
SENATE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Senator María Elena Durazo, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

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Fiscal: Yes
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GENERAL PLAN: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ELEMENT: DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

Requires cities and counties to adopt an environmental justice element on or before June 30, 2028, and requires certain community engagement procedures.

Background

Land use planning. The California Constitution allows cities and counties to “make and enforce within its limits, all local, police, sanitary and other ordinances and regulations not in conflict with general laws.” It is from this fundamental power (commonly called the police power) that cities and counties derive their authority to regulate behavior to preserve the health, safety, and welfare of the public—including land use authority.

The Planning and Zoning Law requires every county and city to adopt a general plan that sets out planned uses for all of the area covered by the plan. A general plan must include seven mandatory elements: land use, circulation, housing, conservation, open space, noise, and safety. The general plan must also either include an eighth element on environmental justice, or incorporate environmental justice concerns throughout the other elements (SB 1000, Leyva, 2016).

The general plan must be “internally consistent,” which means the various elements must work together and cannot have conflicting information or assumptions. Additionally, cities’ and counties’ major land use decisions—including zoning ordinances and development permitting—must be consistent with their general plans. In this way, the general plan is a blueprint for future development.

Environmental justice legislation. Since 1999, the Legislature has enacted several laws to advance consideration of environmental justice; as defined in state law, environmental justice means the fair treatment of people of all races, cultures, and incomes with respect to the development, adoption, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. SB 115 (Solis, 1999) designated the Office of Planning and Research (OPR)—now known as the Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation—as the lead state agency on environmental justice matters. Subsequently, AB 1553 (Keeley, 2001) required OPR to adopt recommendations in its general plan guidelines that local governments may use to address environmental justice issues. Recognizing the importance of local planning in environmental justice issues, SB 244 (Wolk, 2011) required consideration of specific water, wastewater, and fire protection needs for disadvantaged communities in general plans as well as in some proceedings that determine local government boundaries.

SB 1000 formalized consideration of environmental justice in local planning. As a result, whether in a standalone element or throughout the document, the general plan must identify disadvantaged communities and identify objectives and policies to:

- Reduce the unique or compounded health risks in disadvantaged communities by means that include, but are not limited to, the reduction of pollution exposure, including the improvement of air quality, and the promotion of public facilities, food access, safe and sanitary homes, and physical activity;
- Promote civil engagement in the public decisionmaking process; and
- Prioritize improvements and programs that address the needs of disadvantaged communities.

Cities and counties must only comply with these requirements upon adopting or revising two or more elements of the general plan concurrently.

In February 2018, then-Attorney General Xavier Becerra established a Bureau of Environmental Justice within the California DOJ. The Bureau's stated mission is to, "Protect people and communities that endure a disproportionate share of environmental pollution and public health hazards." The Bureau has engaged on local land use matters, including to identify best practices for the citing of logistics uses and development of environmental justice elements, as well as to provide comments to communities on their implementation of SB 1000. SB 352 (Reyes, 2025) formally codified the existence of the Bureau.

SB 1000 guidance. Following the enactment of SB 1000, OPR released updated general plan guidelines in 2020 that included information and recommendations to local governments on implementing SB 1000. Subsequently, the Attorney General published guidance on SB 1000 implementation in 2023. Both documents emphasized the need for meaningful engagement with disadvantaged communities as a part of developing an environmental justice element. The Attorney General's guidance states, "Environmental injustices often result from excluding communities from land use planning processes...[C]ommunity engagement is especially important for developing environmental justice policies because local governments will not be able to develop compliant policies without involving the community." The guidance goes on to identify best practices, including to:

- Establish an environmental justice advisory committee;
- Partner with local community organizations and trusted community leaders;
- Consult with Native American Tribes;
- Select meeting times and locations that are convenient for the community, and offer opportunities for childcare, along with virtual options;
- Ensure language access by translating written materials and ensure interpretation is available at meetings; and
- Establish metrics to assess the effectiveness of their community engagement.

