

BEACON
SPOTLIGHT
AWARD
WINNER
BEST PRACTICE
ACTIVITIES



City of El Cerrito

Sustainability Best Practice Activities









ILG INSTITUTE FOR
LOCAL GOVERNMENTSM
Promoting Good Government at the Local Level

City of El Cerrito

California communities are leading the fight against climate change. From small projects to large-scale programs, cities and counties are making great strides to create healthy, sustainable and economically prosperous communities. Participants in ILG's Beacon Program serve as leaders in this effort, making measureable contributions to reducing energy and greenhouse gas emissions, and sharing their sustainability best practices.

This document represents a collection of activities your agency has completed in 10 areas of sustainability. While local governments have a wide range of choices available to address climate change, these activities represent the unique opportunities and values in your community. These voluntary actions are essential to achieving California's goals to save energy, reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and create more sustainable communities.

SPOTLIGHT AWARD

SPOTLIGHT AWARD		SILVER LEVEL	GOLD LEVEL	PLATINUM LEVEL
Areas of Accomplishment				
	Agency GHG Reductions		2019 (10%)	
	Community GHG Reductions		2018 (14%)	
	Agency Energy Savings		2013 (14%)	2018 (26%)
	Natural Gas Savings			2018 (52%)
	Sustainability Best Practice Activities			2019
	Beacon Award		2019	

Cities and counties throughout the Golden State should be proud of the accomplishments made through the hard work, innovation and collective community action. The Institute for Local Government applauds your achievements and thanks you for your continued participation in the Beacon Program.

The Beacon Program is sponsored by the Institute for Local Government and the Statewide Energy Efficiency Collaborative (SEEC). SEEC is an alliance between three statewide non-profit organizations and California's four Investor-Owned Utilities. The Beacon Program is funded by California utility ratepayers and administered by Pacific Gas and Electric Company, San Diego Gas and Electric Company, Southern California Edison and Southern California Gas Company under the auspices of the California Public Utilities Commission.



Energy Efficiency and Conservation Activities

Silver

1. The city has adopted and promotes Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) financing programs to encourage property owners to invest in and reduce barriers to energy efficiency projects. So far, the city has authorized four different PACE programs to operate in El Cerrito.

Gold

2. In 2008, the city established the Energy and Water Efficiency Program (EWEP), which helps fund projects that improve the resource efficiency of operations. The EWEP has funded five energy projects and one water project that has saved 245,000 kWh in energy, 1.5 million gallons of water, and reduced 79 tons of CO₂.
3. The City of El Cerrito works closely with East Bay Energy Watch to help track greenhouse gas emissions, educate residents, and to encourage energy efficiency upgrades. East Bay Energy Watch offers rebates and works with businesses, organizations, and individuals to help lower their energy bills and reduce their ecological footprint.

Platinum

4. The Environmental Quality Committee regularly hosts workshops for residents to educate the public about sustainable practices, such as reducing energy use, installing solar or purchasing electric vehicles, and evaluating the “electrification” of buildings. To do this, among other things, the committee promotes programs, such as SunShares, opportunities from East Bay Energy Watch, and the 100% renewable energy option available from El Cerrito’s community choice aggregation, Marin Clean Energy (MCE).
5. The city implemented a streamlined solar system permitting process, which allows residents to receive solar energy permits at an expedited rate. This makes the solar process easier on residents and encourages the installation of solar panels.
6. El Cerrito inputs municipal energy usage data into an EnergyCap database to track trends and ensure energy is being used efficiently across the city. Moreover, monitoring the data alerts the city of anomalies so they can be addressed in a timely manner.





Water & Wastewater Systems Activities

Silver

1. The El Cerrito platinum LEED certified Recycling and Environmental Resource Center is equipped with four rain gardens, which capture and treat stormwater runoff before returning it to the San Francisco Bay. The center also has a stormwater catchment system in place, which captures, treats, and stores rainwater in an 11,000-gallon cistern. This water is then used for the center's irrigation and flushing systems.

