

8.0 POLICIES ON SUSTAINABILITY

8.1 SUSTAINABILITY (Adopted 4-27-10; Amended 6-22-21)

The County of Santa Clara is committed to working towards building a livable, equitable and resilient community by reducing climate pollution, adapting to a changing global climate, enhancing natural resources and the environment, fostering a prosperous and just regional economy, and meeting the needs of current and future generations to ensure all people have equitable opportunities to reach their full potential.

Whole-Systems Approach and Equity

The County applies a whole systems approach that addresses the core elements of sustainability (economy, environment, and equity) to fulfill the needs of today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. The County is committed to addressing disparities caused by a long history of systemic discrimination to improve outcomes for all, and will build the infrastructure to apply an equity framework across its programs, services, and policies to address inequities and its root causes, including but not limited to those caused by systemic racism.

The County's sustainability mission is achieved through public policy, programs, and advocacy to support and promote actions across four priority areas:

- **Climate Protection and Defense**

The County works to combat climate change by accelerating approaches to become carbon neutral through transportation and commutes strategies, fossil-fuel free energy systems and buildings, smart growth, zero waste solutions, low carbon agriculture and ecology practices, and improving preparedness and capacity of all community members to adapt and persist through natural disasters, shocks, and stressors.

- **Natural Resources and the Environment**

The County strives to maintain a healthy environment; provide access to parks, open spaces, clean air and water; enhance and protect natural habitats and working lands to provide environmental, economic, and health benefits for all community members and businesses and promote stewardship and responsible resource management.

- **Community Health and Well-Being**

The County strives to improve the overall health and well-being of County employees and residents by reducing differences in health outcomes among population groups; working to ensure all are supported in getting their basic needs of housing, healthcare, food, and education met, and enhancing civic participation, leadership, and engagement of all.

- **Prosperous and Just Economy**

The County seeks to build financial security and prosperity for all through education, workforce training, and living wage job opportunities; a diversified and green economy through local hiring and small and minority business support; and procurement, investments and partnerships that advance sustainability and empower sustainability practitioners.

Providing Balance

The interrelationships among the four priority areas are more important than any one area. The County will pursue a thoughtful, balanced approach when interests compete and the commitment of the County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors to a sustainable future shall be reflected in public policy, programs, and services. Four cross-cutting approaches will drive how the actions will be implemented to integrate sustainability as a core function within County operations, coordinate sustainability efforts, enhance partnerships, and empower collective action and transformation to build a sustainable government agency and community:

- **Commitment to Equity**: Strive to eliminate disparities and environmental injustices experienced by historically marginalized communities based on income, race/ethnicity, age, ability, immigration status, sexual orientation, and gender identity, and help ensure that there is equitable distribution of benefits and burdens across all communities.
- **Collaborative**: Collaborate with all internal and external partners including nonprofits, community-based organizations, and community leaders to implement shared sustainability goals and develop solutions to build vibrant and thriving communities.
- **Creative Approaches**: Encourage innovation, creative thinking, piloting new tools and technologies, and developing state-of-the-art solutions and unique financing mechanisms to become a leader in the sustainability realm.
- **Change Agents**: Empower County employees and community members to be mindful sustainability practitioners who continually strive toward sustainability goals and actions within both their workplace and their communities.

8.2 ZERO WASTE EVENTS (Adopted 5-24-11)

Policy

All events presented and funded by the County¹ shall be “Zero Waste” events. Zero Waste events are those in which foods, decorations, program materials and service-ware are used that are either reusable or accepted in the County's composting and recycling program.

1. County-presented event is defined in the Board of Supervisors' Policy Manual Section 3.49.

Event planners organizing County-funded events that are located in leased buildings where the County does not provide recycling and composting service shall plan events so that they create as little waste as possible.

Event planners organizing County-funded events in non-County venues shall use Zero Waste as one of the selection criteria in choosing a venue and shall negotiate with venue managers to obtain the most comprehensive waste reduction service that is feasible. To the extent practicable, reusable service-ware is preferable and can often be provided by the hotel or caterer.

Event planners should use the opportunity of a Zero Waste Event to inform the attendees on the benefits of zero waste event planning.

Background

Zero Waste is a systems approach to eliminating the impacts of products and packaging, resource use and reutilization, through the implementation of modern materials management and greenhouse gas reduction programs. Impacts are designated as upstream impacts (e.g., pre-consumer, resource extraction and production of goods); and downstream impacts (e.g., post-consumer, end of life, waste management, and greenhouse gas emissions).

Achieving Zero Waste will reduce the environmental impacts of our current way of life and the amount of greenhouse gas emissions. Greenhouse gas emissions from materials consumption fall into two broad categories: (1) methane generated as organics decompose in a landfill, and (2) emissions produced in the extraction of resources, the use of energy in the production of goods and services and transportation of goods.

Zero Waste Events are one way in which the County can reduce upstream and downstream impacts from materials use and reduce greenhouse gas emissions relating to materials management.

