



Environment & Climate Commission

ACTION CALENDAR
June 16, 2026

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
 From: Berkeley Environment and Climate Commission (ECC)
 Submitted by: Alison LaBonte, Chairperson, ECC
 Subject: Affirming All-Electric Standards for the 2026 Infrastructure Bond Measure and City Capital Projects

RECOMMENDATION

The Berkeley Environment and Climate Commission recommends that the City Council adopt a resolution to:

- Adopt a formal policy prohibiting the installation of new natural gas infrastructure (hereafter referred to as “gas”) or the replacement of existing gas equipment with new gas equipment in any project funded by the proposed 2026 General Obligation Bond Measure;
- Include explicit all-electric construction and retrofit language in the bond measure itself; and
- Direct staff to apply this no-new-gas standard as a condition of all City capital spending, beyond bond-funded projects, thus affirming that public funds shall not be used to install new gas infrastructure in any municipal facility.

POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

On May 20, 2026, the Facilities, Infrastructure, Transportation, Environment & Sustainability Policy Committee adopted the following action: M/S/C (Lunaparra/Taplin) to send the item to Council with a Qualified Positive Recommendation with an addition to add exception language to be approved by City Council.

Vote: Ayes – Taplin, Lunaparra; Noes – None; Abstain – Humbert

FISCAL IMPACTS OF RECOMMENDATION

All-electric construction is increasingly cost-competitive with gas-dependent construction. Electric systems eliminate ongoing gas utility costs, reduce long-term maintenance burdens, and position City facilities to benefit from falling costs of electric technologies. Any potential upfront cost differential is outweighed by the quantifiable benefits to public health, lifecycle savings, and avoided climate risk. No new appropriation is required to implement this policy direction.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

The City of Berkeley is preparing a proposed \$300 million General Obligation Bond Measure for the November 2026 ballot. The measure proposes to fund major capital

projects across three categories: Parks, Recreation, and Waterfront; General Facilities and Buildings; and Fire Department facilities.

This bond measure represents one of the largest single investments in municipal infrastructure in Berkeley's recent history — and one of the most significant opportunities to permanently align City capital spending with Berkeley's climate commitments. Many of the proposed projects involve ground-up construction or comprehensive building renovations, making them ideal candidates for all-electric design at little or no additional cost.

Despite Berkeley's status as a national leader in building electrification policy, passing a first-in-the-nation ban on natural gas in new construction in 2019, there are no longer any laws prohibiting natural gas use in buildings, and no explicit electrification requirement has been proposed for the bond measure. While the 2024 ruling by the Ninth Circuit in opposition to Berkeley's natural gas ban, and recent changes in state law limit changes to the building code, no restrictions exist on how a municipality chooses to direct its own spending. Other Bay Area cities, such as San Francisco, enacted all electric requirements applying to city buildings before proceeding to more expansive requirements that remain in force to this day. Without such a requirement, bond-funded projects could default to gas equipment for heating, cooking, water heating, or other building systems, locking in fossil fuel infrastructure for decades and undermining the City's climate goals.

This is a strategic planning priority, advancing Berkeley's goal to be a global leader in addressing climate change, advancing environmental justice, and protecting the environment.

At the March 25, 2026 meeting, the commission took the following action:

Action: M/S/C (Ranney/Binns) to approve the substantive content of the report to Council, regarding the inclusion of building electrification in relation to the potential City of Berkeley \$300M General Obligation Bond for the November 2026 Ballot and municipal capital projects, as revised at the March 25, 2026 meeting, with additional minor edits to ensure consistency and clarity throughout.

Vote: Ayes - Ranney, La Bonte, Tahara, Mahmoudian, Kesselman, Binns, Brown, Athanasiou, Syed; Noes - None; Abstain - None; Absent - McGuire.

BACKGROUND

The proposed 2026 bond measure applies to existing and new municipal buildings, which is a domain where the City has full discretion over construction standards. The City is free to ensure that its own facilities reflect its stated climate values, and has a rare opportunity to do so on a large scale.

The list of proposed projects span a wide range of building types and uses. Where projects involve full replacement or substantial renovation, such as community centers, fire stations, the Fire Training Center, and multiple civic buildings, all-electric design is achievable with current technology and at competitive cost. For projects involving more limited scope (e.g., mechanical system upgrades), a no-new-gas standard would at minimum prevent the installation of new gas-fired equipment where electric alternatives are available. The City should also strongly consider reducing reliance on other fossil fuel infrastructure where suitable alternatives exist, such as solar and storage for backup power.

Furthermore, the proposed bond measure explicitly lists "energy-efficient systems and lower long-term costs" and "environmental sustainability and resilience" among its stated values in evaluating and prioritizing projects. Codifying an all-electric requirement in the bond measure language is a direct and concrete expression of those values and a fulfillment of the measure's own stated goals. Such a requirement, both applying to projects funded by the bond measure and all future city projects, would implement crucial components of the Berkeley Existing Buildings Electrification Strategy, adopted by Council in 2021¹.

The public is supportive. Council polling of the measure revealed that the top infrastructure priority for Berkeley residents was climate resilience, with 35% of residents listing it as one of their top two priorities².

