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AGENDA ITEM NO.: 7 (Public Hearing and Action)

PLANNING COMMISSION

MEETING DATE: January 28, 2026

SUBJECT:

General Plan Amendment No. 2025-06/
Environmental Justice Element

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Inyo County Planning Department has prepared an Environmental Justice (EJ) Element for inclusion in the County's General Plan in response to Senate Bill 1000 (SB 1000) and California Government Code §65302(h) and the direction of the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD). While Inyo County has no identified disadvantaged communities (DACs) under state criteria, staff has taken a proactive approach to incorporate existing environmental principles into a standalone element focused on environmental justice.

PROJECT INFORMATION

Supervisory District: Countywide

Recommended Action: **Conduct a public hearing and adopt Resolution No. 2026-01 recommending the Board of Supervisors certify the Environmental Justice Element is exempt from CEQA and make certain findings with respect to and approve General Plan Amendment No. 2025-06/Environmental Justice Element.**

Alternatives:

- 1.) Recommend modifications to the Environmental Justice Element.
- 2.) Continue the public hearing to a future date, and provide specific direction to staff regarding additional information and analysis needed.

Project Planner: Danielle Visuaño, Senior Planner

BACKGROUND

Staff has prepared an Environmental Justice (EJ) Element for incorporation into the General Plan in accordance with Senate Bill 1000 (SB 1000) and California Government Code §65302(h). SB 1000 mandates that jurisdictions with identified disadvantaged communities (DACs) incorporate environmental justice policies into their general plans, either as a standalone element or integrated into other elements.

Although Inyo County does not contain any DACs as defined by CalEPA and verified using CalEnviroScreen mapping tools (see Section 10.1 of the EJ Element), the County has proactively developed this element to address equity, health, and environmental concerns for all communities. Furthermore, HCD required the completion of this EJ Element for certification of the County's Sixth Cycle Housing Element Update.

More importantly, the vast majority of the policies, goals, and implementation measures required by SB 1000 are already embedded within the County's existing General Plan. This EJ Element consolidates, references, and supplements those existing provisions, ensuring statutory compliance while enhancing clarity and public accessibility.

During the workshops provided to the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors throughout the late summer and fall of 2025, staff received comment and has altered and added the following provisions to Section 10.3 Food Access found on page 9 of 38 paragraph 3 sentences 5, 6 and 7:

“There are smaller markets in the Bishop, Big Pine and Lone Pine areas. However, there are other smaller communities which have much less to no option for access to fresh healthy food, which tends to be overpriced when available. For example, the south-eastern areas of Inyo County have no existing markets.”

Additionally, staff determined another provision needed to be added to the Safe and Sanitary Housing Section of the Environmental Justice Element. This provision is as follows and can be found in Section 10.5 Safe & Sanitary Housing on page 24 of 38:

Policy PSU-8.1	Fire Protection for New Development
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STAFF ANALYSIS

Summary of EJ Element Content

The EJ Element begins with discussion of environmental justice and required components, then discusses the nonexistence of DACs, and then consolidates and expands upon policies already present in the General Plan and organizes them within the EJ Element under the following major focus areas to comply with Government Code §65302(h).

1. Environmental Justice Discussion – page 1 of 38 of the Environmental Justice Element

The concept of Environmental Justice originally focused on environmental contamination and degradation. Over time the objectives and goals of Environmental Justice expanded to include such topics as physical activity, food access and public participation in the governmental decision-making process in order to create and sustain a healthy living environment for everyone. Under this expansion California has adopted several laws and programs to promote Environmental Justice and its implementation. Under California Government Code §65040.12(e) Environmental Justice is defined as:

“the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of people of all races, cultures, incomes, and national origins, with respect to the development, adoption, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.”

Subsequently, lawmakers passed Senate Bill (SB) 1000 in 2016 in order to integrate Environmental Justice concepts and objectives into the planning process and making it mandatory to address and apply them to DACs. SB 1000 was further codified in California Government Code §65302(h) which requires the following Environmental Justice components in jurisdiction’s General Plan if it contains one or more DACs:

1. Identification of Disadvantaged Communities
2. Policies to reduce exposure to pollution and improve air quality
3. Policies to promote public facilities
4. Policies to improve food access
5. Policies to promote safe and sanitary housing
6. Policies to promote physical activity
7. Policies to reduce unique or compounded health risks
8. Policies to promote civic engagement in public decision-making
9. Policies to prioritize improvements and programs

2. Disadvantaged Communities (DACs) Discussion – page 4 of 38 of the Environmental Justice Element

A DAC is defined in the California Government Code §65302 (h)(1) as:

“an area identified by the California Environmental Protection Agency Pursuant to Section 39711 of the Health and Safety Code or an area that is a low-income area that is disproportionately affected by environmental pollution and other hazards that can lead to negative health effects, exposure, or environmental degradation.”

To determine the location of DACs the use of CalEnviroScreen and its pollution burden data layers is an effective identification mapping tool. CalEnviroScreen was developed by California Environmental Protection (CalEPA) and is the tool used to determine the existence of DACs for environmental justice purposes. In viewing Inyo County in CalEnviroScreen and taking into consideration CalEPA’s identification of DACs, it is demonstrated Inyo County has no DACs.

