



Office of the City Manager

January 17, 2025

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Paul Buddenhagen, City Manager

Re: Prepared, Safe and Healthy Berkeley: General Plan Disaster Preparedness and Safety Element, Environmental Justice Element and Climate Resilience Metrics

SUMMARY

The Planning and Development Department is working to update the General Plan's Disaster Preparedness and Safety Element (Safety Element), develop a new Environmental Justice (EJ) Element, create equitable climate resilience metrics, and conduct related technical analyses and staff training. The "Prepared, Safe and Healthy Berkeley Project" began in May 2024 and is expected to be completed in early 2027.

The project aims to ensure everyone in Berkeley is safe and healthy, with a focus on communities most affected by environmental justice and climate related issues. As part of the development of the Safety and EJ Elements, the City and its partners—including Ecology Center and Rincon Consultants—will prepare a Social Vulnerability Analysis and a Climate Adaptation Assessment to identify climate vulnerable communities based on income level, pollution burdens and health risk factors, among other indicators. Community engagement will inform every aspect of this project, including citywide community meetings as well as more focused meetings, surveys and interviews led by the Ecology Center.

This memo provides an overview of the project, the current status of the planning process, and key milestones.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

In June 2023, the Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation awarded the City of Berkeley a grant through its Adaptation Planning Grant Program (APGP), to support this project to update the Safety Element, develop a new EJ Element, and create Equitable Climate Metrics. The Safety Element update and new EJ Element will allow the City to comply with state laws and align with Program 27 of the adopted 2023-2031 Housing Element. In partnership with the Ecology Center, the City will conduct extensive community engagement to inform the City's planning efforts to increase environmental justice and safety, especially from communities most impacted by climate

change and those that have been historically underserved. This grant will also support staff training to address hazardous railway materials.

SAFETY ELEMENT

The Safety Element outlines policies and actions that support the City's efforts in disaster and emergency prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery. The updated Safety Element will identify known hazards and risks, evaluate community vulnerabilities, and propose strategies to minimize potential impacts. It will assess the capacity, safety, and reliability of evacuation routes and locations in different emergency scenarios, and identify residential areas with fewer than two evacuation routes. In response to identified risks and needs, the Safety Element will establish policies to enhance community safety.

The City is updating the Safety Element to address the following topics required by state law:

- Climate and vulnerability adaptation - SB 379 (2015)
- Flood, fire hazard, and climate adaptation updates on an eight-year cycle - SB 1035 (2018)
- Identification of evacuation routes and their capacity, safety, and viability under a range of emergency scenarios from the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ) - AB 747 (2019) and AB 1409 (2021)
- Identification of residential developments in hazard areas that do not have at least two emergency evacuation routes - SB 99 (2019)

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ELEMENT

SB 1000, the Planning for Healthy Communities Act, requires the City to adopt an Environmental Justice Element. Through the EJ Element, the City and its partners will identify environmental justice communities by assessing vulnerability to pollution and environmental burdens, to understand which Berkeley communities experience disproportionate environmental hazards or reduced quality of life. In response to this community engagement and data analysis process, the City will develop policies to invest in health, safety and resilience. These policies will focus on:

- Pollution exposure
- Access to public facilities, services and amenities
- Health and physical activity
- Healthy food access
- Safe and sanitary housing

EQUITABLE CLIMATE METRICS

The development of Equitable Climate Metrics will expand the City's tracking of climate action and resilience goals to incorporate an easy-to-understand summary of measurements and indicators. The project team will focus on community priorities in developing these metrics, which will demonstrate progress towards the goals

established in the Environmental Justice Element, the City's Climate Action Plan, and other relevant plans, and thereby establish a framework for accountability.

ENHANCED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In addition to citywide community meetings, the Ecology Center will be leading engagement with community members and organizations that represent the voices of frontline communities such as Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), people with disabilities, and other community members affected by discriminatory government policies, such as redlining. To date, the Ecology Center has engaged the following organizations to help develop the General Plan elements and equitable climate metrics:

- Berkeley Food Network
- Center for Food Faith and Justice
- Gray Panthers
- Healthy Black Families
- Latinos Unidos
- Multicultural Institute
- Pacific American Disabilities Act Center (Pacific ADA)
- Waterside Workshops.

