



Agenda Report

Item #: 26-441

Meeting Date: 10/20/2026

TITLE: CITY OF COSTA MESA SAFETY ELEMENT UPDATE (PCTY-25-0002), CLIMATE ACTION AND ADAPTATION PLAN (PCTY-25-0009), AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE POLICY REVIEW (PCTY-26-0002)

DEPARTMENT: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT / PLANNING DIVISION

**PRESENTED BY: AMBER GREGG, CONTRACT PROJECT MANAGER, AND
ANNA MCGILL, ADVANCED PLANNING MANAGER**

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RECOMMENDATION:

The Planning Commission recommends the City Council:

1. Find that the proposed Safety Element Update, Climate Action and Adaptation Plan, and Environmental Justice General Plan Policy Update are exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15061(b)(3), and, in addition, find that the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan is categorically exempt pursuant to CEQA Guidelines sections 15307 and 15308; and
2. Adopt a Resolution approving the Safety Element Update and Environmental Justice General Plan Policy Update.

In addition, staff recommends the City Council:

3. Adopt a Resolution approving the City of Costa Mesa Climate Action and Adaptation Plan.

BACKGROUND:

The City of Costa Mesa is advancing three coordinated long-range planning initiatives:

- **Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP)** - Costa Mesa's first comprehensive climate planning document, which establishes a long-range framework for reducing greenhouse gas emissions while preparing the community for anticipated climate-related conditions;
- **Safety Element Update** - Modernizes the City's General Plan policies related to natural and human-caused hazards, emergency preparedness, infrastructure resilience, and climate adaptation; and
- **Environmental Justice (EJ) Policy Update** - Identifies and strengthens policies addressing community health, environmental burdens, access to public facilities and services, infrastructure investment, and meaningful public participation.

The project was agendized for Council consideration at the regular September 15, 2026, City Council meeting. The City Council opened the public hearing, and with no individuals coming forward to speak, closed the public hearing and then continued the item to the regularly scheduled meeting of October 20, 2026.

Over the past several years, California has adopted legislation requiring local jurisdictions to address climate adaptation, natural hazards, emergency preparedness, and environmental justice through their General Plans and related planning documents. In addition, Costa Mesa's 2021–2029 Housing Element includes Program 2G, which commits the City to updating its Safety Element and incorporating EJ policies into the General Plan by December 2026. Separately, on October 14, 2024, the City Council authorized preparation of Costa Mesa's first CAAP.

Although the CAAP, Safety Element, and EJ Policies are separate documents, they rely on common technical information and address many related community issues. The City therefore coordinated preparation of the three documents to improve consistency, reduce duplication, and establish a more comprehensive policy framework. The table below identifies the purpose, requirement, and outcome of each document.

Table 1 – Documents Purpose, Requirements, and Outcome

Project	Primary Purpose	State Requirement	Primary Outcome
CAAP	Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and prepare for changing climate impacts	Although not required by state law, it supports state and local climate goals	Climate mitigation and adaptation strategies
Safety Element Update	Protect the community from natural and environmental hazards	Government Code section 65302(g), SB 379 and SB 1035	Updated General Plan safety policies consistent with the City's Local Hazard Mitigation Plan
EJ Policies	Promote healthy, equitable, and resilient communities	Government Code section 65302(h) (SB 1000)	Identifying existing EJ policies in the General Plan and new policies implementing state law

On July 27, 2026, the Planning Commission conducted a study session to receive an introduction to the purpose, technical foundation, policy framework, and relationship among the CAAP, Safety Element Update, and Environmental Justice General Plan Policy Update. Staff presented the technical analyses supporting the documents and explained how the three planning efforts work together to address greenhouse gas reduction, climate adaptation, hazard mitigation, emergency preparedness, and Environmental Justice.

The Commission expressed overall support for the direction of the three initiatives and provided recommendations for refinement prior to the public hearing.

