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Addressing the Need for Creating Climate Resilient Communities

The Board of Supervisors has taken a number of strong actions designed to meet its commitment to the Paris Climate Accord and to the goals of the OurCounty Sustainability Plan. In the last year alone, the Board directed the Department of Regional Planning to phase out oil drilling in unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County, adopted 100% renewable energy as the default energy product for our residents and for the over 100,000 businesses served by the Clean Power Alliance in unincorporated County areas, and adopted a fleet policy requirement that all vehicles purchased by the County be zero emission whenever an appropriate model is available that meets operational needs. Later this year, the Department of Regional Planning will present an updated Climate Action Plan for the County that sets out a pathway for meeting Paris Climate Accord targets.

However, despite these bold actions to reduce climate impacts and air pollution in our communities, we understand that climate change is a global threat and that we are already experiencing its effects here in Los Angeles. The Chief Sustainability Office recently released a Climate Vulnerability Assessment containing a year-long technical

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analysis that comprehensively assessed, on a Countywide basis, the expected impacts of climate change on each of our census tracts. We know our communities will experience increasingly frequent, long-lasting, and severe heat storms, wildfires, and droughts; that droughts will be punctuated by periods of intense rain that lead to inland flooding; and that areas along the coast are at risk of flooding due to sea level rise.

The Climate Vulnerability Assessment used census data to identify populations within each census tract that were susceptible to these climate changes. It is not surprising that low-income communities and communities of color will be disproportionately impacted. For example, while the County population is about half Hispanic/Latinx, this population makes up two-thirds of the residents in the census tracts most vulnerable to extreme heat. This disparity is exacerbated by a lack of investment in urban trees, parks, and other open space as well as a preponderance of heat trapping surfaces like asphalt roadways and parking lots.

So, while the County has been bold in taking action to reduce climate impacts and air pollution emissions, this report points out the severity of impacts to communities, necessitating equally aggressive action in preparing our communities and systems to be more resilient to the changes we know are coming.

A great many cities and counties in the U.S. and across the world have met this challenge by creating Chief Resilience Officers and/or Chief Heat Officers to dedicate staff and resources to comprehensively address community and infrastructure preparedness for, and recovery from, systemic stressors and shocks, specifically as they relate to climate change and other environmental hazards.

According to a 100 Resilient Cities report, cities hire an average of 4 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff for their resilience offices. This can be done organizationally in many ways. Some examples include: The City of Los Angeles has both a Chief

Sustainability Office and a separate Chief Resilience Office; San Francisco has a Department of Environment and a separate Office of Resilience & Capital Planning; Boston has separate departments of Environment and of Racial Equity & Resilience; and Miami-Dade County has hired both a Chief Resilience Officer and Chief Heat Officer in addition to having a separate Sustainability Office.

Last year, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) ranked Los Angeles County as the riskiest county in the nation. Given the existing and future hazards that our residents and businesses face, it is appropriate and necessary that we create a Chief Climate Resilience Office that can lead the County's efforts. Given the extreme needs and importance of this issue, we should have a Chief Climate Resilience Officer as well as a Deputy Chief Heat Officer that work in concert and coordination with our Chief Sustainability Officer. These offices would co-lead the OurCounty Sustainability Plan update process and oversee implementation moving forward.

An important component to developing resilience is building equitable and climate resilient infrastructure - infrastructure that can withstand climate hazards and is also designed to mitigate impacts of these hazards to communities. This means infrastructure built to cool and green, conserve water and energy, and promote well-being and connection. As unprecedented amounts of funding become available at the state and federal level, part of the Chief Climate Resilience Office's core mission would be to develop a coordinated and focused effort to access these funds to create equitable and resilient County infrastructure as part of a formal Resilient Infrastructure Program in coordination with the *Addressing Infrastructure Inequity program* initiated by Board motion (Mitchell-Hahn) on August 10, 2021.

Finally, the OurCounty Sustainability Plan must capture and reflect goals, strategies, and actions to make our communities more resilient. Therefore, the

forthcoming update to the OurCounty Sustainability Plan – which will begin next year – should guide both the Chief Sustainability Office and the Chief Climate Resilience Office, and the two offices should be connected by both the shared plan and by shared projects such as the Youth Climate Commission and coordination and engagement with cities.

As such, the Chief Climate Resilience Office should stand parallel with the Chief Sustainability Office within the Board Executive Office and should have sufficient staffing and financial resources to carry out its work, commensurate with workload and precedent in other jurisdictions. Recognizing that the state has begun to allocate significant financial resources to this issue, that the federal government is also dedicating resources, and that philanthropy has expressed a keen interest in creating more resilient communities, there will be opportunities to supplement any County funding with outside resources to further enhance the Chief Climate Resilience Office's work.

With the increasing focus on resilient and equitable infrastructure and the financial resources now being dedicated to these issues, it is imperative that the County act quickly to create this office and begin accessing these resources for the benefit of our communities.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Direct the County's Chief Sustainability Officer, in consultation with the Chief Executive Office, to report to the Board within 45 days on the steps necessary to establish a Chief Climate Resilience Office within the Executive Office of the Board of Supervisors, including a Chief Climate Resilience Officer and a Deputy Heat Officer and the estimated staffing and funding levels; and
2. Direct the Chief Executive Office to report back during the Fiscal Year 2022-23

Final Changes Budget phase with staffing and funding options to effectuate the establishment of a Chief Climate Resilience Office.

S:SF/AddressingTheNeedForCreatingClimateResilientCommunities