The goal of the project team is to develop a replicable model for a planning process that prioritizes the needs of its most vulnerable and historically disadvantaged communities, not only for this project but for future planning processes.

PARALLEL PLANNING EFFORTS

There are several concurrent projects that run parallel to the topics covered in the Safety Element Update and new Environmental Justice Element.

- **The Berkeley Wellness Blueprint (BWB).** This project, led by the Health, Housing and Community Services Department, will identify health and equity challenges in Berkeley. The goal of the project is to improve health, housing and wellness for all. The BWB data analysis and community engagement will inform the creation of a Community Health Assessment (CHA) and a Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP).
- **Evacuation and Response Time Study.** As part of the Safety Element update, the City must comply with SB 99, AB 747 and AB 1409, which require cities to identify evacuation routes and their capacity, safety, and viability under a range of emergency scenarios from the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ). The Office of Emergency Services (OES) is conducting an evacuation and emergency response time study in partnership with the Planning and Development Department to comply with the requirements of these laws. Staff anticipates sharing the results of this study with the City Council for discussion in spring 2025.

- **Local Hazard Mitigation Plan¹**. The Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) is a part of the Disaster Preparedness and Safety Element. State and Federal regulations require the LHMP to be updated every five years pursuant to the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000. The LHMP identifies potential hazards that can occur in Berkeley and mitigation measures the City can take to reduce the risk of severe impacts from these events. The draft LHMP is scheduled to be considered by the Planning Commission in February 2025, and will subsequently be brought to the City Council for consideration and adoption.

PROJECT TIMELINE AND NEXT STEPS

The project will take up to three years and consist of five phases of work. Staff anticipate completion of the draft Safety Element and Environmental Justice Element in the spring 2026, followed by review by the Planning Commission, and review and adoption by the City Council at the end of 2026.

- **Phase 1: Project Initiation and Preliminary Technical Analyses**
The project team will identify environmental justice communities through inclusive community engagement. The team will also conduct preliminary technical analyses, including a Social Vulnerability Analysis and a Climate Adaptation Assessment, to identify climate vulnerable communities based on income level, pollution burdens and health risk factors, among other indicators. Phase 1 also includes a staff training on risks related to hazardous railway materials. The first citywide community meeting and survey will occur at the end of this phase.
- **Phase 2: Existing Conditions**
The project team will analyze risks relevant to the Safety and Environmental Justice Elements, as well as the City's available resources and barriers to accessing them.
- **Phase 3: Goals, Policies and Programs Development**
Data and analysis from first two project phases will inform the development of draft policies and draft climate metrics. The project team will evaluate whether policy topics reflect community priorities, potential consequences of policy implementation, and how the draft equity principles address policy implementation concerns. An additional citywide community meeting will occur during this phase.
- **Phase 4: Draft Elements and Metrics**
This phase will include a final citywide community meeting to share the draft elements and climate metrics.

¹For more information, go to the City's LHMP webpage: <https://berkeleyca.gov/safety-health/disaster-preparedness/local-hazard-mitigation-plan-update>

- **Phase 5: Final Elements and Metrics**

During the final phase of the project, the project team will bring final draft elements to the Planning Commission for review and a recommendation, and then to City Council for review and adoption.

Phase 1 of the project is near conclusion and the project team is preparing for the first community workshop on February 1, 2025. Additional information about upcoming community workshops, surveys and a link to sign up for email notifications are available on the City of Berkeley's project website: <https://berkeleyca.gov/prepared-safe-healthy>.

Staff will continue to update the City Council on the progress of the Prepared, Safe and Healthy Berkeley project. Staff anticipates engaging with the City Council during Worksessions in late Spring 2025 with results of the Evacuation and Response Time Study, and in Fall 2025 with a draft policy framework for the Safety Element and Environmental Justice Elements.

For more information, please contact Jordan Klein, Director of Planning & Development, at (510) 774-1337 or jklein@berkeleyca.gov.

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