8.3 GREEN CLEANING POLICY (Adopted 9-10-13)

The County of Santa Clara seeks to protect the health and safety of all building employees, occupants and visitors, reduce impacts to the environment and support LEED certification through establishing strong standards on cleaning products and equipment used in County facilities.

The Green Cleaning Policy applies to all departments that have responsibility for cleaning and custodial work in buildings owned or leased by the County or that manage contracts and vendors that supply cleaning services.

All cleaning products used within County-owned or operated facilities shall be certified by a nationally-recognized, third-party, certifying organization or the products must be approved by the procuring department as equal to the green-certified products, unless green products are unavailable, not cost-effective or not practicable. Exemptions may additionally be granted to meet the needs of infectious disease control and security.

The Green Cleaning Policy is supported by Administrative Guidelines that detail purchasing and handling of green cleaning products and equipment, provide information on best practices, identify exemptions and note chemicals to avoid. The Office of the County Executive shall delegate responsibility for maintaining the Guidelines and facilitating a stakeholder committee, with representatives of departments that have responsibility for custodial staff or contracts and other interested parties, to update the Guidelines and grant exemptions, as needed.

As supplies are reordered and new contracts written, the practices and processes outlined in the Administrative Guidelines should be utilized or incorporated to the maximum extent possible to meet the objectives of this policy.

8.4 ZERO WASTE POLICY FOR COUNTY FACILITIES AND OPERATIONS (Adopted 10-8-13)

Purpose

The County seeks to reduce consumption of materials, to minimize unneeded materials being disposed in landfills and to maximize the highest use of products and materials that are no longer needed.

Responsibility

The policy applies to all County departments and agencies.

Policy

(A) Source Reduction

All County departments shall consider their purchasing practices and reduce the purchase and use of ongoing consumables to the extent that is practicable. At a minimum, departments shall ensure that:

- (1) Printing default on all computers is set to print double-sided.
- (2) Processes are developed that reduce paper use through utilizing electronic files or reducing the number of copies or forms needed.
- (3) Rechargeable batteries are used when available.
- (4) Unnecessary items are not purchased.
- (5) Items are bought in bulk and packaged in reusable or recyclable packaging.
- (6) Reusable options are considered when making purchasing decisions.
- (7) During office cleanouts, usable supplies and equipment should be reused within the department or given to Property Disposal.

Departments shall seek to reduce the use of natural resources and size purchases according to what will be used. Remainder materials can also be eliminated by refining processes and procedures to require less use of resources.

(B) Appropriate Purchasing Decisions

The County's Environmental Purchasing Policy (EPP) defines the requirements for green purchasing. This policy supports the EPP objectives of purchasing items with recycled content and/or buying long-lasting durable goods, as two criteria that support zero waste.

Purchasing decisions shall take into account the current zero waste program of the County and avoid choosing products for routine purchases that cannot be either composted or recycled. Selection of service-ware (plates, cups, utensils) shall comply with current requirements of the County's Zero Waste Program for facilities, which is coordinated by the Facilities and Fleet Department.

Purchasing decisions shall also consider product disposition at end of life and the special management required for hazardous waste. Purchasing solicitations for items such as paint, fluorescent tubes and batteries, shall require vendors to take back these products at end of life and manage them in a manner compliant with laws and regulations.

(C) Ongoing Consumables

Ongoing consumables are items that have a low cost per unit and are regularly used and replaced in the course of business, such as paper, janitorial supplies, service ware, batteries and food.

For discarded materials that are regularly picked up from County facilities by contracted hauling, recycling, composting and disposal companies, these contracts shall set a minimum goal of 75% for diverting materials from being landfilled or incinerated and contractors will be required to report regularly on progress.

For newly leased buildings where landlords are responsible for costs and oversight of waste management, the County shall require that the landlord provide, at a minimum, a strong recycling program.

All County buildings shall have conveniently located battery recycling containers for used batteries, with a goal of capturing a minimum of 80% of all County portable dry-cell types of batteries, including single-use and rechargeable batteries, used in towel dispensers, tools, radios, phones, cameras, computers and other devices or equipment. Departments in LEED buildings shall track the purchase and disposal of batteries to ensure that the 80% target is achieved, as required for certification.

(D) Durable Goods

Durable goods are items that have a useful life of two years or more and are replaced infrequently, such as furniture, office equipment, appliances and electronics.

The Surplus Property Disposal Section of the Procurement Department is responsible for managing all durable goods that are no longer needed. Property Disposal shall identify items able to be reused or recycled and only discard items with no value or which are unable to be sold, given away, recycled or refurbished.

For LEED certification projects, departments shall work with the Procurement Department to track durable goods purchasing and disposal shall be tracked by weight, volume or replacement cost with a goal of 75% diversion.

(E) Facility Alterations, Additions and New Construction

Construction and demolition debris (C&D) resulting from any new, remodeled or renovated County building shall be salvaged for reuse or taken to a C&D sorting facility. Leftover construction materials shall be either directed to another project for use or a salvage company as much as is feasible.

Buildings that contained hazardous materials such as asbestos shall be demolished or deconstructed within health and safety regulations and resulting materials shall be disposed of appropriately.