Progress on adoption of environmental justice elements. When the Legislature added a requirement for an environmental justice element, or consideration of environmental justice throughout other elements, the goal was to ensure that all land use decisions took environmental justice into account. However, in the 10 years since, many cities and counties have not enacted an environmental justice element or otherwise addressed environmental justice throughout their general plans. Although definitive counts are difficult to develop, a 2023 policy brief from the

University of California, Irvine, and the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, found that of the 238 cities and 29 counties with census tracts that are overburdened by environmental health issues, only 33 jurisdictions had general plans that included environmental justice provisions.¹

Attorney General Rob Bonta wants the Legislature to ensure that cities and counties with disadvantaged communities adopt environmental justice elements or goals, policies, and objectives, as envisioned by SB 1000.

Proposed Law

Assembly Bill 1457 requires a city or county with a disadvantaged community to adopt an environmental justice element, or environmental justice goals, policies, and objectives in other elements, by the earliest of either:

- The adoption or next revision of two or more elements concurrently on or after January 1, 2018; or
- June 30, 2028.

The bill also requires those cities and counties to meaningfully involve disadvantaged communities in the development, adoption, and implementation of the environmental justice element, or the related goals, policies, and objectives integrated in other elements, using methods that are designed to effectively involve disadvantaged communities based on local conditions and circumstances.

Cities and counties must conduct outreach to disadvantaged communities to encourage and receive input by holding at least two public workshops to receive and consider public input. Workshops must be held at times and locations that are readily accessible to residents of disadvantaged communities and that include both in-person and online virtual options. A city or county may choose to hold additional workshops.

Cities and counties must provide notice of any public workshop, hearing, or other opportunity to provide input in the three most commonly spoken languages in disadvantaged communities in the jurisdiction, based on United States Census Bureau data.

Cities and counties must also implement at least two other methods to meaningfully involve disadvantaged communities, and two methods of notifying disadvantaged communities of opportunities to provide input. The bill lists examples of options for meaningful involvement and notice that cities and counties may, but are not required to, use.

A city or county must maintain a website where it posts:

- Drafts of the environmental justice element or the related goals, policies, and objectives integrated in other elements;
- The adopted environmental justice element or the related goals, policies, and objectives integrated in other elements;
- Other relevant materials; and

¹ Michelle E. Zuñiga, Assistant Professor, Geography & Earth Sciences, UNC Charlotte, and Michael Méndez, Assistant Professor, Urban Planning & Public Policy, UC Irvine. "The Emergence of Environmental Justice in General Plans: Lessons from California's Senate Bill 1000."

- Information about public workshops, hearings, and other opportunities to provide input, translated into the three most commonly spoken languages in disadvantaged communities in the city, county, or city and county, based on United States Census Bureau data.

AB 1457 spells out procedures cities and counties must follow to receive input on the environmental justice element or policies, goals, and objectives in other elements. These procedures include to:

- Release an initial draft of the environmental justice element, or the related goals, policies, and objectives integrated in other elements, for public review at least 90 days prior to adoption;
- Make the initial draft of the environmental justice element, or the related goals, policies, and objectives integrated in other elements, available for public input and comment for at least 45 days; and
- Consider and incorporate public comments received and releasing a new draft for public review, input, and comment at least 15 days prior to adoption.

Cities and counties must then meaningfully consider and incorporate the input and recommendations of disadvantaged communities, and:

- Compile and summarize public input;
- Provide the summary and any written public comments received to each member of the legislative body of the city, county, or city and county before adoption; and
- Include the summary in the environmental justice element or the related goals, policies, and objectives integrated in other elements.

Comments

1. Purpose of the bill. According to the author, “Ten years ago, SB 1000 was signed into law, requiring local jurisdictions to include environmental justice in their general plans when updating 2 or more elements, yet gaps in transparency and compliance remain. Every Californian should have the opportunity to live in a community that is healthy and safe. AB 1457 promotes community engagement in environmental justice element development, ensuring that community voices are central to local planning decisions and that no neighborhood is left behind. This bill prioritizes transparency and sets a compliance deadline for existing requirements.”