However, as discussed above and is detailed below, Inyo County has taken steps to address the Environmental Justice topics although there are no identified DACs in the county. In doing so, Inyo County is being proactive in addressing these issues to prevent pollution impacts on any community.

3. Air Quality (Section 10.2) – page 6 of 38 of the Environmental Justice Element

Air quality issues are addressed throughout the Inyo County General Plan, which also includes cooperation with the Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District (GBUAPCD), the entity overseeing air quality enforcement in the region. The existing General Plan includes numerous provisions that regulate PM-10 emissions, control dust during construction, and monitor development impacts on regional air quality. The EJ Element’s Air Quality section supplements this framework by introducing climate adaptation strategies that align with emerging state priorities. These include the incorporation of clean transportation methods—such as public transit and carshare programs—and requirements for climate-resilient building materials, including cool roof technologies. These additional strategies are designed to minimize emissions from new development and promote long-term regional sustainability.

4. Food Access (Section 10.3) – page 9 of 38 of the Environmental Justice Element

Inyo County’s rural setting presents unique challenges for access to affordable, nutritious food, particularly in smaller and more remote communities. The General Plan already supports agricultural land preservation and the development of neighborhood-serving retail services. This Food Access section builds on this by recognizing the gaps in food availability and proposing zoning revisions to support the creation of community gardens and farmers markets. It also promotes policies that encourage the development of healthy food establishments, particularly in areas dominated by fast food or convenience store options. Additionally, this section emphasizes the importance of public education on nutrition, County support for mobile food vendors, and expanded transit options to improve access to grocery stores, particularly for seniors and low-income residents. These approaches provide an adaptive, equity-focused framework for improving food access without reliance on traditional DAC designations.

5. Public Health (Section 10.4) – page 15 of 38 of the Environmental Justice Element

The Public Health section acknowledges that a healthy population depends on more than access to healthcare; it depends on the quality of the physical and built environment. The existing General Plan already addresses core public health concerns through water quality policies, housing safety standards, emergency response planning, and transportation strategies. These policies are located in various elements in the General Plan, including the Safety Element, the Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (MJHMP), and the Housing Element. This Public Health section incorporates these policies and further enhances them by defining key public health terms such as ‘health’ and “health equity” and expanding policies to promote walkable communities, mixed-use development, and inclusive design for seniors and people with disabilities. Together, these policies establish a comprehensive foundation for preventing environmental health risks and promoting long-term community well-being.

6. Safe & Sanitary Housing (Section 10.5) – page 21 of 38 of the Environmental Justice Element

The General Plan’s Housing Element and Land Use Element already contain a broad range of policies aimed at improving housing conditions, increasing affordability, and ensuring safe living environments. These include policies to eliminate substandard housing, provide adequate sites for development, and encourage energy efficiency and code enforcement. The Safe & Sanitary Housing section of the EJ Element enhances this commitment by focusing on the unique needs of “Legacy Communities”—historically underserved, rural settlements that lack basic infrastructure or public services. The EJ Element commits the County to pursuing upgrades in these communities, including road repair, broadband expansion, and improvements to water and wastewater systems. This approach ensures that the needs of vulnerable communities are explicitly considered and addressed in both planning and implementation processes.

7. Public Facilities (Section 10.6) – page 27 of 38 of the Environmental Justice Element

Access to reliable and equitable public facilities is a key driver of environmental justice and quality of life. The General Plan addresses this comprehensively, with policies on schools, parks, utilities, public safety, and transportation infrastructure. These provisions are reflected in the General Plan Land Use, Circulation and Safety Elements. The Public Facilities section of the EJ Element reiterates these commitments and adds new policies to support the development of on-site renewable energy systems, promote participation in broadband infrastructure initiatives (such as the Digital 395 project), and encourage the integration of climate resilience into public facility planning. Special attention is also given to hazard avoidance, ensuring that vulnerable populations are not placed in harm’s way. These efforts reinforce the County’s goal of providing inclusive and adaptive public services for all communities.

8. Recreation (Section 10.7) – page 33 of 38 of the Environmental Justice Element

Physical activity is essential to public health, and access to recreational resources is a central environmental justice concern. The General Plan includes provisions that support open space preservation, access to public lands, scenic highway protection, and the development of trails and

active transportation networks. These policies promote walkability, reduce dependence on vehicle use, and encourage interaction with the natural environment. The EJ Element's Recreation section expands on these efforts by introducing strategies for enhancing scenic view corridors and encouraging aesthetically compatible development along scenic routes. These policies support physical activity as a public health goal and reinforce the County's identity as a place of natural beauty and outdoor opportunity.

