
FW: SCVOSA comment letter City Council 12/2 Item 6.1

From City Clerk <city.clerk@sanjoseca.gov>
Date Tue 11/25/2025 9:14 AM
To Agendadesk <Agendadesk@sanjoseca.gov>

 1 attachment (355 KB)
SCVOSA comment letter Item 6.1.pdf;

From: Lena Eyer [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, November 25, 2025 9:08 AM
To: City Clerk <city.clerk@sanjoseca.gov>
Cc: Marc Landgraf <[REDACTED]> Andrea Mackenzie <[REDACTED]>
Subject: SCVOSA comment letter City Council 12/2 Item 6.1

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Good morning,

On behalf of the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority, please see the attached comment letter regarding item 6.1 on next week's City Council agenda.

Thank you!
Lena Eyer

Lena Eyer (she/her)
Conservation Policy Specialist
[REDACTED]
Openspaceauthority.org

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Andrea Mackenzie, General Manager
Alex Kennett, District 1
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Lisanna Dominguez, District 6
Kalvin Gill, District 7

November 25, 2025

San José Mayor & City Council
City of San José
200 E. Santa Clara Street
San José, CA 95113

Subject: Climate Smart San José 2025 Update – *NWL Element* Incorporation

Dear Mayor Mahan and Councilmembers:

On behalf of the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority (Open Space Authority), I am writing to express support for the incorporation of the *Natural and Working Lands (NWL) Element*, approved by City Council on May 2, 2023, into the Climate Smart San José plan, and to urge the meaningful integration of its goals and strategies into the City’s policies and decision-making moving forward.

The Open Space Authority is a public, independent special district created by the California State Legislature in 1993 to conserve the natural environment, support agriculture, and connect people to nature by protecting open spaces, natural areas, and working farms and ranches. To date, the agency has protected over 30,000 acres for the benefit of current and future generations.

With the adoption of the Climate Smart plan in 2018, and reinforced through the passage of the San José Carbon Neutral by 2030 Resolution in 2021, the City recommended further research and analysis on the potential value of natural and working lands (NWLs) in carbon sequestration and the City’s overall GHG reduction goals. In response, the Open Space Authority proudly co-lead the development of the *NWL Element* and technical report with the City of San José Environmental Services Department and Cascadia Partners, in collaboration with the Department of Transportation, Office of Economic Development, Parks, Recreation, and Neighborhood Services, Planning, Building, and Code Enforcement, and with technical expertise from over twenty public, private, and non-profit experts. **Upon Council’s approval of the *NWL Element* in 2023, San José became the first city in California to adopt a natural and working lands greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction plan into its climate action plan and climate resilience strategies.**

The *NWL Element* quantifies GHG impacts and benefits from NWLs and outlines goals and strategies for land preservation and management to maximize carbon sequestration potential and other climate resilience values. The report produced the following key findings:

1. **NWLs will help us meet our local and global climate goals** by capturing and storing carbon dioxide.

2. **Restoring and enhancing NWLs helps protect our communities** from the effects of climate change, buffering against wildfires, capturing stormwater, mitigating urban heat island effect, and providing critical habitat for biodiversity.
3. **NWL restoration and enhancement is a generational investment**, and the ability for NWLs to sequester carbon and provide other important community benefits into the future will depend on the choices we make today.
4. **How we grow matters.** Policies should direct growth to infill areas to protect NWLs from conversion and to prevent sprawl development which increases GHG emissions from increased vehicle miles travelled (VMT), strains public resources and inequitably increases costs, and puts people in higher-risk areas.
5. **NWLs should benefit all communities.** NWL investment has the potential to have a direct and meaningful impact on social and environmental equity by expanding access to opportunity, improving health outcomes, and investing in historically under-invested communities.

