

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 18, 2019

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San José Becomes First Major U.S. City to Require Buildings Be Gas-Free

To dramatically cut greenhouse gas emissions, Mayor Liccardo and his Council colleagues unanimously approved requiring new residential and municipal buildings to be fully electric.

San José, Calif. – Mayor Sam Liccardo and Councilmembers Raul Peralez, Lan Diep, Magdalena Carrasco, and Dev Davis [announced that their proposal to require new construction of detached accessory dwelling units \(ADUs\), and single-family, low-rise, and multi-family buildings in the City of San José to be electric unanimously passed the City Council.](#) San José becomes the largest city in the nation to act to cut its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions of its new buildings by up to 90 percent.

“Through the launch of San José Clean Energy, we have dramatically boosted the share of our electricity supply coming from renewables—now more than 80% and rising. Yet the daunting menace of climate change marches on,” **said Mayor Liccardo.** “We can leverage our success in decarbonizing our electricity grid—and light the path to sustainability for thousands of other American cities—through electrification of our buildings, which emit one-third of our GHG emissions.”

Mayor Liccardo continued, “Our children and grandchildren will not forgive us for merely incremental progress—we need to take bold action to counter this global threat.”

In addition to banning natural gas in all new construction of accessory dwelling units, single-family homes, and low-rise and multi-family buildings, the Mayor and his colleagues are also recommending all new multi-family buildings include 70 percent electric vehicle capable spaces, at least 20 percent electric vehicle ready spaces, and at least 10 percent electric vehicle service equipment spaces. They are also asking City Staff to explore:

- Offsetting the cost of installing solar and battery storage, electric vehicle infrastructure, and electric appliances in new affordable housing construction;
- Prohibiting natural gas infrastructure in all new municipal construction; and
- Options for potential fee and tax reductions for new all-electric high-rise multi-family and commercial building construction.

“From cleaner air and less climate pollution to more affordable homes and lower utility bills, the reach code will create a safer, greener, and more affordable San José,” **said Kimi Narita, Director of Buildings and Energy for the American Cities Climate Challenge at NRDC.** “It’s exciting to see a city as large as San José lead on building decarbonization and pave the path for other cities to do the same.”

In addition to dramatically cutting the City’s GHG emissions, these new standards will:

- Lower costs for renters and homeowners in new all-electric buildings, which are projected to be more cost-effective than mixed-fuel (electric and gas) buildings over their lifetime;
- Lower costs for new development due to installing electric vehicle charging infrastructure at the time of construction instead of retrofitting later;
- Reduce fire risks from gas leaks and lower methane emissions from domestic oil and gas operations; and
- Improve indoor air quality from using electric appliances, unlike gas, which produces respirable irritants such as nitrogen oxide and carbon monoxide.

The standards surpass the minimum requirements of California’s latest Building Energy Efficiency Standards—formally called the reach code—and will take effect on January 1, 2020.

In October 2018, the City of San José was awarded the largest environmental grant in the City’s history through Bloomberg Philanthropies’ American Cities Climate Challenge (ACCC), which has helped fund this electrification and decarbonization effort.

“As one of the highest-emitting sectors in cities, buildings represent an enormous opportunity for decarbonization—and our American Cities Climate Challenge cities continue to find innovative ways to tackle building emissions,” **said Antha Williams, Head of Environment Programs at Bloomberg Philanthropies.** “San José’s new energy reach code will help move the city closer to its Zero Net Energy goals, while also setting an example for other cities to accelerate their building decarbonization efforts. Thanks to the leadership of Mayor Sam Liccardo, the residents of San José will soon feel the financial, environmental and health benefits of cleaner, more energy-efficient buildings.”

“Electrification of buildings in San José will help us meet our climate goals faster,” **said Kerrie Romanow, Director of the San José Environmental Services Department (ESD) and Chief Sustainability Officer,** who oversees Climate Smart San José. “Focusing on new developments provides the opportunity to electrify buildings and transportation at a lower cost than a retrofit and will have a significant reduction in our carbon footprint—a win-win for our community and the environment.”

The reach code will be submitted to the California Energy Commission for review by September 30, 2019, and filed with the Building Standards Commission by December 2019.

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