

Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR
AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Kerrie Romanow

**SUBJECT: ZERO EMISSIONS
NEIGHBORHOOD PILOT
UPDATE**

DATE: June 23, 2023

Approved



Date

6/27/23

INFORMATION

During the May 2, 2023 San José City Council meeting, Council requested that staff provide an update on the Zero Emissions Neighborhood (ZEN) pilot. This memorandum provides a brief history of the ZEN pilot design, current implementation measures, and planned next steps.

ZEN Pilot Design

The City recognizes that climate change is connected to many systems, including housing, energy, transportation, safety, and health. The ZEN pilot aims to holistically address these systems, while centering community input on the pilot design process, by implementing a suite of Climate Smart measures for an estimated number of 20-40 single-family (owned or rented) and/or multi-family homes in a disadvantaged neighborhood in San José. Pending funding from internal and external sources and input from community members, planned ZEN pilot measures include urban greening, water conservation, waste reduction, energy efficiency and electrification, and zero emissions mobility.

The ZEN pilot was developed with three main goals in mind:

1. Improve quality of life in the pilot neighborhood in ways that matter deeply to them, including combining outreach and education with hands on projects;
2. Reduce greenhouse gas emissions by increasing access to and awareness and support of Climate Smart building and mobility measures; and
3. Demonstrate the feasibility and benefits of the ZEN concept, with an equity focus in mind, in order to gain lessons-learned for future programming.

Working with Sylver Consulting based in Evanston Illinois for nearly two years under the American Cities Climate Challenge grant, Environmental Services Department (ESD) staff conducted an extensive research and outreach process to determine the ZEN pilot design and which neighborhood in San José would be selected for the ZEN pilot program. This work included:

- **Collaboration with Santa Clara University to Identify Equity Focus Areas** – Staff collaborated with graduate students in the Department of Environmental Studies and Sciences at Santa Clara University to identify ten potential candidate neighborhoods at the census tract level. This research analyzed metrics including percentage of residents below the federal poverty level, percentage of residents experiencing high/severe energy burden, percentage of residents renting, percentage of residents experiencing linguistic isolation, racial and ethnic diversity measures from the Esri Diversity Index, and pollution burden measures from CalEnviroScreen.
- **Interviews with Residents in Potential ZEN Areas** – Staff worked with Sylver Consulting to engage residents in zip codes within the priority census tracts to understand how the community viewed the ZEN pilot concept and potential benefits in order to further inform the ZEN pilot design.
- **Workshops with Community-based Organizations** – Staff worked with Sylver Consulting to conduct two workshops with community-based organizations to review and discuss the ZEN concept and the identified potential candidate areas within the ten census tracts. During these workshops, the community-based organizations provided insight on their service areas and best practices for conducting community engagement.

With the general pilot design in place, ESD staff presented the pilot to the Guadalupe-Coyote Resource Conservation District which has since changed its name to North Santa Clara Resource Conservation District (NSCRCD), to gain support for the first phase of the pilot. NSCRCD awarded the ZEN pilot \$73,000 in 2022 to implement urban greening measures.

Ultimately, City staff identified the Santee neighborhood located in Council District 7 for the ZEN pilot. Santee is within the ten priority census tracts identified by the Santa Clara University research study and has one of the highest CalEnviroScreen scores. Santee is also within the boundaries of the NSCRCD and Project Hope service areas. Project Hope, administered by the Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Department, empowers communities by promoting the creation and support of neighborhood associations in underserved areas. Project Hope has a strong existing relationship with the Santee community, which has greatly aided in engaging Santee residents in the ZEN pilot.

The ZEN pilot launched in July 2022 and is currently funded through December 2023. City staff intends to seek additional funding from internal and external sources to extend the pilot.

Current ZEN Pilot Implementation Initiatives

Following receipt of the NSCRCD funding and pilot area selection, City staff began engaging directly with Santee community members to co-design the Climate Smart initiatives they wanted to see implemented in their neighborhood. This engagement included:

- **Community Survey** – At community meetings and events in summer 2022, Project Hope staff distributed a survey to residents of the Santee community and posted flyers with links to the survey in high traffic areas to gather input on desired urban greening projects. Sixty-five residents responded to the survey; the results of the survey indicated

planting projects were preferred over water conservation, flood prevention, or other types of urban greening projects.

- **Community Meetings** – Staff engaged in five neighborhood association and community garden meetings to identify specific urban greening measures for implementation with NSCRCD funding and provide pilot progress updates. Residents prioritized trees and drought-friendly plants and identified the existing community garden, community centers/parks/playgrounds, and schools as focus areas. ESD staff separately met with representatives from the Franklin McKinley School District, Santee Elementary School, and Franklin McKinley Children’s Initiative Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County to identify urban greening opportunities at properties owned by these organizations in the Santee neighborhood. Staff from NSCRCD also held a community garden workshop on sustainable gardening practices, with plans to make it a series of workshops over the course of the year.

In addition to urban greening measures, the Department of Transportation staff has also started working with the Santee neighborhood on a second phase of the ZEN pilot to design an initiative focused on reducing greenhouse gas emissions from urban freight.

Next Steps

Through community surveys and meetings, ESD staff received feedback from Santee residents regarding additional Climate Smart measures that they would like to prioritize. These priorities include:

- Improving lighting in streets and schools;
- Implementing San José Clean Energy’s School Energy Efficiency Program at Santee Elementary School;
- Upgrading air conditioning/appliances in rental units; and
- Integrating Electric Homes San José, a program in collaboration with BlocPower focused on accelerating building electrification

Through the next fiscal year, City staff will be focused on closing out currently funded pilot measures and expanding implementation into other ZEN pilot measure areas. Planned activities include:

- **Completing Urban Greening Measure Implementation** – By December 2023, ESD staff intends to close out the NSCRCD funding by completing planting projects, including a tree planting at the Franklin-McKinley Children’s Initiative community center, hosting educational community gardening workshops, installing a drip irrigation system at the Santee Community Garden, and continuing to meet with additional organizations to identify more urban greening opportunities in the neighborhood.
- **Initiating Building Electrification Implementation Measures** – In 2024, staff will initiate efforts to connect Santee residents with opportunities for building electrification incentives and upgrade opportunities (e.g., San José Clean Energy’s San José Home Appliance Savings Program, ESD’s Electric Homes San José program).
- **Seeking Funding for Transportation Measure** – Following Santee neighborhood input on the design of a pilot to address greenhouse gas emissions associated with urban

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freight, City staff will be seeking opportunities to acquire funding to implement a pilot in the ZEN pilot area.

City staff will continue to center community leadership and co-creation in the development of specific ZEN implementation measures that both improve residents' quality of life and advance the City's Climate Smart goals. By engaging community members in the planning stages of projects, staff can ensure resources are leveraged in ways that promote City goals while keeping San José resident priorities at the forefront.

/s/

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