Gold

2. The city is in the process of developing a Green Infrastructure Plan to shift from a conventional gray stormwater system to a sustainable, green stormwater system that treats runoff water before it enters the bay. The city will set target reduction goals for polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and mercury by the years 2020, 2030, and 2040.
3. El Cerrito has already started to incorporate green infrastructure at locations throughout the city. There are rain gardens at the Recycling and Environmental Resource Center, at city hall, and on the Ohlone Greenway active transportation corridor. These rain gardens treat stormwater runoff, capture litter, and reduce flood risk in the community.

Platinum

4. In 2019, the city will update the Storm Drain Master Plan, which is focusing on assessing current storm drain infrastructure, identifying areas of improvement, future capital improvement projects, and incorporating more green infrastructure throughout El Cerrito.
5. The city updated the city's approved tree list in 2017 with a focus on drought tolerant species to improve water conservation efforts.
6. To better educate and promote water conservation efforts, the city has posted information with links to useful resources on the city's website. The information outlines California's state restrictions and provides information on resources for residents and businesses. El Cerrito also publishes educational articles in their newsletter, A Greener El Cerrito.





Green Building Activities

Silver

1. El Cerrito's city hall is a LEED certified building with permeable surfaces and drought-tolerant plants surrounding the building. A rain garden, native plant creekscape, and bioswales were incorporated on the site to better manage and treat stormwater runoff from the parking lot and roofs of the surrounding area.

Gold

2. The city re-opened the re-built Recycling and Environmental Resource Center in April of 2012. The building is a platinum LEED certified building and includes 24 kW of solar panels, a building made of recycled materials, heat pumps, energy efficient designs, and rain gardens. A rainwater catchment system also collects and treats stormwater and stores it in an 11,000-gallon cistern.
3. The city has incorporated and encourages high density, transit-oriented development plans along major transportation corridors, for example in the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan.

Platinum

4. The city promotes green building on the city website by clearly defining it and demonstrating how residents can incorporate these practices on their own. The web page also includes links to Contra Costa County green building, California state recycling for construction and demolition, LEED building, and more.
5. El Cerrito has provided a building permit fee discount of 50% for accessory dwelling units to encourage more density and a smaller ecological footprint.
6. In 2019, the city council adopted a resolution to implement a program that prevents PCBs from being released into the stormwater system or San Francisco Bay from the demolition of older buildings.





Waste Reduction and Recycling Activities

Silver

1. The Recycling and Environmental Resource Center was reconstructed in 2012 and accepts a wide range of materials, including plastics, metals, textiles, cardboard, Styrofoam, pharmaceuticals, electronic waste, and more. The center also provides resources and educational materials for residents to help them be more environmentally conscious consumers and properly dispose of used items. The center has won multiple local and national awards, including an honorable mention from the National Waste and Recycling Association for “recycling facility of the year award.”

Gold

2. In 2013, the city adopted a Climate Action Plan, which set waste reduction goals and targets. El Cerrito is actively working to divert more materials away from landfills; the city conducted over 50 site visits throughout El Cerrito in 2018 to educate the commercial sector on best practices and continues to increase outreach and programs to reduce waste.
3. The city has been gradually decreasing waste. El Cerrito’s landfilled materials have remained stable and its diversion programs have expanded. The amount of trash going to landfills decreased by almost 4,000 tons between 2005 and 2016.

Platinum

4. The Recycling and Environmental Resource Center actively works to promote reuse of items above all else. The center has an “exchange zone” in which residents can leave or take books, magazines, CDs, corks, platners, and more. There is also a St. Vincent de Paul donation trailer on site where reusable items can be donated and USAgain bins for any textiles to be donated or upcycled.
5. The center has implemented a satellite program to provide a household hazardous waste collection service for West Contra Costa County residents. The service takes place every Tuesday and accepts a wide range of cleaners, garden products, hazardous aerosols, and more.
6. The city conducts outreach and education to inform residents and businesses. This includes mailing inserts, site visits, bill inserts, newsletters, and workshops.





Climate-friendly Purchasing Activities

Silver

1. The city has set a goal in the Climate Action Plan to green the municipal fleet and has taken the first steps in doing so by leasing three electric vehicles.