For the CAAP, Planning Commission comments included:

- Bringing key near-term implementation priorities more prominently into the body of the CAAP;
- Providing greater visibility to quantitative greenhouse gas reduction information contained in Appendix D;
- Clarifying how the City would respond if individual CAAP actions are not pursued or do not achieve anticipated results; and
- Providing for continued monitoring, reporting, and periodic review of implementation.

For the Environmental Justice policies, the Commission recommended additional emphasis on:

- Improving access to healthy food, including farmers markets and urban agriculture opportunities in or near Environmental Justice communities;
- Prioritizing recycling education programs serving Environmental Justice communities; and
- Prioritizing cooling centers and emergency service response facilities within Environmental Justice and/or underserved communities when opportunities arise.

On August 10, 2026, the Planning Commission conducted a duly noticed public hearing to consider the revised draft documents and recommendations to the City Council. Staff presented the revisions completed since the July 27, 2026 Study Session, summarized public comments received during the formal review period, and described how the documents had been refined in response to Planning Commission and community input. Following public testimony and Commission discussion, the Planning Commission adopted a resolution recommending that the City Council approve the Safety Element Update and Environmental Justice General Plan Policy Update. The Planning Commission is not a formal decision body for the CAAP; however, they were presented with the CAAP for information and discussion purposes, and modifications were made based on their feedback.

The documents before the City Council incorporate the revisions presented to and recommended by the Planning Commission, together with final technical and editorial refinements necessary to prepare the documents for adoption. For additional information on these topics please refer to the Study Session and Planning Commission hearing Agenda Reports provided below.

July 27, 2026, Study Session Agenda Report:

<https://costamesa.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=8144196&GUID=A28F54A5-01D9-497A-B1B2-503B19901944&Options=&Search=>

July 27, 2026, Study Session Minutes:

<https://costamesa.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=M&ID=1429415&GUID=D14C456A-C716-444D-B92A-5460E080F1C8>

August 10, 2026, Planning Commission Agenda Report:

<https://costamesa.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=8164831&GUID=02EE162C-3034-4149-86E9-A807B83CAC23&Options=&Search=>

On September 1, 2026, the City Council approved a General Plan Amendment to amend the Sixth Cycle Housing Element (2021-2029) to add additional Housing Element Opportunity Sites needed to maintain Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) capacity, and adopt associated revisions.

These associated revisions included the EJ policies incorporated into the Housing Element and as a result, the Housing Element is not included in the proposed amendments for this item.

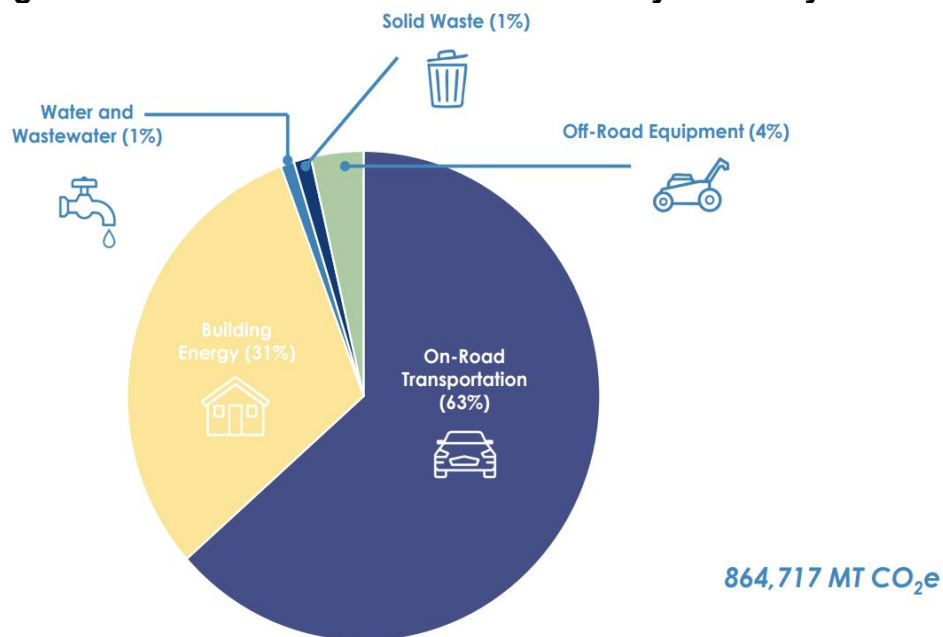
ANALYSIS:

Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP)

Preparation of the CAAP included a comprehensive greenhouse gas inventory, emissions forecast, climate vulnerability assessment, and implementation strategy. Together, these analyses identify the City's largest sources of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, evaluate anticipated climate-related hazards, and provide the technical basis for practical and measurable implementation actions within the City's authority.

GHG Inventory and Emissions Forecast

Figure 1 – Costa Mesa 2023 GHG Community Inventory Baseline

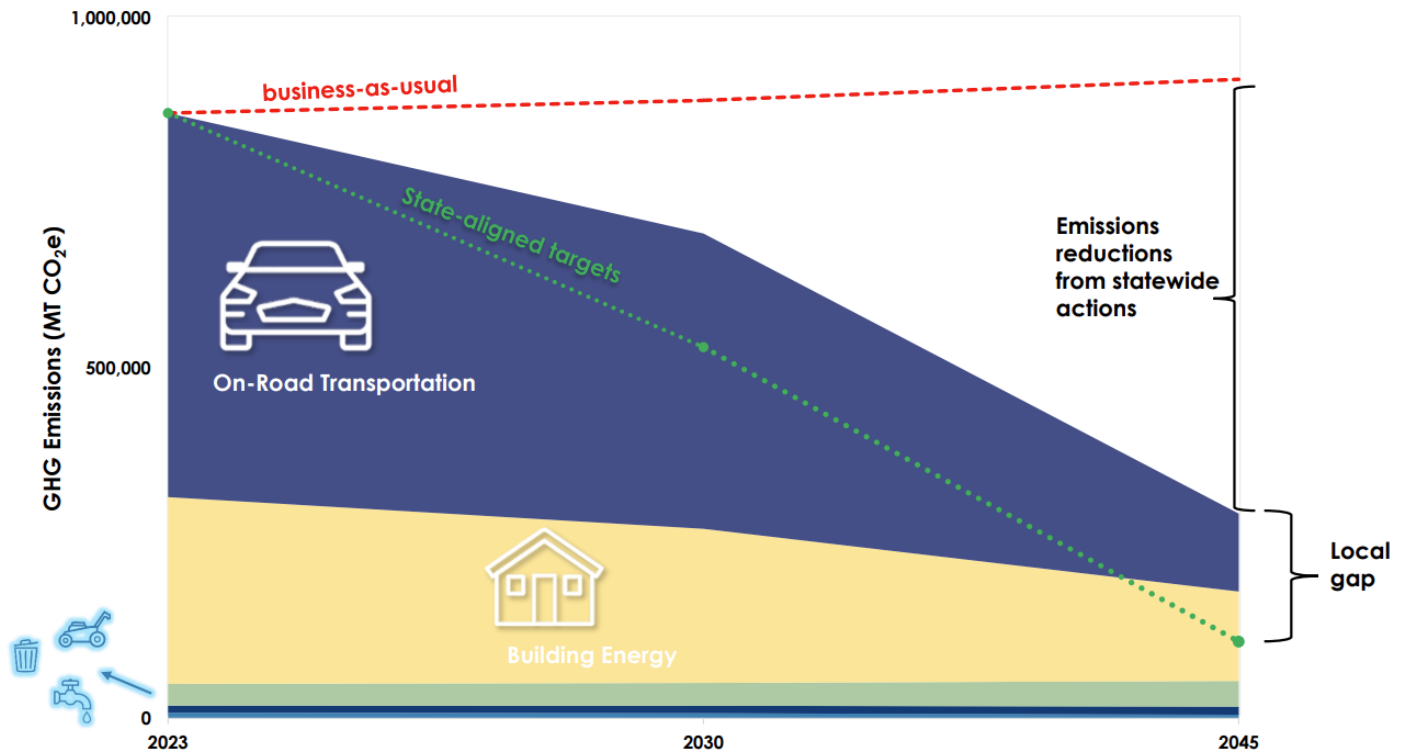


The GHG inventory determined that on-road transportation is Costa Mesa's largest source of communitywide GHG emissions, accounting for approximately 63% of total emissions. Building energy is the second largest source at approximately 31%, while emissions from off-road equipment, solid waste, and water and wastewater collectively account for the remaining 6%. These findings indicate that the greatest opportunities for reducing community GHG emissions are through improvements in transportation and mobility, increased building energy efficiency, renewable energy, and continued investment in sustainable municipal operations and community programs.

The emissions forecast further demonstrates that existing state regulations and programs, including cleaner vehicle standards, renewable electricity requirements, and building energy regulations, are expected to substantially reduce community emissions over time. However, the analysis also identifies the remaining local emissions gap to reduce local GHG to 85% by 2045 (per AB 1279) cannot be

closed through state actions alone. The CAAP, therefore, identifies locally appropriate implementation actions intended to complement statewide efforts and further reduce GHG emissions over the next 20 years, helping the state reach carbon neutrality by 2045. Should the City wish to strive for carbon neutrality in the future, strict regulations and reach codes would need to be developed and implemented.

Figure 2 – Costa Mesa Forecasted GHG Emissions



Climate Vulnerability Assessment

The CAAP includes a Climate Vulnerability Assessment that evaluates the City's exposure to climate-related hazards, including extreme heat, drought, flooding, changing precipitation patterns, poor air quality, and wildfire smoke, while also considering community characteristics that may influence vulnerability to these hazards.

Based on the assessment, the CAAP includes adaptation strategies intended to strengthen public infrastructure, improve emergency preparedness, expand urban tree canopy and shade, promote water conservation, protect vulnerable populations, and incorporate resilience into future planning, capital improvement projects, and municipal operations. The combined mitigation and adaptation approach distinguishes a Climate Action and Adaptation Plan from a traditional Climate Action Plan by addressing not only how the City can reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but also how Costa Mesa can prepare for climate conditions that may occur over the coming decades.

