



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

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CLERK OF THE BOARD  
OF SUPERVISORS

# COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

## BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

1600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY, ROOM 335, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101-2470

### AGENDA ITEM

**DATE:** May 5, 2021

**06**

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

**SUBJECT: FRAMEWORK FOR OUR FUTURE: RESTRUCTURING COUNTY DEPARTMENTS TO PRIORITIZE SUSTAINABILITY, NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT, AND EQUITY (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

#### **OVERVIEW**

The County of San Diego supports numerous natural resources and sustainability actions. These programs are currently dispersed and overseen by different departments, coordinated by the Land Use and Environment Group (LUEG) and Finance and General Government Group (FG3). This organizational structure for sustainability and natural resources efforts has worked in the past, but as more programs are implemented across the County enterprise, there arises a greater need for coordination. Further, new environmental justice and equity programs are being developed that require greater coordination.

Concern for the sustainability of our relationship with our environment has always and necessarily been a preoccupation of San Diegans. San Diego County is the most biodiverse county in the country and San Diegans grow up in intimate interaction with the natural world, spending summers on our beaches, hiking in our mountains, deserts, and canyons, riding bikes around our bays and horses in our foothills. We are also, however, uniquely vulnerable to environmental risks, including drought, flooding, and, above all, fire. With few natural freshwater lakes or aquifers, we are heavily dependent on water that falls as snow in the Sierra Nevada and the far-off Rocky Mountains and must be conveyed hundreds of miles to us in order to sustain our communities. The accumulation of greenhouse gases (GHGs) in our atmosphere and the associated global climate crisis is projected to significantly increase the severity of these and other environmental risks.

San Diegans have also historically chosen to build out into our open spaces, rather than up, with freeway-oriented suburban growth in perennial conflict with habitat preservation. As a result, issues of environmental sustainability and natural resource management have been implicitly or explicitly central to much of the County's decision-making, and the County has made these issues the object of explicit consideration and policy development.

Sustainability-related responsibilities are distributed throughout every department and staff position in the County. More formally, there are specifically designated departmental level (for example, Department of Environmental Health and Quality, Department of Parks and Recreation,

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and the San Diego County Fire Authority), manager level (including Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), Conservation, Climate Action Plan, and Sustainability within the LUEG Planning & Development Services (PDS)), program level (for example, the Energy and Sustainability Program in the Department of General Services), and cross-departmental (for example, the Electric Vehicle Roadmap which spans PDS and Department of General Services) units within the County that are mandated to fulfill sustainability-related responsibilities.

However, as vital as the work done by these units and by County staff more broadly is, the increasing ambition of our environmental, social, and economic sustainability goals necessitate some degree of institutional reorganization. In particular, the County’s sustainability work must be organized to advance the equity and environmental justice priorities historically neglected by our society.

Given the complexity of the challenges—and recognizing the wide variety of ways in which comparable jurisdictions have attempted to structure their sustainability efforts—the Board is asked to authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting, to award a contract to develop County sustainability actions, environmental justice, and natural resource management planning and implementation across the County enterprise and direct the Deputy Chief Administrative Officer (DCAO) to return to the Board within 270 days for Board decision. At that point in time, an implementation strategy will be considered and Board action taken towards implementation.

**RECOMMENDATION(S)**

**CHAIR NATHAN FLETCHER AND SUPERVISOR LAWSON-REMER**

1. Find that the proposed project is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines section 15060(c)(3) and 15378(b)(5).
2. In accordance with Section 401, Article XXIII of the County Administrative Code, authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting, pending approval of the Fiscal Year 2021-22 Operational Plan, to issue a competitive solicitation or solicitations for services to assess the capacity of the current organizational and staffing structure of departments across the County enterprise to achieve the County’s sustainability goals, consult with relevant stakeholders, and to propose organizational changes that maximize sustainability and equity, and promote comprehensive natural resource management, and upon successful negotiations and determination of a fair and reasonable price, award a contract or contracts and amend the contract(s) as needed to reflect changes to services and funding.
3. Direct the Deputy Chief Administrative Officer to return to the Board within 270 days with options and recommendations for Board consideration.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

Funds for this request are included in the Fiscal Year 2021 - 22 CAO Recommended Operational Plan in the Land Use and Environment Group Executive Office. If approved, this request will result in costs of \$150,000 and the funding source is prior year available General Fund fund balance. There will be no additional staff years.