Gold

2. The city drafted the Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Policy in 2006 to document and increase the city's practices of buying environmentally preferable products whenever possible.
3. El Cerrito uses U.S. EPA recycled content standards as part of the Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Policy to purchase recycled goods, such as office paper.

Platinum

4. The city implemented a food ware ordinance in January of 2014 that eliminated the use of expanded polystyrene foam food ware. This prohibited food providers, including all of the city's facilities and contractors, from serving prepared food in polystyrene food ware. The city implemented a single-use bag ordinance in 2014, which reduces the use of single-use carry out bags.
5. The city council approved a resolution in 2008 that supports extended producer responsibility and product stewardship. This is an effort to encourage producers to create more environmentally friendly products.
6. The city considers environmentally preferable purchasing requirements and climate-friendly goods when purchasing janitorial products.





Renewable Energy and Low-Carbon Fuels Activities

Silver

1. El Cerrito has equipped several municipal buildings with a total of over 250 kW of solar panels, which offsets approximately 100,000 kWh in non-renewable energy.

Gold

2. The city joined the community choice aggregation, MCE, in 2015. This was a goal set in the Climate Action Plan and helps the city further reduce greenhouse gas emissions by sourcing electricity from more renewable sources.
3. El Cerrito became the first city in Contra Costa County to opt-up to MCE “deep green” 100% renewable energy in 2017, which is projected to reduce GHG emissions by 24% between 2015 and 2019.

Platinum

4. The city created a Living Lightly team to further promote the MCE “deep green” 100% renewable option. The city is always encouraging residents and businesses to also opt-up and has been participating in and promoting MCE’s Living Lightly campaign.
5. The city celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2017. As part of the celebration, El Cerrito conducted the 100x100 campaign, which encouraged residents to choose up to 100% renewable energy in honor of the city’s 100 years. These efforts helped the community gain 213 “deep green” enrollments.
6. El Cerrito has actively participated and promoted SunShares, an annual program that gives discounts to residents for electric vehicles and home solar installation. This past year, El Cerrito had 76 interested community members in the program and 12 contracts signed. This totaled to over 47 kWh of energy savings from new solar installations.





Efficient Transportation Activities

Silver

1. El Cerrito's General Plan and San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan focuses on transit-oriented development around the city's two BART stations and along the city's main corridor. The city is investing in pedestrian, bicycle, and transit friendly infrastructure along the multi-modal corridor.

Gold

2. The Active Transportation Plan was adopted in April 2016 and includes nine projects, such as an updated bicycle and pedestrian network, a policy toolkit, and programming to make walking and biking around the city more accessible.
3. The city is continuing to participate in the development of the Bay Area Sustainable Community Strategy's Plan Bay Area process. El Cerrito is also positioned to be competitive for SCS Plan Bay Area grants because the city has created a Complete Streets Plan.

Platinum

4. El Cerrito participates in the Bay Area Bike to Work Day each year. The city hosts an energizer station outside one of the BART stations where bicyclists can grab refreshments, giveaways, and information on bicycling in the area. In 2018, El Cerrito had over 400 people stop at the energizer station.
5. El Cerrito has a Safe Routes to School Program, which is working to enhance the areas surrounding schools and improve safety so students can walk, bike, and roll to school easily and efficiently. The city is encouraging alternative modes of transportation to reduce automobile congestion and reach goals set in the Strategic Plan, Climate Action Plan, and Active Transportation Plan.
6. El Cerrito is working to develop a congestion relief plan that mitigates automobile and parking impacts by partnering with all regional transportation agencies serving West Contra Costa County.





Land Use and Community Design Activities

Silver

1. El Cerrito adopted the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan (SPASP) in 2014 to enhance the midtown and downtown areas of San Pablo Avenue. The city's SPASP form based code seeks to ensure high quality, context sensitive development by providing specific design standards meant to enhance the public realm, encourage pedestrian-oriented commercial activity, protect neighboring areas, and create a sense of community identity.