CAAP Framework

The CAAP establishes a coordinated framework for reducing community-wide greenhouse gas emissions and improving Costa Mesa's resilience to climate-related hazards. The CAAP is organized around eight sectors that address both community-wide emissions and municipal operations:

Figure 3 – CAAP Sectors



Consistent with previous City Council direction, the CAAP emphasizes practical implementation strategies through municipal leadership, incentives, education, partnerships, infrastructure investment, grant funding, and voluntary community participation. The Plan does not directly regulate private property or require individual residents or businesses to undertake specific improvements.

The primary objectives and implementation actions include:

- **Transportation and Mobility:** Expand electric vehicle charging infrastructure; support the transition to zero-emission vehicles; improve sidewalks, bicycle facilities, and active transportation connections; reduce single-occupancy vehicle trips; improve transit access; and support land use patterns that reduce vehicle travel.
- **Energy and the Built Environment:** Improve building energy efficiency; promote renewable and carbon-free energy; encourage energy conservation; support electrification where feasible; and improve the efficiency of municipal buildings and facilities.
- **Water and Wastewater:** Promote water conservation, drought-resilient landscaping, stormwater management, recycled water opportunities, and coordination with local water providers.
- **Solid Waste:** Support waste prevention, reuse, recycling, composting, organic-waste diversion, and public education to reduce material sent to landfills.

- **Off-Road Equipment:** Encourage the transition to lower- and zero-emission construction, landscaping, and other off-road equipment through education, incentives, partnerships, and equipment-replacement opportunities.
- **Natural and Urban Lands:** Expand and maintain the urban tree canopy, increase shade, reduce urban heat-island effects, support habitat and open space, and increase carbon sequestration where feasible.
- **People and Community:** Improve public awareness and preparedness for extreme heat, drought, flooding, poor air quality, wildfire smoke, and other climate-related hazards; support vulnerable populations; and strengthen community and regional partnerships.
- **Municipal Operations:** Lead by example through energy- and water-efficient City facilities, fleet and equipment modernization, waste reduction, sustainable purchasing and operations, grant pursuits, and ongoing implementation monitoring.

