

County of Santa Clara

Office of the County Executive

County Government Center, East Wing

Eleventh Floor – East Wing

70 West Hedding Street

San Jose, California 95110



DATE: April 12, 2022

TO: Honorable Members of the Board of Supervisors
Jeffrey V. Smith M.D, J.D., County Executive

FROM: Jasneet Sharma, Director, Office of Sustainability

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Jasneet Sharma
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SUBJECT: Update on Efforts to Establish a Santa Clara County Sustainability Commission

During the October 5, 2021 Board of Supervisors meeting (Item No. 12), at the request of Supervisor Lee, the Board directed the Administration and County Counsel to report to the Board at a date uncertain with options for considerations to establish a Santa Clara County Sustainability Commission to guide the County's efforts on climate change and sustainability, including implementation of the Sustainability Master Plan (SMP), and to designate two Commission seats to youth.

At the request of Supervisor Chavez, the Board directed the Administration to provide an off-agenda report to the Board on date uncertain relating to an analysis of the impact of the Commission on existing staff workloads in the Office of Sustainability and discussion of potential partnership with the Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE) relating to the formation of the Commission.

President Wasserman also requested that Administration report to the Board on next steps regarding completion of the SMP and whether the Commission will be a help or hindrance to the work currently performed by the Office of Sustainability (OOS).

This Off-Agenda Report responds to Supervisor Chavez's and Supervisor Wasserman's requests by providing an update on efforts to-date to identify potential courses of action for creation of a Santa Clara County Sustainability Commission, including research and informational interviews on sustainability commission models and best practices, initial partnership discussion with the SCCOE, analysis of the impact of the Commission on existing staff workloads in the OOS, and next steps on implementation.

Executive Summary

Based on conducted desktop research and informational interviews of jurisdictions with sustainability commissions, OOS found that the most effective sustainability commissions are the ones with:

- A well-defined model including purpose, commission structure, and commission roles and responsibilities;
- Alignment between the commission's workplan to advise on a specific body of work and set up to be complementary to other countywide initiatives; and
- Adequate staff for ongoing commission support, including staff liaisons from other key departments.

Due to the unique role and purview of a County-level Sustainability Commission, OOS is partnering with Stanford University to identify other county sustainability commissions and translate research and best practice findings from other jurisdictions to recommend options for a Santa Clara County Sustainability Commission. Additionally, OOS will continue to work with SCCOE on the commission structure to ensure youth accessibility and how best to engage and recruit youth to serve on the Sustainability Commission.

Given the portfolio of projects and current staff workloads, OOS currently has the bandwidth to analyze and present options together with County Counsel for the Sustainability Commission for the Board's consideration at a later time. The re-addition of the Program Manager II position in OOS that was deleted during the 2020 budget reduction process and funding has been proposed for inclusion in the 2022-2023 Recommended Budget. This will provide much-needed management-level staff capacity and resources for OOS to launch, recruit commission members, and staff the Commission.

Findings from Research and Informational Interviews

Over the last four months, OOS has conducted desktop research and held informational interviews with 10 jurisdictions that have sustainability commissions and/or environmental committees. Research started locally and then expanded across the Bay Area and nationally. The jurisdictions researched and interviewed thus far have included: City of Sunnyvale, City of Cupertino, City of Milpitas, City of Mountain View, City of Los Altos, Town of Los Altos Hills, City of San José, City of Menlo Park, Contra Costa County, and City of San Antonio (TX).

Early-stage findings suggest that successful sustainability commissions need to have a well-defined model including purpose, commission structure, and roles and responsibilities. Jurisdictions have structured commissions in a variety of forms, including by assigning seats by sector representation, area of expertise, or geography. The Sustainability Commission in its advisory capacity to both the Board and OOS will need to provide insight regarding a wide range of major or emerging program and policy initiatives related to sustainability and how to best engage residents and businesses on sustainability issues. Aligning the Sustainability Commission's workplan to initially advise on the implementation of the SMP will help to advance rather than hinder the current work of the Office of Sustainability. In the future, OOS will explore, in consultation with County Counsel, the feasibility of expanding the advisory role

to other bodies of work including the Community Climate Action Plan (CCAP) and General Plan.

Adequate staffing and funding are additional essential components of successful commissions, as it takes a significant amount of time to oversee the initial development and recruitment phase and provide ongoing staff support. Commissioners may also need regular trainings in sustainability and equity-related topics. Since sustainability initiatives span across multiple departments, other departments may also be asked to support specific aspects of the Commission's work.