The City of San José has already made significant investments to protect its important NWLs. Through the passage of Measure T in 2018, San José voters invested over \$46 million in natural infrastructure by protecting the multi-benefit Coyote Valley landscape for water quality, flood risk reduction and community-wide climate resilience. Subsequently, in 2021, the City rezoned Northern Coyote Valley to Agriculture and Open Space, protecting the habitat, floodplains, farmland, and other assets of the “last-chance landscape” where over \$120 million in local, state, and federal public and private funds have been invested. In 2022, Coyote Valley was featured on the cover of the California Natural Resource Agency’s Conservation’s *Pathways to 30x30* report – the state’s strategy for conserving 30 percent of lands and coastal waters by 2030, in service of global conservation and climate goals.

However, despite these investments in our local NWLs, between 2001 and 2023, the City still lost the equivalent of 45 football fields or roughly 1,200 acres of NWLs *each year* to urban development, with sprawl development being the number one contributor to NWL conversions in San José (NWL Element). The *NWL Element* found that “the land use and land management policies that have been in place for the past 20 years have not been sufficient to stem the conversion, loss, and degradation of San José’s NWLs.” Therefore, “without thoughtful land use policy and NWL-focused investments, more of San José’s critical habitat, natural areas, and agricultural assets could disappear.”

Climate Smart San José 2025 Update

Within the Climate Smart San José 2025 Update, the City commits to minimizing the loss of NWLs and increasing the carbon sequestration potential of NWLs through land management practices. The Open Space Authority strongly supports this commitment as well as the specific goals identified in the *NWL Element*, including increasing the land area of City-designated NWLs in the General Plan, reducing future development pressure on existing NWLs through pro-infill policies, and applying a range of regenerative and restorative practices to these lands to increase their ability to sequester carbon.

The Open Space Authority especially supports the strengthening of land use policies that protect NWLs from conversion and instead direct development into infill areas. As detailed in the *NWL Element*, the conversion of undeveloped agricultural and open space lands for sprawl development directly impacts GHG reduction goals by eliminating sequestration potential of the land itself, increasing VMT-induced emissions, and oftentimes increasing energy use, water resources, and overall costs to the public compared to infill development. While not explicitly stated in the Climate Smart San José 2025 Update report, the loss of NWLs is not just a lost opportunity for potential GHG reduction benefits; sprawl development directly contradicts the City’s GHG reduction efforts.

The Open Space Authority looks forward to continued collaboration with the City on important land use policy and decision-making that directly and indirectly affects the natural and working lands that protect and sustain our communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.

Sincerely,



Andrea Mackenzie
General Manager

Cc: Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority Board of Directors

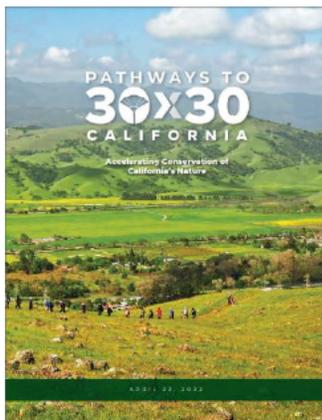


Figure 1. In 2022, Coyote Valley was featured on the cover for the California Natural Resources Agency's "Pathways to 30x30" report – the state's strategy for conserving 30% of our lands and coastal waters by 2030.



Fw: City Council 10/2 Agenda Item 6.1 Public Letter - Natural and Working Lands Element

From City Clerk <city.clerk@sanjoseca.gov>
Date Mon 12/1/2025 9:18 AM
To Agendadesk <Agendadesk@sanjoseca.gov>

1 attachment (94 KB)

Support - NWL Element Climate Smart Plan.pdf;

Office of the City Clerk | City of San José

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From: Mani Bekele <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Monday, December 1, 2025 9:10 AM
To: City Clerk <city.clerk@sanjoseca.gov>
Subject: City Council 10/2 Agenda Item 6.1 Public Letter - Natural and Working Lands Element

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Dear City Clerk's office,

Silicon Valley Youth Climate Action has sent a letter to City Council on Agenda item 6.1 of tomorrow's meeting (attached below). May we request that it be added to the agenda packet?

Thank you,
Mani Bekele | SVYCA

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Dear Mayor Mahan and San José City Councilmembers,

The youth-led Nature-Based Solution team of Silicon Valley Youth Climate Action, representing student climate advocates across the bay area, is writing to express our strong support for the full adoption and implementation of the San José Natural and Working Lands (NWL) Element as part of the City's Climate Smart San José plan.