Although organized by sector, many CAAP actions provide multiple benefits. For example, expanding tree canopy can reduce heat exposure, improve air quality, increase shade, support habitat, and sequester carbon. Improvements to walking, bicycling, and transit can reduce emissions while improving mobility, public health, safety, and access to community resources.

Co-Benefits and Fiscal Benefits

Many CAAP actions can also reduce long-term operating and maintenance costs, improve the efficiency of City facilities and infrastructure, enhance public safety, and leverage outside funding. Costa Mesa's prior sustainability initiatives demonstrate these potential benefits. For example, the City's conversion of approximately 6,150 streetlights to energy-efficient LED fixtures is projected to save approximately \$1.63 million in electricity costs over the first 20 years and approximately \$204,443 annually thereafter. The project also reduces maintenance needs and improves nighttime visibility and public safety. LED lighting upgrades at TeWinkle, Wakeham, Heller, and Bark parks provide an additional estimated \$5,694 in annual energy-cost savings while reducing maintenance demands.

The City has also successfully used grants, rebates, and partnerships to reduce local project costs. Examples include \$148,210 in grant funding; a \$70,000 rebate for the City Hall electric vehicle charging project; \$25,670 toward the purchase of three electric municipal vehicles; and \$180,000 toward a zero-emission shuttle for the Senior Center. These projects illustrate how sustainability investments can improve municipal operations, enhance public services, reduce long-term costs, and position the City to compete for future funding opportunities.

Safety Element Update

The General Plan Safety Element establishes the City's long-term policies for protecting residents, businesses, property, public infrastructure, and essential services from natural and human-caused hazards. State law requires jurisdictions to periodically review and update their Safety Elements to reflect current hazard information and planning requirements. The City's 2021-2029 Housing Element also includes Program 2G, which commits the City to completing an update of the Safety Element by December 2026.

Since adoption of Costa Mesa's current Safety Element, State law has expanded the issues that must be addressed. Senate Bill 379 requires cities to evaluate how climate change may affect future hazards and incorporate climate adaptation and resilience strategies into the Safety Element. Senate Bill 1035 requires periodic review and revision of Safety Elements using updated flood, fire, and other hazard information.

A key component of the update is improved coordination with the City's 2022 Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP). The LHMP provides the City's most current assessment of hazards and vulnerabilities and identifies mitigation actions intended to reduce risks to life, property, infrastructure, and essential services. It addresses hazards including flooding, earthquakes, severe weather, drought, extreme heat, wildfire, and hazardous materials incidents. Because the LHMP contains the City's most current hazard information, it served as a primary technical foundation for the Safety Element Update. A copy of the LHMP is provided below:

City of Costa Mesa Local Hazard Mitigation Plan

<https://www.costamesaca.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/52032/637992796596200000>

The Safety Element and LHMP serve complementary purposes. The LHMP focuses on hazard identification, emergency management, and mitigation actions, while the Safety Element incorporates this information into the General Plan and establishes the City's broader, long-term policy framework for addressing hazards through land use planning, infrastructure investment, emergency preparedness, and City programs.

The update also incorporates climate vulnerability and adaptation information developed through the CAAP. Together, the documents provide a coordinated framework:

- The LHMP identifies existing hazards and mitigation strategies;
- The CAAP evaluates future climate-related risks and adaptation strategies; and
- The Safety Element incorporates applicable findings into the City's long-range General Plan policies.

Following the July 27, 2026, Planning Commission Study Session, additional revisions were made to strengthen coordination with the City's Environmental Justice policies, including prioritizing public information and education regarding extreme heat and cooling centers within Environmental Justice communities and prioritizing opportunities for cooling centers and emergency service response facilities within Environmental Justice and/or underserved neighborhoods.

