

Fiscal Year 2025-26 Budget Community Workshop Summary

The City of Carlsbad held a public workshop May 22, 2025, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., at the Faraday Administration Center, to provide an opportunity for community members to learn about the proposed fiscal year 2025-26 city budget, ask questions of staff and provide feedback.

Workshop promotion

City staff promoted the workshop through the following channels:

- News release
- Print ad in the Coast News
- Digital ad on the Coast News website
- Social media posts
- Email newsletters
- City website and calendar
- Nextdoor post
- Fliers at city libraries and other facilities
- Announcements during City Council meetings



Attendance

16 community members attended all or part of the workshop

12 provided verbal comments or questions

No written comments were submitted

Information shared

City staff presented the same budget overview that had been presented to the City Council May 20, 2025, then allowed time for community members to ask questions and provide comments.

Summary of questions and comments

Question: In the Climate Action Plan, transportation accounts for 50% of emissions. However, the city hasn't had a greenhouse gas emissions inventory since 2016. The city applied for a grant to update the inventory, but what happens if they don't get the grant?

Answer: The city has included funding in its FY 2025-26 budget to complete an updated greenhouse gas inventory, regardless of whether we receive grant funding. While the Climate Action Plan does not require an updated inventory on a fixed schedule, it identifies updating the inventory every two years as a best practice to track progress and inform future planning.

In the past, SANDAG provided local jurisdictions with GHG inventories at no cost. However, SANDAG staff have indicated they likely will not be able to continue offering this service for free moving forward. To help offset this change, the city joined a group of jurisdictions applying for a Smart Growth Incentive Program grant through SANDAG to fund two inventories. We expect to learn the outcome of that grant application in fall 2025.

Even without the grant, we've planned ahead by allocating funds for this work in the budget. A new GHG inventory typically costs about \$25,000.

A consultant will assist with compiling the data and preparing the inventory, using the 2022 transportation data when it becomes available.

Like all cities in the region, Carlsbad relies on transportation data from SANDAG to complete its inventories. This data is not released annually, which is why our most recent complete inventory uses 2016 transportation data—the latest available at the time. SANDAG is expected to adopt its next Regional Plan in late 2025, which will include 2022 transportation data. That data will form the basis of our next GHG inventory.

Question: Why is the city spending over \$6.5 million on artificial turf replacements, not including the \$2.2 million already spent on Stagecoach Park? Given health and environmental concerns, why not replace it with natural grass as soon as possible?

Answer: The city has eight synthetic turf fields, that have been installed or replaced at

five community parks over the past dozen years, and several of those fields are nearing the end of their useful life.

Turf replacement projects at Poinsettia and Pine Avenue Community Parks are slated for construction next year. Two other parks are currently in the design/scoping phase, but would not begin construction in the next fiscal year. Funding has been identified and included in the proposed budget for these projects. However, the City Council will still have the opportunity to consider synthetic or natural turf when the plans and specifications are brought forward for approval and bid authorization at a future City Council meeting.

During development of the Stagecoach Park on July 23, 2019, the City Council was presented with various options, including newer organic infill products.

Question: Plastic is plastic, and it's toxic. Synthetic turf poses many risks to young people. I know technology is advancing but those green pieces of plastics create greenhouse gas emissions upon disposal. Has a cost analysis been done to compare artificial turf with grass? What about future projects like Robertson Ranch and Veterans Park?

Answer: A cost analysis was conducted ahead of the Stagecoach project and provided to the City Council, along with alternatives and associated costs. The City Council chose synthetic turf at that time. Similar information will be provided for future projects, including Robertson Ranch Park, and the City Council will provide direction.

Question: What's the status of the open space at the end of Aura Circle and Hillside Drive? It seems to have been forgotten.

Answer: The Aura Circle property is managed by the city's contractor for natural preserves. While a trail was proposed through the property in the past, it is not currently an active project.

Follow-up comment: The focus should be more on habitat and planting native plants, and involving the neighbors, than trails.

Question: I appreciate the community vision statement that envisions the city emerging as a leader in energy. The city has a good opportunity. In 2018 there was a discussion of a microgrid at the Orion Safety Center. What will it take to revisit this idea at a future City Council meeting?

Answer: The City Council previously directed staff to explore energy resilience projects, including microgrids. The city is currently studying feasibility through the Maerkle Solar project. Results of that feasibility study will help staff assess available technologies and funding options and could inform future consideration of a microgrid at the Orion Safety Center.

