



November 17, 2020

San Jose City Council
200 E. Santa Clara Street
San Jose, CA 95113

Mayor Liccardo, and members of the Council:

As the council considers the semi-annual progress update on Climate Smart San Jose, Save The Bay would like to urge the city to embrace climate adaptation alongside the plan's goals to reduce greenhouse gas emission and promote resource conservation. While Climate Smart San Jose shows bold leadership on climate mitigation, it unwisely leaves adaption and resilience strategies as topics for future consideration. We no longer have the luxury of waiting to adapt our communities to be resilient to the changing climate and acting now can provide multiple benefits for the city's people and wildlife.

One of the most effective steps that the city can take is to prioritize and coordinate a comprehensive plan to expand urban greening.

This year has made it even clearer that the long-predicted impacts of climate change are already becoming our daily reality. Frequent and devastating wildfires, persistent drought, record-setting urban heat, and compromised air quality are becoming common, and these challenges will soon be compounded by sea level rise and more frequent inland flooding.

Nature-based solutions like urban greening – including rain gardens, swales, and urban tree canopy – help manage stormwater and improve water quality in the Bay, and they also provide a host of climate adaptation benefits that are urgently needed. By incorporating more vegetation into roadway designs and public spaces, urban greening can alleviate urban heat, better manage more frequent rain events, improve air quality, and make streets safer and more appealing for bicyclists and pedestrians.

Improvements like these benefit public health and enhance the quality of life within neighborhoods, which is more important than ever as people stay close to home and rely on their immediate surroundings for recreation during the Covid-19 pandemic.

San Jose's current green stormwater infrastructure plan relies almost exclusively on underground regional projects that provide necessary water quality improvements but fail to deliver any of these additional resilience benefits that above-ground urban greening provides.

Therefore, we urge the council to adopt a comprehensive urban greening strategy and implementation plan as a city council priority.

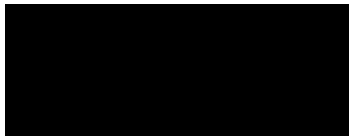
In doing so, the council should direct staff to incorporate urban greening elements into all roadway improvement projects wherever feasible and make urban greening a default – not just suggested or optional – component of the city’s various infrastructure planning documents, such as Vision Zero, Better Bike 2025, the Community Forest Management Plan, and the Urban Villages. This approach will accelerate the city’s climate resilience and make these plans more successful and appealing to city residents.

The risks to our communities from climate change are not the same in all parts of the city. Air pollution and urban heat tend to be higher in lower income communities. By making urban greening a council priority, you can ensure that these important resilience strategies are equitably distributed throughout the city and reach the neighborhoods that need them the most.

Climate Smart San Jose shows a willingness to confront the significant challenges of climate change, and San Jose is now a leader in this effort. Climate adaptation is the next frontier and the time to act is now. Prioritizing urban greening will demonstrate once again that San Jose is a trailblazer willing to enact forward-looking policies that encourage the entire Bay Area to meet the biggest challenges of our time.

Save The Bay and our community partners are ready to work with you to make this effort successful.

Sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of David Lewis.

David Lewis,
Executive Director

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Mayor Liccardo, and members of the Council:

For over 60 years, Greenbelt Alliance has helped create cities and neighborhoods that make the Bay Area a better place to live - healthy places where people can walk and bike; communities with parks, shops, transportation options; homes that are affordable - and defend the Bay Area's natural and agricultural landscapes from sprawl development. Greenbelt Alliance's new [strategic plan](#) envisions a Bay Area of healthy, thriving, resilient communities made of lands and people that are safe during climate disasters and recover quickly from wildfire, floods, and drought, where everyone is living with nature in new and powerful ways for generations to come.

This year has demonstrated that the long-predicted impacts of climate change are already becoming our daily reality. More frequent and devastating wildfires, persistent drought, record-setting urban heat, and compromised air quality are becoming common, and these challenges will soon be compounded by flooding at the shoreline and inland, from sea level rise and more frequent storms.

Nature-based solutions like urban greening – including rain gardens, swales, and native urban tree canopy – help manage stormwater and improve water quality in the Bay. They also provide a host of climate adaptation benefits that are urgently needed. By incorporating more trees and vegetation into roadway designs and public spaces, urban greening can alleviate urban heat, support native habitat, better manage more frequent rain events, improve air quality, and make streets safer and more appealing for bicyclists and pedestrians.

That's why we support making a comprehensive urban greening strategy and implementation plan a Council priority.

A comprehensive urban greening strategy can enhance other citywide planning projects, like Vision Zero, Better Bike 2025, the Community Forest Management Plan, and the Urban Villages. And since climate impacts are not distributed equitably, this approach would ensure that the areas of San Jose that are already being impacted disproportionately by a changing climate benefit from these resilience strategies.

Prioritizing urban greening will not only accelerate the City's move toward climate resilience but will ultimately make San Jose a more appealing place to live, work, and play.

Sincerely,

Justin Wang
Advocacy Manager