

Comment on the Draft Cape Regional Policy Plan

I commend the Commission for undertaking a thorough review of the challenges facing the Cape in an inclusive and participatory manner. Many of the elements of the plan and much of the information in the document are excellent.

As with other planning documents, the plan is uneven in the quality of its coverage of key issues. There are a lot of great data sound bites but they are not always presented as part of a coherent hypothesis which links an empirically driven problem analysis to time bound clear outcomes/goals. Perhaps some of the more important details of the vision can be found in the specialized regional plans referenced in the draft for water, transport, economic development and climate resilience. That kind of desired granularity is absent in most of this draft. Consequently, this product reads as a very aspirational and nice sounding tome touching on a lot of important subjects but fundamentally vague and not particularly useful as a mobilizer for action.

There are 14 appropriate goals, but there do not appear to be any targets or a theory of what/how those targets would/should be set, much less reached. Admittedly in some topic areas, determining specific metrics can be challenging (resiliency for example) but in others there would appear to be an opportunity for the Commission to lead in laying out some ambitious goals. For example, how much open space should we be working to protect on the Cape and why; how many affordable housing units do we need and how can we make progress getting there (recognizing, of course, Government action alone is insufficient); what might 'balanced' transport actually look like and what investments in infrastructure are needed to get there at what ballpark costs (this may be more extensively treated in the 2016 Regional Transport Plan but that is not clear from this draft); what are the top three infrastructure investments we need to make and why; how much solid waste are we generating and what are we doing to get closer to zero waste; and what are some growth scenarios and management options/tradeoffs in terms of cost and the environment, etc.

A planning document that fails to commit to tangible, realistic (but forward leaning) measurable objectives is not a map with milestones. I fear that the Commission is lowering its sights to a well-intentioned rehashing of the same old, same old. On one of the most critical issues, water quality, thankfully, there is finally, albeit belatedly, some evidence of forward movement on some parts of the Cape. But, given the importance of the issue, the draft plan is remarkably unspecific about what needs to be done and doesn't suggest any time lines. Again, perhaps such detail is found in the specialized regional plan but, if so, a general reader of this plan would still welcome at least some top line bullets about the problem and how it is being addressed. The special difficulties in remediating declining water quality in our fresh water ponds merit fuller consideration in this draft or the specialized plan as they are in areas that, in most towns, are not expected to be sewered. Moreover, these ponds suffer from legacy sediment issues that (if not addressed) will continue to adversely impact oxygen levels.

Finally, while I welcome the emphasis placed on adjusting to the consequences of global warming and ongoing climate change – basically the adaptation and mitigation pieces – I am puzzled at the near absence of discussion about how and when we get to net zero in terms of carbon and other greenhouse

gases. The document does talk a bit about renewables and does reference the State's Global Warming Solutions Act (which has some time bound reduction targets) but there is no detail about our greenhouse gas profile, the 1990 baseline for the Cape (this is the baseline year used in the Act) or strategies for accelerating the transition to net zero and what this might portend in terms of our future economy and life styles. This strikes me as a particularly serious lapse given the centrality of carbon to the current way of life on the Cape, a way of life which is increasingly unsustainable if it continues to depend on fossil fuels to drive it forward. I strongly encourage the Commission to consider making carbon neutrality one of the major areas of engagement with appropriately supportive and relevant goals.

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