At Silicon Valley Youth Climate Action (SVYCA), we empower teens and young adults to effectively combat climate change through education, advocacy, and policy initiatives. With over 100,000 students engaged, 15 action teams across the Bay Area, and more than a hundred state and local policies passed, our members have built strong working relationships with local officials and community partners as leaders and advocates for our futures. We champion solutions, such as San José's NWL Element, that ensure the much needed protection of our climate and communities that is necessary if we wish to secure our continued survival.

The NWL Element is a science-based framework that addresses one of the most powerful and underutilized climate solutions available to cities: protecting and enhancing our natural landscapes to store carbon, cool neighborhoods, protect biodiversity, and create healthier, more resilient communities. We urge the Council to approve and prioritize full implementation of the plan's recommendations.

Globally, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) estimates that nature-based solutions could contribute 30% of the mitigation needed to meet our climate targets. As it stands locally, over 55% of San José's sphere of influence (approximately 99,000 acres) is made up of forests, wetlands, rangelands, farmland, and urban green spaces. If managed wisely, these lands can sequester up to 5 million metric tons of CO₂e by 2050, representing a major contribution toward meeting San José's carbon neutrality by 2030 and aligning with California's "30x30" land conservation goal.

These lands also present an incredible opportunity for the restoration of our natural habitats and thereby the overall health and equity of our communities.

By creating green spaces where we can protect our communities, we not only continue to move forwards to mitigate future climate; we also begin to heal the long lasting scars of continual and systematized oppression of less fortunate communities by providing them with the infrastructure they need to find hope, heal, both literally and metaphorically, and continue to rise up to form our future.

Conversely, without proper protection, the city loses more critical habitat each year to urban sprawl, such as the incredibly worrying 1.5% overall drop in tree canopy from 2012-2018.

The NWL Element includes a range of strategies that provide climate, community, and equity benefits:

- Urban greening and tree planting can cool neighborhoods by up to 20–45°F during peak heat according to the EPA in 2021, improving public health and lowering energy use.
- The American Public Health Association asserts that access to green spaces (such as schoolyards, public parks, trails, and open spaces) is strongly associated with improved mental health, lower stress levels, and a greater sense of community well-being.
- Regenerative agriculture supports local food systems, food security and economies while sequestering carbon and improving soil health (NIH, Science Societies, etc.)
- Wetland, riparian, and oak woodland restoration protects biodiversity, enhances flood protection, and improves water quality (California Coastal Commission).
- Land use policies that direct growth toward infill areas reduce vehicle miles traveled and protect remaining open lands (CA Governor’s Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation, etc.).

The plan prioritizes equitable investments, ensuring that green space, cooling infrastructure, and environmental benefits reach historically underserved communities first. This aligns with the central principles of climate justice, which our generation is deeply committed to advancing.

As youth, who will have to live with the long-term impacts of today’s climate decisions, we see the NWL Element as an important generational investment in our future. Without investments and actions like those recommended in the NWL Element, it is largely today’s young people who would bear the burden of flooding events running off of degraded watersheds, the loss of intangibly but critically valuable biodiversity, and of a dangerously overheated city for lack of tree canopy. The climate future of today’s young people will instead become healthier and more stable if we come together to protect the natural and working lands that both directly sequester carbon and help to reduce the greatest impacts of climate change. As a community, we must absolutely safeguard our rights to clean air, water, climate stability, and quality of life for the many decades to come.

The NWL Element allows San José to continue its pioneering leadership as the 6th greenest city in the U.S. , a point of pride for us locals, demonstrating how nature-based climate solutions can also work

with clean energy and transportation strategies. Therefore, we sincerely urge the Council to fully adopt and fund the plan, and to ensure swift and accountable implementation.

Thank you for all your work and leadership in shaping a sustainable and livable future.

Best regards,

Nature-Based Solutions Team at SVYCA

San José Team at SVYCA:

Mani Bekele, District 3

Kanika Rawat, District 4

Rosalía Bacon-Flores, District 6

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