A goal of 90% diversion is set for all C&D and shall be noted in any construction contracts, unless there are extenuating circumstances that make this goal unreasonable. Contracts should also include the option to salvage any materials that have reuse value.

(F) Landscape Waste

Plant materials generated through landscaping maintenance and projects, including work done by contractors, shall not be disposed of in a landfill unless it is the only means in which to avoid spreading plant diseases.

Where practicable, discarded grass, clippings, trees, and leaves shall be handled on-site through low-impact grasscycling, mulching or composting processes. Plant discards from County projects or maintenance may also be directed to commercial composting facilities in the County.

8.5 SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPING POLICY (Adopted 3-22-16)

The County of Santa Clara finds and declares that the landscaping practices by County departments can have significant impacts on the environment. As of 2015, the County government owns 735 parcels and nearly 48,455 acres of land. Decisions regarding the development and maintenance of property under County jurisdiction provide an opportu-

nity to promote the sustainable use of water and land, conserve soils and vegetation, support natural ecosystem functions, conserve materials, promote human health and well-being, and ensure accessibility for all users, including those with disabilities. Therefore, County operations shall practice “Sustainable Landscaping” in accordance with the following principles, practices, and standards.

A sustainable landscape is a whole system approach to the design, construction and maintenance of the landscape in order to support the integrity of the regional watershed and local ecology. Sustainable landscapes embody community values for health and safety, wildlife and the environment. It is a healthy and resilient landscape that will endure over the long term and without the need for a high input of resources. The natural functions and processes of the landscape are able to maintain themselves into the future. The following principles and related practices shall serve as a foundation for the recommendations under this policy:

- Landscape Locally
- Landscape for Less to the Landfill
- Nurture the Soil
- Conserve Water
- Conserve Energy
- Protect Water & Air Quality
- Create & Protect Wildlife Habitat

Purpose

This policy sets forth goals and strategies for County operations to achieve sustainable outcomes rather than specifying prescriptive solutions and technology. Decisions regarding the design, construction and maintenance of sustainable landscapes on property under County government jurisdiction can provide an opportunity to positively impact urban forestry; open space, parks, and trails; water conservation and quality; air quality and climate change; recycling and waste reduction; energy conservation and greenhouse gas emissions; mobility and transportation; community health and safety; food production and nutrition; disaster and emergency resilience, and strengthen the vitality and livability of the communities in which County facilities are located.

Scope (Applicability) of Policy

This policy applies to all County departments, agencies, offices, officers, and employees for landscape practices and activities when constructing new, or rehabilitating existing County-owned land or space, or when landscaping improvements are otherwise planned on existing landscapes. This policy does not supersede the requirements contained in applicable County, State, or Federal law or regulations that may be more specific and/or more stringent.

All County departments, agencies, offices, officers, and employees should strive to balance natural resource management priorities with development needs (energy, security, infrastructure) while considering cultural, recreational, and environmental resources inherent in the landscape. This policy and associated Sustainable Landscaping Guidelines (Guidelines) are intended to enhance, not inhibit, County planning, operations and maintenance.

This policy shall be applied in a manner that achieves the maximum consistency with the landscaping performance standards contained in the “Sustainable Landscaping Principles, Practices and Standards” identified below. These best practices and performance goals for the design, construction, and maintenance of sustainable landscapes described in this document are drawn from the Bay Friendly Landscape Guidelines prepared by the Bay Friendly Landscaping Coalition and Stopwaste.org, and from Guidance for Federal Agencies on Sustainable Practices for Designed Landscapes issued by the Council on Environmental Quality.

This policy reflects the intent of the Board of Supervisors, and establishes a structure for planning, designing, installing, maintaining and managing water efficient landscapes in new construction and rehabilitated projects; establishes provisions for water management practices and water waste prevention for existing landscapes by utilizing sustainable landscaping, a whole systems approach to the design, construction and maintenance of the landscape.

Sustainable Landscaping Principles, Practices and Standards

Sustainable landscaping is a whole systems approach to the design, construction, and management of the landscape in order to support the integrity of the regional watershed. The following principles serve as a foundation for the recommendations that are to be contained in the Guidelines on the best practices and performance goals for the design, construction, and maintenance of sustainable landscapes:

- (1) Landscape in harmony with the natural conditions of the local watershed
- (2) Reduce waste and recycling materials
- (3) Nurture healthy soils while reducing fertilizer use
- (4) Conserve water, energy and topsoil
- (5) Use integrated pest management to minimize chemical use
- (6) Reduce stormwater runoff and air pollution
- (7) Protect and enhance wildlife habitat and biodiversity

These principals are intended to inspire flexibility, innovation, and a culture change. They apply equally to new construction, major renovations and, to a lesser extent, alterations to

existing small scale landscaping efforts. The recommendations can be adapted to support the County's diverse environmental stewardship and sustainability missions and policies.

A well-designed and maintained sustainable landscape can cost less to maintain in the long run, as well as lead to increased customer satisfaction. By being proactive, the County can be part of the environmental solution rather than reacting to more severe water conservation and pollution controls that are increasingly likely due to our region's growing population and local changes in climate.

