, Assessing Progress

The participants broke into small groups to discuss barriers that might prevent their own departments from moving to adopt the Best Practices from the Green Business Program, as well as ideas on how to assess progress. Key points are provided below.

- Waste Reduction (paper/plastic/electronic/electricity)
- Feasibility of implementation based on monetary constraints (just don't have the resources)
- Enthusiasm from staff within departments
- Concerns with practicality and effectiveness of "green" products (e.g. sanitation during COVID)
- Targeting electric vehicles, more charging as well as more electric fleet vehicles
- The challenge of "where to start?"
- Utilizing custodial staff, both for their knowledge, but also for implementation
- Identify metrics before the change happens; that way it can be accurately tracked
- Internal misalignments and lack of employee cooperation
- Require departmental report out
- Limited infrastructure (sprayer for sink to rinse containers, etc.)