

July 17, 2021

Contra Costa Board of Supervisors
651 Pine St.
Martinez, CA 94553

Dear Members of the Board,

At its June 21, 2021 meeting the Sustainability Commission unanimously supported four recommendations developed by its “Green Buildings” working group. The recommendations aim at reducing the carbon footprint of the County’s buildings and infrastructure. This includes electrification, reuse, and reducing embodied carbon in construction materials, both in the public and private sector. This letter briefly states those recommendations.

A fifth recommendation, the adoption of a low-carbon concrete reach code, is still under discussion by our Commission members.

Measures similar to the four recommendations below have been, or are in the process of being adopted in neighboring Bay Area cities. In the footnotes, you will find references to specific measures in their Climate Action Plans.

1. All-electric requirements for new buildings

The Sustainability Commission fully supports current work by County staff to develop all-electric building reach codes for new construction in both public and private sectors. We recommend the adoption of a prescriptive, rather than performance-based, reach code.¹

2. Procurement policies and lifecycle GHG analysis

We recommend adoption of procurement standards that incorporate total lifecycle GHG analyses. Products and materials should be selected with consideration for their recovery, resale and reuse potential. Such policies will result not only in reducing lifetime GHG emissions but also bring cost savings over the long-term, factoring in operations, durability, and maintenance.²

3. Buy Clean California specifications

The *Buy Clean California Act* states the Department of General Services (DGS) is required to establish and publish the maximum acceptable Global Warming Potential (GWP) limit for select construction materials.

We recommend that the county’s Requests for Proposals require use of the construction materials identified by *Buy Clean California*. These materials currently include structural steel, concrete reinforcing steel, flat glass, and mineral wool board insulation.³

4. Adaptability and repurposing of public buildings

Promote adaptability and capacity for re-purposing in new and existing public buildings. For example, community centers should be designed with potential for being quickly adapted as cooling and clean air centers or as evacuation support facilities. Planning for such contingencies aligns with the Climate Emergency Resolution, which identifies the need to plan for the needs of the County's most vulnerable populations.⁴

We wish to restate this: these four recommendations were unanimously approved by the members of the Commission. This is an indication of the importance that our members, representing residents from across the county, attach to the goal of rapidly cutting carbon emission. Reducing the carbon content of our buildings and infrastructure is a cost-effective, technologically viable, and socially just step toward achieving that goal.

Respectfully,

Wes Sullens
Chair, Sustainability Commission

¹ [Oakland CAP](#), B-2 (p. 66)
[Dublin CAP](#), Measure EE-1 (p. 75) and ML-1 (p. 106)
[San Francisco CAP \(Draft\)](#), BO 1-1, BO 2-1, BO 2-9 (enter these into search box at top of page)

² [San Francisco CAP \(Draft\)](#), RPC 1-2 through 1-7
[Dublin CAP](#), ML-4 (p. 114)
[Oakland CAP](#), B-4
[Circular Economy - Principles for Building Design, European Commission, 2020](#) (download)
General Principles B, F, H (document p. 8)
From Principle F: "Favor construction systems that incorporate circular economy thinking... enable systems to be easily maintained, repaired and replaced as this will prolong life cycle of buildings."

³ [Buy Clean California Act](#), accessed July 8, 2021.

⁴ [San Francisco CA \(Draft\)](#), RPC 1-2, RPC 1-4 through RPC 1-7, TLU 6-4
[Circular Economy - Principles for Building Design](#),
General Principles F and G (p. 8)