

Senate Bill 379

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land use: general plan: safety element: climate adaptation

Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson

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SUMMARY

Under current law, every city and county must adopt a general plan with seven mandatory elements: land use, circulation, housing, conservation, open space, noise, and safety.

SB 379 would require cities and counties to include climate adaptation and resiliency strategies in the safety elements of their general plans upon the next revision of their housing elements beginning January 1, 2017. The bill would require the climate adaptation update to include a set of goals, policies, and objectives for their communities.

BACKGROUND

Except for the housing element, the Planning and Zoning Law does not require counties and cities to regularly revise their general plans. Cities' and counties' major land use decisions—subdivisions, zoning, public works projects, use permits—must be consistent with their general plans.

Climate change may well be the foremost challenge of our time—and it is already having a significant and measurable impact on California's environment. An August 2013 report by California's Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment entitled "Indicators of Climate Change in California," tracks 36 indicators of climate change and its effects and shows that climate change is occurring throughout California, including impacts to the coast, the Central Valley and the Sierra Nevada Mountains. These impacts include decreasing spring snowmelt runoff, rising sea levels, shrinking glaciers, increasing wildfires, warming lakes and oceans, and the gradual migration of many plants and animals to higher elevations.

There are many efforts under way in California by the administration and state agencies to address climate change. For example, in July 2014, the California Natural Resources Agency, in coordination with other state agencies, updated its 2009 California Climate

Adaptation Strategy, now called the "Safeguarding California Plan." This Plan is designed to provide policy guidance for state decision makers in nine specific areas. In July 2012, the Governor's Office of Emergency Services, the California Natural Resources Agency, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency released the "California Adaptation Planning Guide" for use by local communities to address climate change impacts. Further examples include the California Coastal Commission's recent release of its draft Sea Level Rise Policy Guidance and there is the expectation that the Governor's Office of Planning and Research will soon release revised General Plan Guidelines that will include climate adaptation.

California has become the national leader on efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, but much work still needs to be done at the state, regional, and local levels to adapt to the effects of climate change impacting California.

While some cities and counties have been proactive in addressing climate change adaptation in their local planning efforts, many have not. There is no requirement in current law that they consider climate adaptation as part of their general plan process as they plan for the future.

SOLUTION - SB 379

SB 379 would require cities and counties to review and update the safety elements of their general plans to address climate adaptation and resiliency strategies applicable to their localities the next time they are required to update the housing elements of their general plans beginning January 1, 2017, based on the most current information available. It also requires them to include a set of goals, policies and objectives and specified feasible implementation measures based on this information. SB 379 further provides that if a city or county has already adopted a climate change plan separate from the general plan that contains the information required by this bill, it can be attached by reference.

SB 379 is a natural follow-up to, and builds on the requirements of, AB 162 (Wolk, Ch. 369, Stats. of 2007) which added flood protection information and SB 1241 (Kehoe, Ch. 311, Stats. of 2012) which added fire protection information to the safety elements of general plans. It will help ensure that cities and counties are providing for the safety and protection of their communities in the future by including climate adaptation and resiliency strategies as part of the safety elements of their general plans.

SUPPORT

STATUS

Referred to the Sen. Governance and Finance and Sen. Environmental Quality Committees.

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