Environmental Justice (EJ) General Plan Policy Update

Senate Bill 1000 requires qualifying jurisdictions to address EJ within their General Plans. EJ planning is intended to reduce disproportionate environmental and health burdens experienced by certain communities while improving access to public facilities, healthy food, physical activity, safe and sanitary housing, and opportunities for meaningful participation in local decision-making.

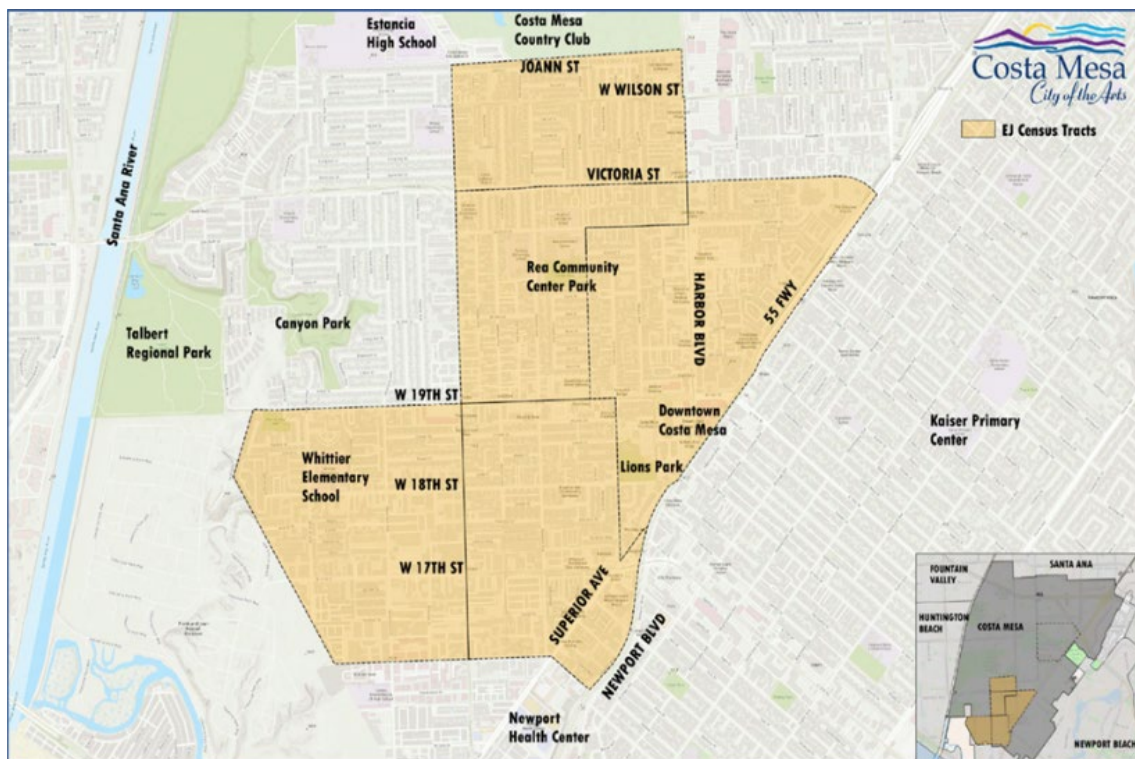
The City's 2021-2029 Housing Element includes Program 2G, which commits the City to reviewing and updating its General Plan to address EJ requirements by December 2026. As part of this effort, the City conducted a comprehensive review of its existing General Plan to determine the extent to which current goals and policies already address EJ topics required by State law.

The review found that Costa Mesa's General Plan already contains numerous policies that support EJ objectives. Rather than creating a separate EJ Element, the proposed update builds upon the City's existing policy framework by identifying applicable policies throughout the General Plan and proposing targeted amendments and new policies where additional direction is needed. Required EJ policy topics include:

- | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Reduce Pollution Exposure | 2. Provide Safe & Sanitary Homes |
| 3. Enhance Community Assets | 4. Increase Physical Activity |
| 5. Access to Healthy Foods | 6. Address Compounded Health Risks |
| 7. Promote Civic Engagement | |

As part of the analysis, the City utilized State maps for identifying Environmental Justice communities. The maps are typically updated annually and currently include six census tracts within Costa Mesa, which are identified as Environmental Justice communities.