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**BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT**

N/A

**ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT**

N/A

**BACKGROUND**

The County of San Diego's Land Use and Environment Group (LUEG) and Finance and General Government Group (FG3) support numerous natural resource and sustainability actions across the County. These programs include, but are not limited to, reduction of stormwater pollution, groundwater reduction efforts, the Climate Action Plan, the Electric Vehicle Roadmap, Direct Access (or other energy procurement programs), strategic planning to reduce waste, collaborating with farmers on agricultural conservation, conserving natural lands, and implementing the Multiple Species Conservation Plan (MSCP).

These programs are currently spread out among different County departments (e.g., Department of Public Works, Planning & Development Services, Department of Parks and Recreation, and Department of General Services). The increased prominence of sustainability in County policy and administration and the increase of sustainability-related programs across the County enterprise greatly increase the need for coordination. Furthermore, environmental justice and equity are priorities for the Board of Supervisors, and this action supports that effort.

To better prioritize and integrate these diverse sustainability activities, we are proposing to bring in an external consultant to analyze County departments engaged in sustainability, and provide recommendations for restructuring that would prioritize sustainability, comprehensive natural resources management, and equity. The objectives of the consultant would include identifying potential restructuring options, staffing and resource needs, and opportunities to elevate these priorities within the County, and. Additionally, methods of coordination and cross-department collaboration could be explored to ensure a streamlined approach across the County enterprise. An overarching objective should elevate community engagement and communications with the public, and to facilitate a coordinated and holistic approach to public engagement. We can also look to other jurisdictions on model approaches.

We also envision that new environmental priorities will take on added importance within this County. Environmental justice is a vitally important topic within San Diego County and the development of the Environmental Justice Element of the General Plan is one such new requirement that is encouraging us to rethink our current approach to rectifying environmental injustices. The Office of Equity and Racial Justice will ensure that all County departments are analyzed through an equity lens, and a similar approach within this effort could help ensure that environmental justice is a guiding priority across the County enterprise.

Another area of focus is on natural resources management. San Diego County is one of the most biodiverse regions in the world. We have allocated substantial funding and resources to create a strong and effective South County MSCP. Thousands of acres are now preserved in perpetuity. A

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new Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is currently being developed for the North County MSCP, following which, an East County MSCP will then be developed. Natural resources conservation and management is a critical focus of the Department of Parks and Recreation, and is aligned with our sustainability, climate action, and water conservation efforts. We can explore opportunities to integrate natural resources conservation and preservation across the enterprise.

Piecemeal divisional or departmental sustainability efforts may be inadequate or under-coordinated, but even purpose-built departments can have difficulty exercising the required authority over co-equal departments, and sustainability offices may have the authority to initiate campaigns without the dedicated staff to ensure ongoing adherence in daily operations. Developing an organizational structure to design and successfully implement and administer a comprehensive sustainability program requires carefully analyzing the recurrent challenges of sustainability planning, studying analogous efforts to overcome them, and applying those insights to the unique history, context, and prevailing conditions of a given jurisdiction and administrative body.

During this important leadership transition period within the County of San Diego, this proposed action would help ensure that all natural resources management, sustainability, and environmental justice issues are coordinated and elevated within the County.

Toward that end, the Board is asked to authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting to competitively procure and award a contract for a consultant to develop regionally and institutionally appropriate alternatives for the organization of County sustainability actions, environmental justice, and natural resource management planning and implementation and to direct the Deputy Chief Administrative Officer (DCAO) to return to the Board within 270 days for Board decision. At that point in time, an implementation strategy will be considered and Board action taken towards implementation.

**LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN**

Today's proposed action to explore options to restructure County departments to prioritize sustainability, natural resources management, and equity supports the Sustainable Environments/ Thriving Strategic Initiative in the 2021-2026 Strategic Plan by elevating and coordinating these various priorities across the County.

Respectfully submitted,



CHAIR NATHAN FLETCHER  
Supervisor, Fourth District



TERRA LAWSON-REMER  
Supervisor, Third District

**ATTACHMENT(S)**

N/A

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**AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION SHEET**

**REQUIRES FOUR VOTES:**  Yes  No

**WRITTEN DISCLOSURE PER COUNTY CHARTER SECTION 1000.1 REQUIRED**  
 Yes  No

**PREVIOUS RELEVANT BOARD ACTIONS:**

January 27, 2021 (3), directed the development for a regional zero carbon sustainability plan in partnership with the University of California San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy to achieve zero carbon in the region by 2035.

**BOARD POLICIES APPLICABLE:**

N/A

**BOARD POLICY STATEMENTS:**

N/A

**MANDATORY COMPLIANCE:**

N/A

**ORACLE AWARD NUMBER(S) AND CONTRACT AND/OR REQUISITION NUMBER(S):**

N/A

**ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT:** Districts Three and Four

**OTHER CONCURRENCE(S):** N/A

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