Gold

2. The city's Urban Greening Plan was adopted in December 2015. The plan is intended to enhance public places and open spaces throughout the city. The plan identifies strategies to create greener and more environmentally sustainable areas while increasing mobility pathways in the community.
3. The city developed the Ohlone Greenway Wayfinding project—a pedestrian and bicyclist amenity along the Ohlone Greenway and throughout the city. The signage has highlighted open spaces and community destinations, as well as route guidance and travel time estimations, which has enhanced access, safety, and convenience for residents.

Platinum

4. El Cerrito is striving to link many of its commercial nodes through a network of open space, public art, and historical and cultural amenities that inspire people to linger longer. The city is also developing and implementing design guidelines that promote a pedestrian-friendly commercial environment.
5. El Cerrito began implementation of the Active Transportation Plan sidewalk and pathway network projects, which allow the city to review street and park projects to identify opportunities for pedestrian improvements as part of funded projects.
6. The city is continuing to add features to enrich the Ohlone Greenway—a 2.7 mile, multimodal corridor that crosses through El Cerrito beneath BART tracks. El Cerrito is incorporating interactive exhibits, additional parks, improved plazas, play equipment and gathering areas.





Open Space and Offsetting Carbon Emission Activities

Silver

1. El Cerrito is home to the El Cerrito Hillside Natural Area (HNA)—a mix of woods, grasslands, and creeks in an open space area in the heart of an otherwise dense urban environment. The area is over 100 acres and the largest community-serving park and recreation facility in the city. ABAG has listed the HNA as a priority conservation area.

Gold

2. The city council approved an updated and expanded Public Tree and Shrub Ordinance to establish clear guidelines for the planting and maintenance of trees and shrubs in public places. This ordinance will benefit El Cerrito's urban forest and will help the city to become a Tree City USA.
3. El Cerrito purchased the eight-acre Madera Property to expand the Hillside Natural Area and connect the north and south areas of the existing open space in 2014.

Platinum

4. The city adopted the Ohlone Greenway Master Plan in 2009 to enhance the Ohlone Greenway. The enhancements will create a unique El Cerrito experience for the user while incorporating sustainable designs, such as rain gardens, drought-tolerant plants, and low maintenance landscaping.
5. The city launched a community tree planting project in 2014 as an effort to improve the city's urban forest. As part of the San Pablo Avenue Streetscape project, over 300 trees were planted. In 2010, the city received an Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation grant to plant more than 160 trees citywide.
6. El Cerrito was awarded a Prop 84 grant to develop an Urban Greening Plan with the intent of increasing the benefits of green areas to gather, play and enjoy, and improve existing parks and green space.





Promoting Community and Individual Action Activities

Silver

1. The city's Environmental Quality Committee is made up of 15 volunteer members who live or work in El Cerrito. It is supported by the Operations and Environmental Services Division and hosts many events, including creek and greenway cleanups, restoration events, workshops on environmental topics, and educational film events.

Gold

2. The city has an Urban Forest Committee, which has expanded the capacity of the city to make grant-funded urban forestry projects happen. Examples include the 2014 tree inventory, tree planting throughout El Cerrito, and the development of educational and outreach materials for residents.
3. Each Earth Day, El Cerrito hosts work parties throughout the community. Individuals and groups of volunteers clean up the natural landscape of the city removing litter, planting trees, and removing invasive species. The celebration is supported by donations from residents and local businesses.

Platinum

4. The El Cerrito Trail Trekkers is a community organization that frequently collaborates with the city. Their mission is to build, maintain, promote, and utilize the lesser known urban trails throughout the city. They engage the community by hosting regular trail walks and clean ups.
5. The Recycling and Environmental Resource Center and Public Works staff produce outreach materials and engage with members of the public at community events to encourage individual action in areas ranging from using fewer pesticides to installing solar to reduce waste.
6. El Cerrito's adopt-a-place program allows residents or businesses to "adopt" public areas and look out for vandalism, assist with maintenance, and conduct general clean up.





© 2019 by Institute for Local Government
1400 K Street, Suite 205
Sacramento, CA 95814
916-658-8208
www.ca-ilg.org

