



State of California

LITTLE HOOVER COMMISSION

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Commission Issues Call to Cut Red Tape on State Permitting for Local Climate Change Adaptation Projects

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The Little Hoover Commission, in a letter report sent Friday to Governor Brown and the Legislature, calls for reducing unnecessary bureaucratic delays in state permitting of local government projects designed to improve California's resiliency against climate change. In its letter report, *Improving State Permitting for Local Climate Change Adaptation Projects*, the Commission found that local governments designing and constructing projects to protect Californians from the threat of climate change have landed on a collision course with the state's complicated permitting process intended to protect the environment.

"California leads the world in setting goals to reduce carbon emissions, but the Commission has found in multiple studies, it has not focused anywhere near as much on protecting Californians against the effects of climate change," said Commission Chair Pedro Nava. "Local governments are on the front lines, forging ahead with infrastructure projects to protect California communities," he added. "The state needs to work with and not against them toward shared goals."

Representatives from state and local government were unified on one front – the necessity of the state permitting process in protecting clean air and water, wild landscapes and endangered species. Yet local government officials described a frustrating and time-consuming process that added months, years or in one case, more than a decade in between project design and construction. Local government officials described a process of repeated state requests for more information, one-size-fits-all permit conditions, lack of answers to questions and a gnawing perception that their local experience and environmental commitment are not to be trusted. But the Commission found the frustration is a two-way street. State permitting representatives described a stormy process in which their limited staffs receive incomplete and poorly written applications, often overlooking or ignoring concerns expressed earlier. The result is what both state and local government officials described as a back and forth exchange of letters that goes around and around.

The Commission found seemingly simple solutions that could save time and resources at both levels of government: formalize a "big table" approach to establish multi-agency communication early in the process; require state permitting agencies to develop "cookbooks," detailed guides for expectations and requirements for permit applications; and, when progress fails, particularly for large and complex infrastructure projects, establish a formal dispute resolution process. The Commission also encourages state permitting departments to use existing flexibility on endowments that can require local governments to set aside millions of dollars upfront to maintain mitigation habitat.

The Little Hoover Commission is a bipartisan and independent state agency charged with recommending ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of state programs. The Commission's recommendations are submitted to the Governor and the Legislature for their consideration and action. For a copy of the letter report or documents from the Commission's February 2017 public hearing, visit the Commission's website: www.lhc.ca.gov.