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE IMPACTS

Natural gas combustion in buildings is a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions and indoor air pollution. Installing new or replacement gas infrastructure in bond-funded municipal buildings would:

- Lock in fossil fuel dependency in City-owned facilities for 20–40 years, well beyond Berkeley's 2045 carbon neutrality target;
- Undermine Berkeley's credibility as a climate leader and signal to the public that the City's electrification commitments do not apply to its own operations; and
- Expose building occupants, including community members (especially the more vulnerable young and elderly), fire fighters, and City employees, to the known indoor air quality risks associated with gas combustion appliances, which approach \$1 billion annually across the Bay Area³.

¹ <https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/2022-01/Berkeley-Existing-Buildings-Electrification-Strategy.pdf>

² <https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/city-council-meetings/2026-03-17%20Special%20Agenda%20Packet%20-%20Council.pdf>

³ https://www.baaqmd.gov/~/_media/dotgov/files/rules/reg-9-rule-4-nitrogen-oxides-from-fan-type-residential-central-furnaces/2021-amendments/documents/20230127_factsheet_rg09040906-pdf.pdf?rev=29d5bd3e4204460298a2ca1f02ac9214&sc_lang=en

Conversely, requiring all-electric construction across bond-funded projects (and all City capital spending) would meaningfully reduce municipal emissions, improve indoor air quality in public facilities, demonstrate institutional leadership, and create durable, future-proof infrastructure aligned with California's clean energy grid trajectory.

RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

1. The bond measure is the right vehicle. Because the bond measure will govern how hundreds of millions of dollars are spent on City facilities over the next decade, it is the ideal place to enshrine an electrification requirement. Including it in the measure language increases public accountability and provides another reason for Berkeley voters to support it.
2. City polling indicates that the public is highly supportive of climate and green infrastructure goals.
3. There is no technical barrier. All-electric construction is viable across every project type in the proposed portfolio. Several of the proposed projects have already completed conceptual design; the Commission encourages the City to verify and update those designs to reflect an all-electric standard where they have not already done so.
4. The City's own spending is within its control. Berkeley can and should hold its own buildings to the highest electrification and emissions standards to improve the health of its residents and that of the environment.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS CONSIDERED

n/a

CITY MANAGER

The City Manager concurs with the content and recommendations of the Commission's Report, recognizing that this has been the City of Berkeley's typical practice since 2020, when the since-repealed Prohibition on Natural Gas Infrastructure in New Buildings became effective.

In addition, to improve regional air quality and reduce the amount of NOx and particulate matter emissions, the Bay Area Air District has adopted zero NOx emissions standards for natural gas fired furnaces and water heaters (Rules 9-4 and 9-6). These rules begin implementation on Jan 1, 2027 (for water heaters under 75,000 BTU/hr, typically residential size) and will impact commercial furnaces on Jan 1, 2029, and commercial water heaters (75,000 – 2M BTU/hr) on Jan 1, 2031. Electric heat pumps will comply with these regulations, applicable to all sales and installations in the Bay Area, in both replacements in existing construction and in new construction.

Although electrification is now standard practice and will increasingly be required throughout the Bay Area for water and space heating, the City Manager notes that there may be limited instances in which exceptions to the electrification of municipal facilities during new construction or the replacement of existing gas equipment may be needed. For example, electrical and/or physical constraints of an existing municipal facility or local grid capacity may limit or eliminate safe, effective electrical replacement options for gas systems at time of replacement. Among the infrastructure projects currently under consideration for funding through the potential bond measure, the King Pool may require a gas alternative.

If such an exception would be sought due to technical infeasibility, the City Manager would come to City Council for approval of a gas alternative.

CONTACT PERSON

Alison LaBonte, Chairperson, ECC

Attachments:

1. Resolution

RESOLUTION NO. ##,###-N.S.

Affirming All-Electric Standards for the 2026 Infrastructure Bond Measure and City Capital Projects

WHEREAS, installing new or replacement natural gas infrastructure in bond-funded municipal buildings would lock in fossil fuel dependency in City-owned facilities for 20–40 years, well beyond Berkeley's 2045 carbon neutrality target; and

WHEREAS, installing new or replacement gas infrastructure in bond-funded municipal buildings would undermine Berkeley's credibility as a climate leader and signal to the public that the City's electrification commitments do not apply to its own operations; and

WHEREAS, installing new or replacement gas infrastructure in bond-funded municipal buildings would expose building occupants, including community members (especially the more vulnerable young and elderly), fire fighters, and City employees, to the known indoor air quality risks associated with gas combustion appliances, which approach \$1 billion annually across the Bay Area; and

WHEREAS, requiring all-electric construction across bond-funded projects and all City capital spending would meaningfully reduce municipal emissions, improve indoor air quality in public facilities, demonstrate institutional leadership, and create durable, future-proof infrastructure aligned with California's clean energy grid trajectory.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the City of Berkeley that the City of Berkeley will adopt a formal policy prohibiting the installation of new natural gas infrastructure (hereafter referred to as “gas”) or the replacement of existing gas equipment with new gas equipment in any project funded by the proposed 2026 General Obligation Bond Measure;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that that the City of Berkeley will include explicit all-electric construction and retrofit language in the bond measure itself; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Council of the City of Berkeley will direct staff to apply this no-new-gas standard as a condition of all City capital spending, beyond bond-funded projects, thus affirming that public funds shall not be used to install new gas infrastructure in any municipal facility.