



CAL Planner

JULY - AUGUST 2007



To respond to global warming, cities and counties will need to formulate more effective general plan policies to — among many other strategies — promote mixed-use infill development, mass transit, the use of low- and zero-emission vehicles and the planting of street trees.

How Should General Plans Deal With Global Warming?

by *Niko Letunic*

By now, the outlines of the debate on global warming are well-established: the earth's average temperature has been rising in recent decades; the main cause of this warming is emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs) from human activities; and the warming could have severe consequences within several decades unless GHG emissions are significantly reduced. Faced with these facts, California's governor signed into law Assembly Bill 32, the "Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006," last September. AB 32 formally commits the state to reduce its GHG emissions to 1990 levels by 2020 through an

enforceable statewide emissions cap.

With the passage of AB 32, attention in the fight against global warming in California has effectively shifted to local government. This year, in April, three environmental organizations sued the County of San Bernardino for not addressing global warming in its newly approved general plan. Significantly, the lawsuit was joined two days later by the California Office of the Attorney General. The lawsuit is the first of its kind in the state, and probably the nation, but almost certainly will not be the last.

continued on page 4

Inside This Issue . . .

California Planning Foundation Auction	2
Commissioner's Corner	3
In Memory: Warren J. Jones	6
Letter to the Editor	7
Penfield & Smith Celebrate 60 Years	7
Legislative Update	8
HDR Purchases Assets of The Hoyt Company	9
Best Efforts: Meeting California's Affordable Housing Needs	10
StaR Announces AICP Certification Maintenance Subsidy Program	11
2007 CCAPA Conference	12
Job Opportunities	14
Planners On the Move	15

Possibly no other level of government has a greater responsibility to respond to global warming than cities and, to a lesser extent, counties.

Global Warming

The suit argues that the county's general plan violates AB 32 and CEQA by, respectively, failing to consider ways to reduce GHG emissions and to evaluate the plan's impacts on global warming. The county has responded that the general plan, including its environmental review, was nearly complete by the time AB 32 was signed and that the state has not yet developed regulations for the implementation of AB 32 by local government agencies. (The latest version of the *General Plan Guidelines* was published by the Governor's Office of Planning and Research in 2003, well before global warming had become a mainstream concern; for that reason, the current edition does not mention the issue, let alone provide guidance for how it should be addressed in general plans.)

At the time of this writing, the fate of the lawsuit is far from certain. What is certain, however — even if the suit is decided in favor of the county — is that the pressure on California cities and counties to address global warming in their general plans is only going to grow as the state's residents become increasingly informed and concerned about the issue. However, with little or no direction from the state on how to do so, cities and counties who are updating their plans will likely need to fend for themselves over the next few years.

This article aims to begin to fill this "guidance deficit" by outlining the most important considerations related to global warming that cities and counties should give attention to when updating their plans. The considerations are not new or specific to global warming, and much has already been written elsewhere about implementing each one of them (the *General Plan Guidelines* actually covers many of them). Instead, the purpose of this article is to offer a framework through which separate and sometimes unrelated issues related to

global warming can be brought together in the context of a general plan.

It is important to note that, concerning global warming, cities and counties should have at least three distinct goals:

1. Reduce the emissions of GHG within their jurisdictions (that is, their contribution to global warming).
2. Counteract the effects of global warming.
3. Protect their residents from the adverse effects of global warming.

All of these goals should be reflected in the policies of a general plan and, accordingly, all are addressed below. With the exception of the noise element, which has minimal relation to global warming, policies and programs concerning global warming should be addressed across the various mandatory elements of a General Plan, as follows:

- **Land Use Element.** With regard to land use, the most important actions that cities and counties can take to shrink their global warming "footprint" are to develop and implement general plan policies that discourage auto-dependent sprawl development and, instead, promote infill development that is compact, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly, and transit-oriented.
- **Circulation Element.** The transportation sector is the single greatest contributor to global warming. Mirroring the land-use policy recommendations above, circulation-related policies should discourage travel by single-occupant motor vehicles (including reducing parking requirements) and, instead, encourage the use of mass transit and other high-occupancy vehicles, bicycling and walking, and telecommuting. More aggressive

Global Warming

continued from page 4

actions may be considered, including congestion pricing and even the removal of roadway and parking capacity for single-passenger motor vehicles.

- **Housing Element.** One of the housing element’s primary considerations should be focused on improving the community’s jobs/housing balance, in order to reduce commuting. In addition, this element can support land use policies by also encouraging higher-density residential development.
- **Conservation Element.** Overlooked in some general plans (especially those of more-urban jurisdictions), this element stands to gain prominence as awareness of the causes and effects of global warming. Policies in the conservation element should promote energy and resource efficiency in both transportation and all building types as well as encourage the development of renewable energy. Global warming is expected to worsen the incidence of droughts, so policies should address water efficiency, conservation, and recycling; the protection of ground and surface sources of drinking water; and the development of new water supplies. Since global warming is also likely to have adverse effects on vulnerable plant and animal species, policies should address the preservation of natural habitats, both aquatic and terrestrial.
- **Open Space Element.** This element can reinforce conservation policies that seek to protect natural habitats and sources of drinking water and groundwater-recharge areas. Since some research indicates that the most effective way to counteract the effects of global warming is to increase an area’s vegetated groundcover, policies in this element

should address the protection of forests and woodlands and the expansion of urban parks and street-tree programs.

- **Safety Element.** This is another overlooked element that is likely to gain in importance. Expected effects of global warming include greater risks of wildfires and flooding, including from rising sea levels. The safety element can protect residents from these effects by incorporating policies that restrict development in the wildland/urban interface, along shorelines and on floodplains.

Possibly no other level of government has a greater responsibility to respond to global warming than cities and, to a lesser extent, counties. By some estimates, urbanized areas cover one percent of the earth’s surface but contribute 80 percent of greenhouse gases; at the same time, urbanized areas are home to the vast majority of Americans. Fortunately, the comprehensive, integrated, and long-range nature of a general plan makes it an ideal vehicle for implementing a community’s goals related to global warming.

In closing, it is important to note that almost all general plans already address most of the considerations mentioned above. However, the possibility of serious adverse effects resulting from global warming implies that cities and counties need to develop even more effective policies and programs and to implement them more aggressively.

Niko Letunic is a founding partner of Eisen|Letunic, a Bay Area-based transportation, environmental, and urban planning firm. He encourages readers to contact him with questions and comments about this article at niko@eisenletunic.com.

CalPlanner Production Schedule

Issue	Articles Submitted	Mailed*
Nov/Dec	Sept 10	Oct 22

* Membership will receive magazine within 10 working days after this date, on average. Dates subject to change without notice.