
FW: Climate Advisory Commission Recommendation Letter

From City Clerk <city.clerk@sanjoseca.gov>
Date Thu 5/22/2025 2:21 PM
To Agendadesk <Agendadesk@sanjoseca.gov>

 1 attachment (222 KB)

CAC Recommendation 052225_FINAL.pdf;

From: Balis, Anne <Anne.Balis@sanjoseca.gov>
Sent: Thursday, May 22, 2025 2:18 PM
To: City Clerk <city.clerk@sanjoseca.gov>
Cc: Climate Advisory Commission 5 <CAC5@sanjoseca.gov>; Karen Nelson [REDACTED] Climate Advisory Commission 8 <CAC8@sanjoseca.gov>; Benabente, Julie <Julie.Benabente@sanjoseca.gov>; Vargas, Leticia <Leticia.Vargas@sanjoseca.gov>; Williams, Lina <Lina.Williams@sanjoseca.gov>
Subject: Climate Advisory Commission Recommendation Letter

Good afternoon,

Please see the attached recommendation letter from the Climate Advisory Commission on the Climate Smart Budget. Please note they request for this to be included as public comment at the following meetings:

- **June 9** – Final Public Hearing: 2025 2026 Proposed Operating Budget
- **June 10** – City Council Meeting, Mayor's June Budget Message
- **June 17** – City Council Meeting, Budget

Thank you, and let me know if you have any questions.

Anne Balis

Climate Smart Supervising Environmental Services Specialist

Environmental Services Department

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May 22, 2025

To: Honorable Mayor, City Council, and City Manager

From: Climate Advisory Commission

Re: Climate Smart in City Budget

June 9 – Final Public Hearing: 2025 2026 Proposed Operating Budget

June 10 – City Council Meeting, Mayor's June Budget Message

June 17 – City Council Meeting, Budget

Dear Honorable Mayor, City Council, and City Manager:

As federal action on climate change is gutted, local governments must step up and do their part. The Climate Advisory Commission is alarmed and perplexed by the reduction of funding to the Climate Smart Program shown in the City of San José's [Proposed Operating Budget for 2025-26](#). While the shift from the Environmental Services Department to the Energy Department will allow for Energy Department coverage of staff costs, non-personnel funding is currently only shown at a base level of approximately \$126,000, compared to previous years with \$300-400,000 in non-personnel funding. This proposed reduction comes after non-personnel funding to Climate Smart was already cut by approximately one-third in 2024-25 from the previous fiscal year.

Such cuts are a false economy. Climate action, and the investment needed to make it work, is not optional. It is a necessity. The City of San José has already acknowledged this fact in its declaration of a climate emergency 6 years ago. Why would we now plan to cut funding used to counteract a declared emergency? Studies are clear that the financial cost of rapid decarbonization right now is dwarfed by the economic damages we will suffer if the climate crisis is allowed to progress. More pressing, every delay in this investment is a lost opportunity to avert human suffering and environmental destruction. It need not be stated that San José and our region are increasingly vulnerable to climate change-driven natural disasters including flooding and wildfires.

Further, the Climate Smart program has been incredibly successful thus far in working towards our climate targets despite already limited funding resources. Climate Smart's non-personnel funding has allowed the program to pursue increasingly broad community engagement to bring all residents on board and support everyone to work together on steps toward climate mitigation and adaptation that we must all pursue. This progress can be seen most directly in the Climate Smart Challenge, which has now engaged more than 1,500 households and prevented the release of 500 tons of CO₂. Continued funding to maintain and expand impactful efforts is critical, especially since less than 5 years remain before our target date for carbon neutrality, 2030.

Climate Smart's funding is only a minuscule portion of the overall City budget, and these reductions do not make significant progress in addressing the budget deficit. Even an increased \$450,000 in Climate Smart non-personnel funding makes up just 0.008% of the proposed City budget for the next fiscal year. Meanwhile, the drastic reductions in funding would only make up 0.9% of this year's projected budget shortfall of \$35.6 million. Do we really want to significantly diminish the ability of our City to tackle one of the most pressing crises facing its residents and the world, just to alleviate less than one percent of this year's budget deficit?

San José's actions now will have an effect on climate efforts well beyond our one city. San José's climate budget is already significantly lower than comparable cities. Other municipalities like San Diego and Seattle average about 24 staff positions and \$16 million annually dedicated to climate work, compared to Climate Smart San José's staff of 8 and annual budget of less than \$1 million. Despite these constraints, we have made great progress and been a model to other cities. Initiatives such as our ambitious carbon neutrality goals, wildly successful community choice energy provider, and energy-efficient building reach codes have been first-of-their-kind for a major U.S. city and rapidly adopted by other local governments.

As the capital of Silicon Valley, the nation's twelfth largest city and a leader in innovation, other cities follow our lead. As many other local governments across the state and country face budget shortfalls, they will learn from San José's example. We must ensure that this is not a resignation that financial difficulties must result in diminished climate investment and stalled action, but instead an affirmation that sustained climate action and investment at the local level is possible, beneficial to residents, and necessary. Accelerated action and investment in our City are ever more important now in the context of federal backsliding on climate policy and blocked federal funding sources.

Thus, the Climate Advisory Commission advises in the strongest terms that non-personnel funding to Climate Smart San José be maintained at a very minimum of 2024-25 fiscal year levels of approximately \$450,000. **Indeed, merely restoring funding is not enough. We can only even come near to achieving our necessary climate targets by *increasing* investments.** Given the gravity of the climate crisis and our City's obligation to its residents to address it, an increase in this funding to at least 2023-24 levels of \$621,000 would be highly merited and is our strong recommendation. Finally, we recommend that a sufficient base level of non-personnel funding, well over its current sum of about \$126,000, be determined and established for Climate Smart that will serve as minimum baseline funding to preferably be increased in future years. In consultation with City staff, the contents of our climate plans and targets, and community members and advocates, we advise that this more permanent block of funding be established to ensure that bold climate action at the City level continues uninterrupted, as it must, for years to come.

In this budgetary decision, the City is both symbolically and actually determining a great deal about the prospects for a stable climate future for all its residents. Every year that passes, action and investment on climate change has less and less impact. These are the last few years when our actions truly continue to make a difference. Thus, our utmost efforts must be applied right now.

Thank you very much for your consideration, and we look forward to seeing climate action to preserve the future of all our residents prioritized in this year's budget.

Sincerely,

/s/

Mani Bekele, Commission Youth Representative

On behalf of the San José Climate Advisory Commission