

Capitola City Council

Agenda Report

Meeting: January 22, 2026

From: Community and Economic Development Department

Subject: Local Coastal Program Amendments for Cliff Drive Resiliency



Recommended Action: Adopt 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.

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, overviews, 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 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) 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.

On January 8, 2026, the City Council unanimously approved the introduction of the ordinance. The Council also unanimously adopted a resolution for the LCP Land Use Plan, with one minor edit to Section 2.

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'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.

At the January 8, 2026 City Council meeting, the Council directed staff to make one minor edit to Land Use Plan Chapter 2: Public Access. Specifically, the implementation section under Policy II-4 was updated to remove the reference to the Village and Park Avenue area since the policy had been amended to focus specifically on Cliff Drive.

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.

Alignment with 2025-2029 Strategic Plan Priority: Accountable Government; Community Safety; Healthy Families, Community, and Environment; Sustainable Infrastructure

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

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