Figure 4 – EJ Census Track Maps





Identification as an EJ community does not change a property's zoning or General Plan land use designation, create new development restrictions, or impose requirements on individual property owners. Instead, the designation provides a planning tool that can help the City better understand where environmental and socioeconomic burdens may overlap and consider those conditions when conducting outreach, developing programs, pursuing grant funding, and prioritizing future public investments.

The proposed General Plan amendments strengthen existing policies related to community health, mobility, parks and recreation, public services, infrastructure, and community participation. Key areas of emphasis include improving access to parks and recreational opportunities; expanding tree canopy and shade; improving walking, bicycling, and transit connections; supporting access to healthy food; reducing pollution exposure where feasible; and encouraging meaningful participation by residents who have historically been underrepresented in local planning processes.

Existing and proposed policies that serve an EJ purpose will be identified with the symbol below, making them easier to locate and track throughout the General Plan.

Figure 4: Symbol to identify Environmental Justice Policies

Following the July 27, 2026, Planning Commission Study Session, the proposed policies were further refined in response to Commission direction. Revisions include:

- Prioritizing and promoting urban agriculture opportunities, including community gardens and farmers markets, within or readily accessible to Environmental Justice communities;
- Prioritizing recycling education programs serving Environmental Justice communities; and
- Strengthening coordination with the Safety Element by prioritizing extreme heat education, cooling centers, and opportunities for emergency service response facilities within Environmental Justice and/or underserved communities.

A complete reference guide list of the proposed new and amended policies is provided under Attachment 6. Note, the Housing Element chapter is included in this reference guide for informational purposes only as it was adopted on September 1, 2026, and therefore is not included in this item's proposed amendments.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The City implemented a comprehensive public engagement program consisting of community outreach events, public workshops, stakeholder meetings (internal and external), surveys, digital engagement, and targeted outreach to gather input throughout the planning process. Key public engagement activities included:

- Three community pop-up outreach events were held: the 2025 and 2026 Earth Day events and a 2025 Concert in the Park. These events generated approximately 400 community contacts, including:
 - Approximately 150 visitors at the 2025 Earth Day event, with over 65 participants providing direct feedback,
 - 40 participants at the 2025 Concert in the Park outreach event, and
 - Over 200 participants at the 2026 Earth Day event.

- Survey: 226 community members participated in the survey, with 158 fully completing the online surveys, regarding transportation, energy, water conservation, solid waste, and climate resilience priorities.
- Employee Engagement: Multiple internal Sustainability Working Group meetings and staff collaboration sessions were conducted with representatives from City departments to identify operational opportunities, implementation strategies, and climate priorities.
- External Focus Group: Representatives from the development community, utilities, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, and community advocacy groups participated in a stakeholder workshop to identify implementation opportunities, barriers, and partnership strategies.
- Joint CAAP and Environmental Justice Open House: Approximately 30 community members attended the April 30, 2026 open house, resulting in 37 written comments and 80 prioritization votes on proposed goals and implementation strategies.
- Additional Targeted Outreach: Staff provided a presentation and workshop with the Coastline Regional Occupational Program Sustainability Cohort, site visits with Mesa Water District and Orange County Water District, maintained a dedicated project website, distributed e-blasts and City Hall Snapshot newsletters (reaching more than 10,000 subscribers), utilized social media, and posted informational flyers throughout the community.

Community feedback consistently emphasized improving active transportation, expanding tree canopy and green space, increasing renewable energy opportunities, enhancing water conservation, supporting vulnerable populations, and ensuring implementation strategies are practical, equitable, and financially feasible. Input received throughout the outreach process directly informed refinement of the proposed CAAP and EJ policies.

