



ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY POLICY COMMITTEE

Highlights June 5, 2026

ATTENDANCE

Members: Max Perrey (Chair); Scott Bauer (Vice Chair); Teresa Acosta; Paul Akinjo; Paolo Beltran; Christine Boles; James Breitling; Margaret Clark; Jonathan Cruz; Michelle D'Anna; Matt Downing; Patti Baribay; Jennifer Gates; Maika Gulati; Nancy Howze; Barbara Leary; Joe Lillio; Elaine Litster; Marijane Lopez-Taff; Jeff Maloney; Sarah Margulies; Julio Martinez; Deborah McGarrey; David Newman; Jeff Nibert; Randall Putz; Karina Quintanilla; Candice Rankin-Mumby; Patty Senecal; Jason Shykowski; Amy Steward; Matthew Summers; Amanda Szakats; Toni Taber; Jennifer Torres-O'Callaghan; Igor Tregub; Kevin Wilk; Thomas Wong

League Partners: Neeraj Bhatnagar

Staff: Melissa Sparks-Kranz, Legislative Affairs Lobbyist
Leila Romero, Policy & Legislative Affairs Analyst

I. **Welcome and Introductions**

Chair Perrey welcomed members of the Environmental Quality Policy Committee. The meeting began jointly with the Housing, Community, and Economic Development Policy Committee for the Building an Affordable California Act ballot measure presentation.

II. **Building an Affordable California Act: CEQA Ballot Initiative**

Cal Cities staff provided an overview of the Building an Affordable California Act, a proposed ballot measure that would create an opt-in process for certain "essential projects" to follow special procedures under CEQA and the Permit Streamlining Act. Staff explained that covered project categories under the streamlining measure would include housing, transportation, water, clean energy, broadband, schools, health care facilities, and wildfire prevention and resilience projects.

The committee heard from proponents of the measure, including representatives from Nielsen Merksamer, LLP, Hanson Bridgett, LLP, and Bicker, Castillo, Fairbanks & Spitz. Proponents shared that the measure would help reduce delays, provide clearer timelines, and preserve local authority to approve, deny, or condition projects. They stated that the measure does not exempt projects from CEQA, does not provide automatic approvals, and does not override local zoning. The committee also heard from opponents of the measure, including representatives Greenbelt Alliance and Shute, Mihaly & Weinberger on behalf of the Planning and Conservation League. Opponents raised concerns that the measure could apply broadly to major infrastructure and development projects, reduce city discretion, limit alternatives analysis, and create new litigation risks for cities. Opponents also expressed concern that the measure could increase costs, create legal uncertainty, and make it more difficult for cities to impose protective conditions of approval.

Committee members engaged in a robust discussion with proponents and opponents. Following the joint presentation and questions, the Environmental Quality Policy Committee moved to a breakout room for discussion and a recommended position. The committee engaged in a discussion on the measure's implications for cities, including concerns related to local control, city liability, environmental review processes, and costs. An original motion to recommend an "Oppose" position was made and seconded. A substitute motion to recommend a "Support" position was then made and seconded. The substitute motion to recommend a "Support" position was then put to a vote and failed. The original motion to recommend an "Oppose" position was then put to a vote and passed with 24 in favor, 2 opposed, and 6 abstentions.

III. Public Comment

Chair Perrey opened the floor for public comment, and no public comment was made.

IV. CEQA Exemption Graduate Research Project

Chair Perrey introduced guest speakers from the UC Davis Environmental Management and Policy Program, who presented their graduate research project on the use of CEQA exemptions. The presenters provided background on CEQA, the purpose of exemptions, and how exemptions are used to streamline certain types of projects. They explained that their project focused on creating databases on CEQA exemption legislation and Notice of Exemption filings from 2010 to 2025. Their work examined how exemptions have evolved over time, what types of projects use them, and whether exemptions align with broader state policy goals. The presentation highlighted the difference between statutory and categorical exemptions and noted that categorical exemptions appear to be used far more frequently in practice.

V. SB 254 Report Update and Roundtable

Cal Cities staff provided an update on the SB 254 report [Enhancing California's Resiliency to Natural Catastrophes](#), which evaluated new models or approaches to mitigate damage, accelerate recovery, and allocate costs related to natural catastrophes, including wildfires, earthquakes, and other disasters. Staff noted that Cal Cities, along with RCRC and CSAC, submitted comments to the California Earthquake Authority and testified before the Legislature on the report findings. Cal Cities emphasized opposition to eliminating inverse condemnation for electric utility-caused wildfires. Staff also highlighted Cal Cities' recommendations to strengthen community wildfire mitigation, including more frequent updates to fire hazard severity zone maps, adoption of a science-based Zone Zero regulation, streamlined permitting for fuel reduction projects, a home hardening certification program, and stronger connections between mitigation efforts and fire insurance availability. Committee members discussed a variety of disaster-related concerns, including wildfire liability, public safety power shutoff events, sea level rise planning, coastal resilience, insurance, and the need for continued prevention and mitigation work.

VI. Legislative & Regulatory Updates

This agenda item was not covered due to time constraints.

VII. Adjourn

Chair Perrey thanked members and speakers for their participation and adjourned the meeting.

Next Meeting: Staff will notify committee members by **August 7** if the policy committee meets in September. If you have any questions, please contact [Meg Desmond](#), Cal Cities Program Manager, Legislative Administration.