

Capitola Planning Commission

Agenda Report



Meeting: September 4, 2025

From: Community and Economic Development Department

Subject: Cliff Drive Resiliency Project and Local Coastal Program Amendments

Project Description: Permit #24-0421 for Amendments to the City's Local Coastal Program including amendments to CMC Chapters 17.32 Parks and Open Space, Chapter 17.64 ESHA, Chapter 17.76 Parking and Loading, and Chapter 17.68 Geological Hazards, as well as amendment to Capitola's Land Use Plan Chapter 2: Public Access and Chapter 7: Natural Hazards. The proposed LCP and LUP amendments affects properties within the Coastal Zone and are not effective within the Coastal Zone unless certified by the California Coastal Commission.

Recommended Action: Consider and Adopt resolutions recommending the City Council adopt amendments to CMC Chapters 17.32 Parks and Open Space, Chapter 17.64 ESHA, Chapter 17.76 Parking and Loading, and Chapter 17.68 Geological Hazards, as well as amendment to Capitola's Land Use Plan Chapter 2: Public Access and Chapter 7: Natural Hazards.

Property Owner: The proposed LCP amendments affect properties within the Coastal Zone

Representative: Katie Herlihy, Community and Economic Development Director

Background: The Public Works Department initiated the [Cliff Drive Resiliency Project](#) as a comprehensive effort to address bluff erosion, sea-level rise, and stormwater drainage impacts along the Cliff Drive corridor while also enhancing pedestrian, bicycle, and coastal access. The project extends from the western City limit to Capitola Village and includes connections to Hooper Beach and the Capitola Wharf overlook. Following an August 2024 presentation regarding alternatives for the project, the City Council reviewed the feasibility study and directed staff to move forward with Alternative 3 for full bluff protection, which includes continuous bluff stabilization along the project length, a Class I facility, cantilevered sections where needed, overlooks, and reconfigured parking. (Attachment 10)

The City hosted a community meeting on August 12, 2025, and presented an overview of the project. A summary of the questions and answers from this meeting is included as Attachment 11.

The City Council received an update on the Cliff Drive Resiliency Project at the August 28, 2025 meeting, including a phased approach due to overall cost and the current \$10.5 million committed funding through the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Emergency Relief Program. (Attachment 9)

The City received a \$500,000 Coastal Commission LCP grant for the Cliff Drive Resiliency Project. As part of the grant contract, the City is required to update Capitola's Local Coastal Program relative to the Cliff Drive improvements.

Discussion: Capitola's Local Coastal Program (LCP) is the guiding policy and regulatory framework for development and resources within the City's coastal zone. There are two key components to a Local Coastal Program. The LCP [Land Use Plan](#) is a long range planning document which establishes broad policies for land use, coastal access, habitat protection, and hazard management. The LCP Implementation Plan (sections of [CMC Title 17 Zoning Code](#)) contains specific zoning standards, ordinances, and procedures to carry out the Land Use Plan policies. The City must amend the two documents to update outdated references and policies related to Cliff Drive resilience planning. These updates address increased coastal erosion, sea-level rise, and public access needs.

The following list contains the sections of the LCP proposed for amendments:

1. CMC Chapters 17.32 Parks and Open Space
2. CMC Chapter 17.64 ESHA
3. CMC Chapter 17.76 Parking and Loading
4. CMC Chapter 17.68 Geological Hazards
5. Capitola's Land Use Plan Chapter 2: Public Access
6. Capitola's Local Coastal Land Use Plan Chapter 7: Natural Hazards

The update to Chapter 17.32: Parks and Open Space includes a new allowance for improvements along Cliff Drive related to the Cliff Drive Resiliency Project, as well as new limitations for development to ensure it is subordinate to recreational, scenic, or natural resources and prohibited on beaches except for public facilities (such as flumes, jetties, beach erosion control structures, lifeguard stands, etc.).

Chapter 17.68: Geological Hazards amendments create consistency in the definition of bluff/Seacliff, introduce a definition for coastal hazards, expand the purpose statement of the geological hazards overlay, remove references to outdated documents for geological reports, and remove the reference to the economic life of the project while maintaining a minimum fifty-year standard.

The amendment to Chapter 17.64: Ecologically Sensitive Habitat Areas clarifies that resource-dependent uses (low-intensity public access and recreation, nature study, restoration) are included as an exception for development within ESHA.

The amendment to Chapter 17.76: Parking and Loading corrects the reference to the Southern Pacific railroad right-of-way by replacing it with the Regional Transportation Commission.

The proposed Land Use Plan amendments would update descriptions of existing conditions, replace references to Southern Pacific Railroad with the Regional Transportation Commission, amend policies to include support for multi-modal enhancements, public access, coastal planning for sea-level rise, shoreline structures, and drainage, and introduce new policies for future climate adaptation planning.

Attachments:

1. Resolution for LCP-LUP Amendments
2. Resolution for LCP-IP Amendments
3. CMC Chapters 17.32 Parks and Open Space
4. CMC Chapter 17.64 ESHA
5. CMC Chapter 17.76 Parking and Loading
6. CMC Chapter 17.68 Geological Hazards
7. Capitola's Land Use Plan Chapter 2: Public Access
8. Capitola's Local Coastal Land Use Plan Chapter 7: Natural Hazards
9. Cliff Drive Resiliency August 28, 2025 City Council Staff Report
10. Cliff Drive Resiliency Full Bluff Protection Plan
11. Cliff Drive Resiliency Community Meeting 8/12/2025 Questions and Answers

Report Prepared By: Katie Herlihy, Community and Economic Development Director

Reviewed By: Rosie Wyatt, Deputy City Clerk

Approved By: Katie Herlihy, Community and Economic Development Director