

Ahwahnee Principles for Climate Change

Preamble: *Existing patterns of urban and suburban development seriously impact our quality of life. The symptoms are more congestion and air pollution resulting from our increased dependence on automobiles.*

These two sentences begin the original Ahwahnee Principles for Resource-Efficient Communities which paved the way for the adoption of smart growth practices by communities in our state and throughout these United States over the past two decades. Coupled with complementary principles on Economic Development and Water, these represent actions which can be taken by communities and regions to “provide a blueprint for elected officials to create compact, mixed-use, walkable, transient-oriented developments”, and also to “implement land use decisions that take water supply and quality into account.”

Cities and counties now face the major challenge of climate change. Implementation of these principles represents key elements whereby many local communities have already started the process of reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. However, much more needs to be done at the local and regional level to meet the goals set, at least in California, by AB32, the California Global Warming Solutions Act and by many local governments who have set even more aggressive targets. The contribution of vehicular traffic to California’s total is over 40%; as high as 60% in counties like Sonoma.

These Climate Change principles build on earlier Ahwahnee Principles by addressing factors “within the control of local decision makers” which will result in absolute (vs. per capita) reduction of GHG emissions to meet the scientific imperative for climate protection. Another important principal for climate protection is climate justice meaning that impacts of reducing emissions including both positive and negative financial impacts should be borne equally by all. Finally the built environment past and future must be part of any set of Principles.

The reductions called for in legislation and policy measures are directed towards the major sources of GHG emissions:

- Construction and operation of the Built Environment
- Transportation of People and Goods
- Energy production in all facets of Residential and Commercial Activities
- Provision of essential public needs such as water, food, goods, and services

It is towards the reduction of GHG emissions in these sectors that these Climate Change principles are addressed.

Community Principles

1. Infill development should be recognized as the primary method for community growth; necessary new development would follow the Ahwahnee Principles for Resource Efficient Communities.
2. Action Plans for mitigating GHG emissions should be put in place by local governments; these will include inventories, targets for reduction, and implementation schedules.
3. Local governments, by adoption of Ahwahnee Principles for Resource-Efficient Communities, can substantially reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT). This should become an integral part of any Climate Action Plan. Land use planning should be used to protect open space, discourage sprawl, create urban growth boundaries, utilize mixed use and infill development. These practices combine to reduce VMT.
4. Energy conservation programs will reduce GHG emissions; green building ordinances, increased energy efficient standards, and increased water conservation (by adoption of the Ahwahnee Water Principles) can all be part of an implementation plan.
5. Use of clean alternative energy sources and appropriate clean vehicle technology, supported by financial incentives, can be part of local governments' efforts to reduce GHG emissions.

Regional Principles

1. Each region should develop a blueprint for transportation and land use that incorporates a GHG reduction target and implement action strategy. Targets would be met by a combination of compliance mechanisms and resource-based incentives.
2. Regional Transportation Plans (RTP) and major regional transportation projects will be required to analyze GHG emissions.
3. Necessary transit operations will receive priority for funding. Such projects which support infill development and reduce VMT will be given priority in funding and implementation strategies.
4. A Regional approach to coordination of city and county Climate Action Plans should be adopted to make sure that there is broad compliance with regional goals.

Implementation Strategy

1. “Blueprint” plans developed for regions of the state should form the basis for city-centered growth; open space protection, urban growth boundaries, and transit-oriented development will be integral parts of these “blueprint” efforts. Infill development tied to transit systems should be a keystone of these “blueprints.”
2. General Plan and Environmental Review processes should include climate change mitigation measures and adoption procedures. A Climate Action Plan should be required of each community. These should include an inventory of GHG emissions and the measures to achieve agreed upon targets for reduction which are reflective of GHG reductions called for in RTP’s. General Plans should be consistent with Regional Blueprint plans and RTP’s.
3. Zoning Codes should be modified to be consistent with the General Plan; thus enabling the execution of measures called for in the plan.
4. As plans are implemented, new construction and retrofitting of existing structures should be governed by mandatory green building standards. Neighborhood developments should meet Low Impact Development and LEED Neighborhood Development standards along with incorporation of Ahwahnee Water Principles.
5. LAFCO statutory authority should be utilized to implement GHG reduction strategies at the local level to require that contracts between counties and individual cities include GHG reduction analyses prior to approval of annexations. The EIR process should contain mitigation measures for reducing GHG emissions. Regulatory requirements for air, water, and other environmental factors should reflect GHG reduction measures.
6. Policies such as car-sharing, pricing of automobile and truck use by a pay-as-you drive system, carbon tax; all oriented towards reduction of VMT and funding of alternative modes of transportation, should be adopted. Telecommuting, flexible work schedules and other methods to reduce VMT at workplaces should be encouraged. These could be part of a Climate Change Element in General Plans.

7. Transportation Corridors responsible for high levels of VMT and pollution will be identified. Transit Oriented Development will be encouraged by use of incentives and by funding from congestion pricing mechanisms.