2. Time’s up. While definitive counts are not available, it appears that many cities and counties with disadvantaged communities have not yet implemented SB 1000. This doesn’t necessarily mean they are in violation of the law: SB 1000 allowed cities and counties to wait to comply with the bill until they update two or more elements of their general plan simultaneously to ease implementation for cities and counties. Additionally, because SB 1000 allowed cities and counties to incorporate environmental justice policies throughout their general plans, instead of centralizing them in a standalone element, some cities and counties may have complied with SB 1000’s requirements in a manner that is not readily apparent to outside observers. Nonetheless, progress has been slower than many have hoped on incorporating environmental justice into planning efforts. AB 1457 requires local governments to comply with SB 1000’s requirements by a certain date. For those that haven’t complied, this timeframe could be aggressive, considering other planning-related duties that the Legislature imposes on them, such as changes to their permitting procedures required by housing streamlining legislation, requirements to

adopt truck routes to reduce impacts from logistics uses, open space planning requirements, and others. The Committee may wish to consider whether local governments have the capacity to simultaneously fulfill the Legislature's varied goals.

3. Talk isn't cheap. The state's guidance on SB 1000 implementation includes numerous suggestions for local governments to ensure that they solicit community input and incorporate it into their planning efforts. AB 1457 mandates that local governments take some of these steps, including translation of notices into three languages and offering virtual meeting options, and directs them to pick additional strategies to round out their outreach. While there is some flexibility in the specific methods that they can choose from, taken together these efforts are likely to be costly. Some local governments charge permitting fees on development to defray the costs of preparing and updating their general plans. In those jurisdictions, these costs get passed onto those that want to build projects. Other jurisdictions rely more heavily on their general fund to support their planning efforts, which may take away from other community services. The Committee may wish to consider the effect of the bill's requirements on local government finances.

4. Mandate. The California Constitution requires the state to reimburse local governments for the costs of new or expanded state mandated local programs. Because AB 1457 adds to the duties of local officials, Legislative Counsel says the bill imposes a new state mandate. AB 1457 disclaims the state's responsibility for providing reimbursement by citing local governments' authority to charge for the costs of implementing the bill's provisions.

5. Gut and amend. As introduced, AB 1457 repealed the sunset provision from the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection's "qualified entities" program, and required the program's curriculum to conform to the Department's "Home Ignition Zone/Defensible Space Inspector" course plan. The June 4th amendments struck the contents of the bill and inserted the current provisions regarding environmental justice elements.

Assembly Actions

Prior votes not relevant to the current version of the bill.

Support and Opposition (6/26/26)

Support: Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment (Sponsor)
 State of California Attorney General (Sponsor)
 350 Bay Area Action
 350 Humboldt
 Asian Pacific Environmental Network Action
 California Environmental Justice Alliance (CEJA) Action
 California Environmental Justice Coalition
 California Environmental Voters
 California Nurses for Environmental Health and Justice
 Catholic Charities of Stockton
 Center for Biological Diversity
 Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice (CCA EJ)
 Center for Environmental Health
 Central California Asthma Collaborative
 Central California Environmental Justice Network (CCEJN)

Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy
Clean Water Action
Cleaneearth4kids.org
Climate First: Replacing Oil & Gas (CFROG)
Climate Resilient Communities
Coalition for Clean Air
Committees for Land, Air, Water and Species
Communities for a Better Environment
Dayenu: a Jewish Call to Climate Action
East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice
Endangered Habitats League
Environmental Defense Center
Food & Water Watch
LA Waterkeeper
Leadership Counsel for Justice & Accountability
Mercury Press
Physicians for Social Responsibility - Los Angeles
Planning and Conservation League
Poder Sf
Regional Asthma Management and Prevention (RAMP)
Sacramento Environmental Justice Coalition
San Diego 350
San Francisco Bay Physicians for Social Responsibility
Sf Baykeeper
Sierra Club California
Sunflower Alliance
The Climate Center

Opposition: California State Association of Counties (CSAC)
League of California Cities
Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC)
Urban Counties of California (UCC)

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