The Sustainability Commission should also be structured to be complementary to other ongoing countywide initiatives, such as, the County Climate Collaborative (Collaborative), which was launched by OOS in 2021. The Collaborative is an informal network of public agencies, academia, nonprofit and community-based organizations, and business to advance regional solutions to climate change through coordination, partnerships, resource and expertise sharing, and funding. The Collaborative is also supporting the development of the County Climate Roadmap and the Santa Clara County Resilience Strategy for flooding and sea level rise. OOS is working with an ad-hoc workgroup and in consultation with County Counsel to develop the Collaborative governance structure.

Partnership with Stanford University

Of the 10 jurisdictions researched by OOS, Contra Costa County was the only government entity with a county-level sustainability commission. Recognizing the need for further research on sustainability commissions at the county scale, OOS is partnering with Stanford University's Office of Government Affairs and Office of Sustainability to identify additional county sustainability commissions and translate research and best practice findings from other jurisdictions for consideration as OOS and County Counsel work to recommend the best model for Santa Clara County to the Board. The three research questions being explored are:

- What are the different sustainability commission models (structure, roles, and responsibilities, etc.) currently being utilized? Key considerations to include:
 - Youth participation
 - Aspects of other counties' sustainability commissions, such as composition, focus, frequency of meetings.
- What are the key elements of a successful Sustainability Commission?
- What is the best approach for connecting a County Sustainability Commission to other sustainability/climate initiatives, e.g., the Countywide Climate Collaborative and existing local Sustainability Commissions?

Partnership with Santa Clara County Office of Education

In November 2021, OOS had an exploratory meeting with SCCOE to discuss potential collaboration opportunities including the County Climate Collaborative and Sustainability Commission. SCCOE expressed interest in partnering and shared its experiences in engaging with youth on other initiatives. OOS will continue to work with SCCOE on the commission structure to ensure youth accessibility and how best to engage and recruit youth to serve on the Sustainability Commission.

SMP Implementation and Workload Impact Analysis

Achieving the vision and goals of the SMP requires operationalizing a comprehensive system for internal coordination, capacity building and communications across County departments, integrating sustainability as a core function within departmental operations and supporting intradepartmental and countywide collaboration and solutions.

To achieve the County's vision for sustainability, OOS is leading and facilitating a diverse portfolio of ongoing time-intensive projects, including but not limited to, the SMP Management System; Carbon Neutrality for County operations; Community Climate Action Plan; County Climate Collaborative; Countywide Resiliency and Adaptation Planning for Flooding, Heat and Air Quality; Integrated Pest Management; Sustainable Purchasing; Food Systems Initiative; Regional Urban Forestry; Bay Area Regional Energy Network and the Green Business Network. In the coming months, OOS is also launching new initiatives focused on Business Resiliency, Carbon Sequestration, and Drought Management and Water Conservation.

Given current staff workloads, OOS has the capacity to conduct research and partner with County Counsel to present options for the Sustainability Commission for the Board's consideration; however, with the current staffing level OOS does not have the bandwidth to both launch, recruit commission members and staff the Commission. Based on findings from informational interviews, it would require a dedicated manager level position and up to 50 percent of a management analyst's time to support Commission operations and administration. Since establishing and staffing the Commission will require significant amount of time and effort from multiple staff, OOS would need additional staff and ongoing funding to successfully run the Sustainability Commission.

As part of the fiscal year 2022-2023 budget request, OOS has requested adding back the Program Manager II and Management Analyst positions that were deleted during the 2020 budget reduction process. Additionally, OOS is requesting funding to build capacity and provide technical assistance to departments on sustainability planning and policy initiatives and support implementation of the SMP, Sustainability Commission, and Climate Collaborative.

Next Steps:

In the near future, the OOS will:

- Collaborate with Stanford University on research to identify key elements of a successful Sustainability Commission and in consultation with County Counsel recommend to the Board the best model for a County Sustainability Commission model best suited to support implementation of the County's SMP and future sustainability initiatives;
- Engage with and solicit input from other County departments that are key implementors of the SMP actions;
- Together with County Counsel, propose and present in 2022 a model for the Sustainability Commission for the Board's consideration that complements the OOS' body of work including the County Climate Collaborative.

c: Chief Board Aides
Miguel Marquez, Chief Operating Officer

James R. Williams, County Counsel
Sylvia Gallegos, Deputy County Executive
Erica Kelly, Office of Budget and Analysis