



STAFF REPORT – PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

TO: Honorable Chair and Commissioners

FROM: David Loya, Director of Community Development

PREPARER: David Loya, Director of Community Development

DATE: February 24, 2026

TITLE: **Recommend Approval of the Comprehensive Update to the Arcata Local Coastal Program; CEQA Exempt**

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the Commission:

1. Open the public hearing, receive a staff report, take public comment, deliberate, close the public hearing; then
2. Adopt Resolution PC-25-04 recommending the City Council adopt the City's Local Coastal Program comprehensive update.

INTRODUCTION:

The City of Arcata certified Local Coastal Program (Program) was last comprehensively updated in 1994. Much has changed regarding both planning and our understanding of the impact of global climate change. The February 17, 2026, version 3 of the Program posted on the City's website includes the Planning Commission's latest recommendation (<https://www.cityofarcata.org/549/Local-Coastal-Program-Update>). This action would recommend the City Council adopt the updated Local Coastal Element and Coastal Zoning Ordinance.

BACKGROUND:

The Commission has considered the draft Program at several hearings over the last five years. The current draft as modified by the Commission and the Creeks and Wetlands Committee has been reviewed at four Commission meetings in 2025.

DISCUSSION:

This action represents a General Plan amendment, adopting the Local Coastal Element (Element) of the Arcata General Plan 2045, and a zoning amendment, adopting the Coastal Zoning Ordinance (Ordinance). These legislative actions require a Planning Commission recommendation and City Council approval. This action will make a formal recommendation to the Council.

The Program will not take effect until it is certified by the Coastal Commission and the Council accepts the certification. Because the Program is delegated authority under the Coastal Act as authorized by the State Coastal Commission, certification is required. Once this step is completed, the currently certified program, which includes the Coastal Land Use Element (c. 1989) and the

Land Use and Development Guide (c. 1994), will be replaced by the updated Element and Ordinance.

The Coastal Commission staff may have recommended changes. City staff will provide updates during the approval process regarding the Commission staff comments. Depending on the nature and volume of the Commission recommendations, the Commission and Council may wish to incorporate the changes before adoption. Alternatively, the City may ask that the Commission's changes be incorporated in the certification process as conditions of certification.

The Program is also under review by the State Housing and Community Development Department (HCD). Their review is limited to whether the Accessory Dwelling Unit policy and ordinance is consistent with State housing policy. While their timeline is unknown, staff recommends finalizing local review because the changes, if any, can be incorporated in a subsequent action.

Local adoption of Local Coastal Programs are statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The California Coastal Commission operates as a "certified regulatory program", which implements the core principals of CEQA while not being subject to the procedural requirements outlined in the Public Resources Code or the CEQA Guidelines. The City will acknowledge the statutory exemption applies to its adoption.

Staff will review various minor edits to the maps that have been updated or will be updated based on the Commission's recommendation before adoption. In addition, staff will recommend a revision to the lighting standards to make the Dark Sky International standards more explicit in the code.

ATTACHMENTS:

A. Resolution PC-25-04