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION

In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the state CEQA Guidelines, the proposed Safety Element Update, Climate Action and Adaptation Plan, and Environmental Justice Policies are exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15061(b)(3) (Common Sense Exemption), as it can be seen with certainty that adoption of these policy documents will not result in a direct or reasonably foreseeable significant effect on the environment. The proposed documents establish goals, policies, and implementation strategies related to hazard mitigation, climate adaptation, greenhouse gas reduction, emergency preparedness, and community resilience, but do not authorize or approve any specific development or physical improvements.

In addition, the CAAP is also categorically exempt pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15307 (Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of Natural Resources) and section 15308 (Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment) as they are regulatory actions intended to protect and enhance the environment and natural resources through climate action, hazard mitigation, sustainability, and resilience planning. Furthermore, none of the exceptions to the categorical exemptions set forth in CEQA Guidelines section 15300.2 apply to the proposed actions, as the adoption of these planning and policy documents will not result in cumulative environmental impacts, impacts to scenic highways, hazardous waste sites, historical resources, or any unusual circumstances that could cause a significant effect on the environment. Any future projects or physical improvements resulting from implementation of these plans will be subject to separate environmental

review, as required by CEQA.

ALTERNATIVES:

City Council alternatives including the following:

1. Approve the documents with modifications. The City Council may identify specific modifications to one or more of the proposed documents and adopt them as modified.
2. Provide additional direction and continue the item. The City Council may request additional information or revisions and continue consideration to a future meeting.
3. Not approve one or more of the proposed documents. The City Council may elect not to approve the CAAP and/or Safety Element and Environmental Justice updates. The CAAP is not required by State law; however, the Safety Element and Environmental Justice updates are required to address applicable State requirements and the City's Housing Element implementation commitments.

FISCAL REVIEW:

Adoption of the CAAP, Safety Element Update, and Environmental Justice General Plan Policy Update does not itself authorize expenditures for individual implementation projects or programs. The CAAP identifies potential implementation actions that will occur over time and may involve future City work programs, capital improvements, grants, partnerships, incentives, or other expenditures. Individual actions will remain subject to available funding, staffing, technical feasibility, applicable procurement and environmental requirements, and future City Council authorization when required. The CAAP is also intended to position the City to pursue outside funding and partnership opportunities that may assist with implementation.

LEGAL REVIEW:

The proposed Resolutions and this report have been reviewed and approved as to form by the City Attorney's Office.

PUBLIC NOTICE:

Pursuant to Government Code section 65854(a), a public notice was published once in the Daily Pilot newspaper on September 4, 2026, exceeding the minimum 10 days prior to the September 15, 2026, public hearing. At the September 15, 2026 meeting, the item was continued to a date certain on October 20, 2026.

Any public comments received for the October 20, 2026 City Council meeting, may be viewed at this link: [CITY OF COSTA MESA - Calendar \(legistar.com\)](https://legistar.com/CITY_OF_COSTA_MESA_Calendar)

CITY COUNCIL GOALS AND PRIORITIES:

The proposed CAAP, Safety Element Update, and EJ General Plan Policy Update support the following City Council-adopted goals:

- ***Advance environmental sustainability and climate resiliency*** - by establishing strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, prepare for changing climate conditions, conserve resources, and strengthen community resilience.
- ***Strengthen the public's safety and improve the quality of life*** - by updating policies addressing natural and climate-related hazards, emergency preparedness, infrastructure resilience, community health, and Environmental Justice.

The coordinated planning effort also supports the City's core values of Sustainability, Innovation, Inclusion, and Collaboration through long-range planning, community engagement, and partnerships focused on creating a safe, inclusive, and resilient Costa Mesa.

CONCLUSION:

The draft CAAP, Safety Element Update, and EJ General Plan Policies Update documents represent the culmination of a comprehensive planning effort involving technical analysis, interdepartmental coordination, stakeholder collaboration, and extensive public engagement. Together, these documents establish an integrated framework to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, prepare for the impacts of climate change, strengthen emergency preparedness and community resilience, protect public health and safety, and ensure that environmental benefits and investments are considered throughout Costa Mesa.