9. Civic Engagement (Section 10.8) – page 35 of 38 of the Environmental Justice Element

Public participation is a long-standing cornerstone of Inyo County's planning framework. The General Plan incorporates numerous policies requiring public input through workshops, advisory committees, and partnerships with tribal governments, local organizations, and regional stakeholders. Policies GOV-2.1 and GOV-2.2 emphasize collaborative planning, while the Housing Element includes several programs to engage property owners, renters, developers, and underserved groups. The EJ Element's Civic Engagement section supports ongoing outreach through other General Plan processes and commits the County to transparency, inclusiveness, and community-driven planning. In this regard, the EJ Element does not create a new participation process but strengthens and affirms the processes already currently existing and the role of the public in shaping local planning outcomes.

Inyo County has a strong history of incorporating public input into its long-range planning efforts. The public participation component has been, and continues to be, met through a variety of established planning processes. As an example, the County has engaged the public during the development of key documents, including the Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan, the Housing Element Update, the County Wildfire Protection Plan and Community Wildfire Protection Plans, the Renewable Energy General Plan Amendment, and the Residential Infill Project. These projects have relied on workshops, surveys, public meetings, interagency coordination, and stakeholder engagement to ensure community needs are reflected in County policies.

In fact, the Environmental Justice Element Workshops previously held for comment and feedback on this element served as the current public outreach effort specifically designed to support the EJ Element. It provided an opportunity for residents, stakeholders, and community members to learn about the purpose of the element, ask questions, and offer comments on its content, structure, and implementation.

With the establishment of a standalone Environmental Justice Element, the County's commitment to equity and inclusive participation will become more visible, and future engagement efforts will be further aligned with the EJ Element's goals for civic involvement, community representation, and transparency in decision-making.

10. Prioritizing Improvements & Programs (Section 10.9) – page 37 of 38 of the Environmental Justice Element

While Inyo County lacks formally identified DACs, the General Plan already includes numerous mechanisms for prioritizing resources, projects, and services in areas of need. These include fire protection planning, flood mitigation, transportation planning, and infrastructure maintenance

policies. This section emphasizes the importance of directing improvements toward vulnerable communities and high-risk areas, especially those prone to environmental hazards or lacking basic public services. In doing so, it uses environmental justice principles through clear, implementable policies that reflect existing County values and intent.

GENERAL PLAN AND ZONING CODE CONSISTENCY

The Environmental Justice Element is consistent with and advances the General Plan because it operates within the General Plan framework consolidating and strengthening the existing General Plan direction on air quality, food access, public health, housing, public facilities, recreation, civic engagement and prioritizing improvements and programs. It is a policy-level document that does not change land-use designations, development intensity, or allowable uses. Instead, it incorporates General Plan elements, goals, policies and implementations by reference and adds environmental justice policies and implementations to improve internal consistency and ease of application during future actions.

The Environmental Justice Element is consistent with the Zoning Code (Title 18) because it supports the purpose and intent of the Zoning Code in promoting public health, safety, welfare and orderly development. It does not amend zoning districts, permitted uses, development standards or maps. The Environmental Justice Element supports implementation of the General Plan through existing zoning districts and review processes, while advancing the County's goals related to public health, equity, and environmental protection in a manner fully compatible with the established zoning framework.

TRIBAL CONSULTATION

General Plan updates require that jurisdictions offer consultation opportunities to local Tribes. Pursuant to Government Code Section 65352.3, Tribes have 90-days, after receiving invitations to consult on GPAs to request consultation opportunities. Staff mailed consultation invitations on November 15, 2023 to the: Big Pine Paiute Tribe of the Owens Valley, Bishop Paiute Tribe, Death Valley Timbi-sha Shoshone Tribe, Fort Independence Indian Community of Paiutes, Kern Valley Indian Community, Lone Pine Paiute-Shoshone Tribe, North Fork Rancheria of Mono Indians, Tule River Indian Tribe, Twenty-Nine Palms Band of Mission Indians, Walker River Reservation and Wuksachi Indian Tribe/Eshom Valley Band in relation to the Projects. No requests for consultation were received.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the proposal is covered by the Common Sense Exemption 15061(b) (3) that CEQA applies only to projects which have the potential for causing a significant effect on the environment. Where it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity in question may have a significant effect on the environment, the activity is not subject to CEQA. The Environmental Justice Element is a policy document that consolidates and clarifies existing General Plan goals, policies and implementations related to equity, health and environmental protection. No new land uses or physical development are proposed. Any future physical projects or regulatory changes contemplated by the element implementation measure may require separate discretionary review and separate findings for General Plan and zoning consistency and CEQA if found necessary.

NOTICING

The draft Environmental Justice Element was posted on the Planning Department website for public review on August 7, 2025 for the August 27, 2025 Planning Commission workshop and the October 7, 2025 Board of Supervisors workshop. The revised Environmental Justice Element was posted on the Planning Department website for public review on January 2, 2026. The public hearing notice was advertised in the Inyo Register on January 3, 2026 meeting the noticing requirement for the January 28, 2026 Planning Commission meeting. No comments were received by the date of posting of this staff report on the Planning Department website on January 2, 2026.

RECOMMENDED FINDINGS

Staff recommends the Planning Commission recommend that the Board of Supervisors approve and adopt the Environmental Justice Element and certify it is exempt from CEQA.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Environmental Justice Element
2. Planning Commission Resolution No. 2026-01
3. Draft Board of Supervisors Resolution