

Santa Clara County League of Conservation Voters

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY PRINCIPLES  
FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

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**SECTION 1: BASIC AND SUPPORTING PRINCIPLES**

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**SECTION 2: PRINCIPLES with Supporting Text**

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**1.0 THINK GLOBALLY AND REGIONALLY, ACT LOCALLY**

**1.01 Local Actions Can Have Larger Consequences**

We live in an interconnected world, in which local decisions can, cumulatively, have regional and global consequences – for better or for worse. All communities have obligations to make decisions that contribute responsibly to meeting the needs of our region, state, nation, and planet – and to providing leadership in addressing problems that extend beyond their individual boundaries.

Example:

**2.0 ACT RESPONSIBLY FOR A HEALTHY FUTURE**

**2.01 The Present is Borrowed from the Future**

Decisions we make today will affect our children, our grandchildren, and future generations. We owe it to ourselves and to all of them to make decisions today that take into account long term consequences and create a better future.

**2.02 Positive, Long Term Visions Mark the Path to a Better Future**

Adapting to new environmental, economic, and social conditions will require many changes, including changes in our urban development plans and policies. These changes should be guided by formally-adopted, long term, community visions that are developed with broad community participation, based on long term sustainability, and acknowledging the community's obligations to meeting the long term needs of our region, state, nation, and planet.

Example:

**3.0 ENHANCE AND PROTECT OUR NATURAL AND BUILT ENVIRONMENTS**

**3.01 The Fate of Natural and Built Environments are Inseparable**

Historically, there has been a tendency to view the natural environment and the built environment as being separate and distinct entities. Environmentalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century understands that the two are very much interrelated – as are their fates.

Protecting and enhancing our natural environment will depend to a very large extent on our ability to create livable, diverse, higher density, mixed use, urban neighborhoods and will require leadership, vision, planning, community involvement, and ongoing commitment.

Incorporating natural environmental values into the built environment can also improve the quality of life and benefit nearby, more natural areas.

**3.02 Sustainability Involves The Environment, The Economy, and Social Equity**

Enlightened 21<sup>st</sup> Century environmentalism recognizes that the health of our environment, the health of our economy, and the health of our society are inextricably interrelated.

As a consequence, government, community, and environmental leaders need to promote solutions to our problems that acknowledge, address, and seek to balance responsibly all three components of sustainability (i.e. environment, economy, and social equity – sometimes referred to as “The Three E’s”).

Example:

### **3.03 Maintaining the Status Quo is Not an Option**

Major environmental, economic, demographic, and technological changes are occurring that will significantly affect our lives and those of future generations. We need to acknowledge and prepare for these changes forthrightly and responsibly, even though they may require changes from the status quo. Failure to plan for change will not prevent unplanned change from happening.

### **3.04 Planning Responsibly for Growth is Essential**

Our country's, state's, and region's population are all projected to grow significantly over the coming decades. All communities have an obligation to plan for future growth in appropriate locations within their boundaries.

Accommodating future population growth in ways that protect our environment will inevitably require that we create higher density, transit-oriented, mixed use urban neighborhoods in appropriate locations within our existing communities. Local officials and community leaders have an obligation to provide leadership and vision in creating livable, vibrant, urban neighborhoods in their communities.

### **3.05 Housing is an Important Environmental Issue**

The decisions we make about how and where we house our future population in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century will greatly impact virtually every aspect of our environment, including: global warming, air and water quality; energy consumption; water usage; loss of agricultural lands, open space, and wildlife habitat; waste generation; forest conservation, etc.

Local officials and community leaders need to promote public awareness of this critical link between our housing policies and the well-being of our natural environment.

Efforts to meet our current and future housing needs should take place within a framework of “smart growth” that protects our natural environment and directs development into appropriate locations primarily within existing urban areas.

### **3.06 Need for More Mobility Options**

In a country experiencing global warming, rising energy costs, an aging population, and increasing health concerns related to lack of physical activity, providing convenient, safe, and efficient mobility alternatives that reduce dependence on the automobile needs to be a high priority.

### **3.07 Land Use Determines Mobility Options**

Providing mobility alternatives that reduce dependency on the automobile can provide important environmental, economic, and social benefits. Local leaders need to promote

development of land use patterns, public facilities, and programs that increase our mobility options by supporting walkability, bicycling, and transit usage.

### **3.08 Preservation is Crucial, But Not Enough**

As our population and our urban areas continue to grow, preservation of natural areas and natural resource systems will be increasingly more important. But, since many of these areas have already been fragmented and degraded by development, other human activities, and invasive species, it will also be necessary to focus substantial efforts on restoring, enhancing, expanding, and linking these areas to improve their ability to perform their natural functions.

### **3.09 Sustainability Requires Efficient and Responsible Resource Use**

We have an obligation to future generations to meet our needs without compromising their ability to meet theirs. To fulfill this obligation, we must find ways to bring our individual and collective resource consumption rates into balance with our planet's ongoing ability to replace these resources.

### **3.10 Traditional Approaches May Not Be Adequate**

The magnitude and complexity of many of the challenges we will be facing in the coming decades will require imagination and creativity, and a willingness to adopt new approaches to dealing with these challenges.

### **3.11 Lasting Community Support is Critical**

Making our communities more sustainable over the long term will require broad and lasting public support. Consequently, it will be important to develop local public policies in ways that are broadly inclusive and produce solutions that are likely to maintain long term support.

### **3.12 A Responsible Sense of Urgency is Needed**

Many of the challenges we are likely to face in the coming decades will require significant changes in our current land use plans and policies. The longer we put off making these changes and taking other necessary actions, the more severe may be the adjustments required in the future.

Consequently, it is important that today's leaders act with a responsible sense of urgency to take the actions needed to achieve a better future for current generations – and generations yet to come.

### **3.13 Bold Dreams and Collaborative Leadership Will Be Required**

The magnitude of the environmental, social, and economic challenges we will be facing in the years ahead will require more than just modest plans and minor incremental changes.

Bold, imaginative visions, implemented by bold, inclusive leaders who can rally and motivate diverse community constituencies will be required.