City climate plan proposal would limit carbon emissions

BY CAROLYN BOLTON NEWS-PRESS STAFF WRITER
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The Santa Barbara Draft Climate Action Plan, which proposes gradually encouraging and mandating reductions in carbon emissions, was discussed Thursday by the Santa Barbara City Planning Commission.

"My impression is, it's a real great primer for people to read - for the public to read - on exactly what's happening and what's going on," Commissioner John Campanella said. The plan was prepared in response to the city's general plan directives and Assembly Bill 32, known as the "Global Warming Solutions Act," passed by the state Legislature in 2006.

The act directed the California Air Resources Board to develop a plan to identify carbon emissions reduction measures that could be taken statewide to reduce carbon emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. Measures proposed in the city's plan include an increase in energy-efficient buildings through utility-upgrade rebates; increased use of renewable energy; additional travel and land-use policies; and increased water conservation.

Proposed renewable-energy measures include offering incentives for providing alternative-fuel infrastructure, and encouraging solar energy use. Proposed travel and land-use measures meant to reduce the number of single-occupancy, petroleum-fueled vehicles include:

- mandated employer-paid transit passes for new employers and new development;
- imposing development-impact fees;
- mandatory reductions to marine shipping emissions;
- reducing width of city streets;
- increasing public electric vehicle charging stations;
- enhancing city pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure;
- optimizing roadway capacity;
- encouraging carpooling and telecommuting;
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- encouraging carpooling and telecommuting;
- alternate work schedules for city employees;
- expanding public-transit services;
- encouraging "sustainable neighborhood plans."

Commissioner Bruce Bartlett said it's important to note single out new development in an effort to achieve reduction targets, adding that 99.9 percent of the "problem" is not new development.

The task of achieving energy efficiency, he said, is "our problem. It's not just the problem of new development."

Some of the proposed waste-reduction measures include waste audits for businesses; collection discounts for businesses that recycle and compost; recycling-education campaigns; reductions in plastic bag use; and mandated recycling of construction and demolition debris.

Many of the proposed measures have a target implementation date of 2015, while others are considered "ongoing" with larger-scale implementation through 2030.

Commissioner Addison Thompson reiterated the inaction of basing policies on assumptions, noting there is often a "range of accuracy" in scientific studies.

"If we took every one of these numbers that we're basing all these policies and assumptions on - and had a range of maybe plus 25, minus 20 percent - we might end up with quite a bit different result," he said.

Michael Chiacos, transportation engineer for Santa Barbara-based Community Environmental Council, urged the commissioners to set a more ambitious goal in terms of carbon emissions reduction.

"It would encourage us not to rest on our laurels," he said, adding that the city should set a "bolder goal" of 25 percent reduction by 2050.

"These would be more on par with what other cities have set targets, such as the city of Santa Monica," he said.

The draft climate plan was posted in June for a 45-day public review period. A proposed final climate plan will be sent to the Santa Barbara City Council for review and potential adoption.

Public comment on the draft climate plan will be accepted through Aug. 6 and may be sent to the Planning Division office at P.O. Box 1950 in Santa Barbara or emailed to Barbara Shelton at bgreent@cityofsb.ca.gov.

A final draft climate action plan is tentatively set to go to City Council Sept. 18. email: c Bolton@newspress.com