

Capitola City Council

Agenda Report



Meeting: January 8, 2026

From: Community and Economic Development Department

Subject: Local Coastal Program Amendments for Cliff Drive Resiliency

Recommended Action: 1) Introduce for first reading, by title only, waiving further reading of the text, an ordinance amending Capitola Municipal Code Title 17: Zoning, Chapter 17.32 Parks and Open Space, Chapter 17.64 ESHA, Chapter 17.76 Parking and Loading, and Chapter 17.68 Geological Hazard (collectively, the “Zoning Code Amendments”) and authorizing submittal to the California Coastal Commission for Certification; 2) Adopt a resolution amending Capitola’s Land Use Plan Chapter 2: Public Access and Chapter 7: Natural Hazards (collectively, the “Land Use Plan Amendments”) and authorizing submittal to the California Coastal Commission for certification; and 3) Find that the above actions are exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Background: The Public Works Department initiated the Cliff Drive Resiliency Project (project information can be found at the link listed as Attachment 10) 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.

The City hosted a community meeting on August 12, 2025, and presented an overview of the project.

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

Before moving forward with the Cliff Drive Resiliency Project, the City must amend two planning documents that guide future development along the corridor. 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.

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 (Attachment 11) is a long-range planning document that establishes broad policies for land use, coastal access, habitat protection, and hazard management. The LCP Implementation Plan (sections of CMC Title 17 Zoning Code, linked as Attachment 12) 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.

On September 4, 2025, the Planning Commission held a public hearing to consider the Local Coastal Program Amendments, received public comment, voted to recommend the City Council adopt the proposed LCP Implementation Plan amendments, and voted to continue the LCP Land Use Plan amendments due to additional edits requested during the meeting.

On October 2, 2025, the Planning Commission reviewed the additional LCP Land Use Plan amendments, received public comment, and forwarded a positive recommendation to the City Council to adopt.

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

1. CMC Chapter 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 Local Coastal Land Use Plan Chapter 2: Public Access
6. Capitola 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.).

Amendments to Chapter 17.68: Geological Hazards 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.

Amendments to Chapter 17.64: Ecologically Sensitive Habitat Areas clarify that resource-dependent uses (low-intensity public access and recreation, nature study, restoration) are included as an exception for development within environmentally sensitive habitat areas (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. During the Planning Commission's review, additional edits were recommended to incorporate up-to-date information on Hooper's Beach and replace references to bicycles with the term "multimodal."

Coastal Commission Input: Since the Planning Commission's recommendation on October 2, 2025, staff received comments from Coastal Commission staff related to additional edits to the CMC Chapter 17.68 Geological Hazards, Capitola Land Use Plan Chapter 2: Public Access, and Capitola Local Coastal Land Use Plan Chapter 7: Natural Hazards. The requested edits are clarifying in nature and do not alter processes or policies; therefore, these edits do not require additional review by the Planning Commission.

1. Section 17.68.160: Text in red is in the existing adopted version and is requested to be kept in updates.

Bluff and hillside stability evaluations shall consider a range of coastal hazards—including erosion rates, wave climate, storm surge, and sea-level rise—over a 50-year planning horizon. Proposed development shall incorporate mitigation measures designed to perform for a minimum of 50 years post-occupancy. Slope stability shall meet minimum factors of safety of 1.5 (static) and 1.1 (seismic, pseudo static) unless otherwise justified by a site-specific analysis prepared and sealed by a California-licensed Geotechnical Engineer (GE) or Certified Engineering Geologist (CEG) and accepted by the City of Capitola. **Because the city staff may not contain the expertise necessary to evaluate the adequacy of a report, the city may employ, at the applicant's expense, an appropriate expert to evaluate the adequacy of the report.**

2. Land Use Plan Chapter 7: Natural Hazards. Text in red added to clarify.

Policy VII-11: The City shall construct future drainage projects and improve existing drainage facilities where feasible so that runoff is filtered and treated, and directed away from the coastal bluffs, or (except that where such measures are infeasible it shall be if it cannot be discharged in a place and manner so as not to contribute to erosion of a bluff or beach.)

Environmental Review: Adoption of the LUP and IP Amendments is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.9, which exempts activities and approvals by any local government for the preparation and adoption of a local coastal program or long-range land use development plan under the Coastal Act. Further, the Project is categorically exempt from CEQA because it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the Project will have a significant effect on the environment (CEQA Guidelines, 14 Cal. Code of Regs. Section 15061(b)(3)).

Fiscal Impact: No fiscal impacts.

Attachments:

1. Proposed Ordinance
2. CMC Chapter 17.32 Parks and Open Space
3. CMC Chapter 17.64 ESHA
4. CMC Chapter 17.76 Parking and Loading
5. CMC Chapter 17.68 Geological Hazards
6. Resolution to Adopt Land Use Plan Amendments
7. Capitola's Land Use Plan Chapter 2: Public Access
8. Capitola's Local Coastal Land Use Plan Chapter 7: Natural Hazards
9. <https://www.cityofcapitola.org/publicworks/page/cliff-drive-resiliency-project>
10. https://www.cityofcapitola.org/sites/default/files/fileattachments/community_development/page/1457/lcp_land_use_plan_with_exhibit_b.pdf
11. <https://www.codepublishing.com/CA/Capitola/#!/Capitola17/Capitola17.html>

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