- Question:** With only eight EV charging stations at Orion Safety Center, how will the city support charging for new electric and hybrid vehicles? Other cities are having difficulty charging their electric fleets, so I want to make sure charging infrastructure is part of our plans for electrifying vehicles.
- Answer:** The city is expanding its Direct Current fast-charging infrastructure at the fleet yard next to the Safety Training Center. Through a partnership with SDG&E's "make-ready" program, two chargers are operational and 10 more chargers are being added in the next month, with a site capacity of up to 1.5MW. The Police Department's patrol vehicles are currently targeted for conversion to hybrids rather than full electrification, though staff are evaluating technology as it evolves.
- Comment:** I am a trails volunteer. I am concerned about illegal trails created in the last few years, specifically at Lake Calavera that are damaging habitat and allowing unauthorized lake access. I've seen people go down to the lake from the dam and fish illegally. Mature trees are being defaced with graffiti or are dying from root trampling. Enforcement is lacking. Suggest adding two ranger positions in the FY 2025-26 budget. More than \$440k has been allocated for the Climate Action Plan, this could be part of that.
- Response:** The request for additional rangers was not included in this year's budget. We understand the concern and will share the suggestion.
- Comment:** Please reconsider the need for additional park rangers and consider the cost of not having enough rangers. Talk to the Parks team about how much money is spent repairing trails. Talk to the Environmental Sustainability team about how much it costs to repair preserves. Bikes on illegal trails in Calavera Hills are causing millions of dollars in damage. I appreciate that \$75,000 was allocated for trail maintenance, but please consider rangers for prevention.
- Question:** The Climate Action Plan includes shifting a benchmarking program from the state to the city. Does this year's budget fund the associated building inventory?
- Answer:** No, it is not included in the FY 2025-26 budget; the target year for this work is 2030.
- Question:** I need help improving pedestrian infrastructure near my home near Estrella De Mar so I can get out of the street I live on and walk safely the half-mile to the grocery store, library, vet, coffee shop and other local businesses. It's a half mile, but I can't get there walking. I can get there in my car, but I can't get to the corner of El Camino Real and Alga walking. Right now, you can't walk either direction - there's no place for pedestrians unless you go out of your way to cross the street. It's a good distance up or down to Alicante, which is out of the way, to cross safely. Cars coming off El Camino Real drive down the hill so fast that you can't walk and feel safe. For kids to walk to the school they have to go out of the way to find a safe route. The only lights are a good quarter mile or more away in either direction, and you have to go in the street because there are no sidewalks. How do I get someone to help solve the problem? I would be happy to walk from my house to the library, Vons or the

coffee shop with someone to show you the problem.

Answer: Several years ago, the city adopted a Sustainable Mobility Plan, which is a compilation of our bike and pedestrian plan. I appreciate you looking at alternate ways to walk around the community. In the Sustainable Mobility Plan there is a list of candidate projects, and we need to prioritize those to make sure we are being fiscally responsible. Our Transportation staff would be happy to walk through the plan and discuss the possibilities that exist for the area.

Follow-up comment: When I asked staff about this in the past, the person I spoke to said they would evaluate the speed limit, but the speed limit is not the problem. Sometimes when the issue goes to staff, they don't understand the entire problem. I will follow up with you later.

Post-workshop follow-up: Following the workshop, city staff discussed these concerns and followed up with the community member to share the current plan for addressing the issues. One of the candidate projects in the Sustainable Mobility Plan identifies improvements along Alga Road from El Camino Real to Melrose Drive. This would include filling sidewalk gaps, adding buffered Class II bike lanes and updating the traffic signals at the El Camino Real/Alga Road intersection to enhance safety. Additionally, the city has a sidewalk construction program included in the CIP. As part of this work, staff will determine the estimated timeframe for installing a new sidewalk on the south side of Alga Road from Estrella De Mar to El Camino Real.

Question: The La Costa Avenue freeway off-ramp is confusing and dangerous, especially for right turns on red. Traffic backs up frequently and I've seen many near misses. Can someone from Transportation or the Police Department come out and look at the area with me?

Answer: Those traffic signals are operated by Caltrans. Recent construction in the area may have also contributed to the traffic back-ups. Staff will relay your concerns and coordinate with Caltrans, as the city frequently partners with them on signal improvements.

Follow-up comment: Right turns on red create confusion and safety issues without much fuel savings. More studies on this are warranted.

Comment: I have done research and contacted experts, and found that it's not possible for two rangers to adequately patrol 70 miles of trails. Recommend four positions and partnerships with organizations like Urban Corps for support. I heard the concern expressed at Tuesday's City Council meeting about volunteers and how we can't rely on that anymore due to liability concerns, but in speaking with different groups that contract with Urban Corps and similar organizations, there are other options. Volunteers can just do patrol or hand work to limit liability. E-bike use on restricted trails is also a concern.

Question: I would like to get an update on polystyrene and the city's "skip the stuff" ordinance. How are we handling enforcement?

Answer: Staff are working closely with restaurants to help them transition to compostable or reusable materials. There are some businesses that are not fully there yet, but if they're not fully compliant yet they have a compliance plan they are working through and our staff is working through that with them. These businesses have received notices of non-compliance. Our goal in implementation was to educate and help people reach compliance, and for them to understand why, rather than starting to fine people right away.

Follow-up question: Could there be signage to show which businesses are compliant?

Answer: Thank you for sharing that idea, we will consider it.

Question: I heard us say we're increasing funding for open space management for fire hazard management and fire prevention. What are we doing to make sure that we do that in a way that doesn't damage open space?

Answer: The funding recently allocated at mid-year and funding in the proposed FY 2025-26 budget is part of a contract and involves work from multiple city departments. We have done nesting surveys and extensive work to prepare. The work is focusing on removing invasive and non-native plants, and areas that are not part of managed preserves, including areas adjacent to homes. It is a very targeted effort. In urban forests, we are focused on four specific areas that are primarily eucalyptus groves. Within the interface zones (i.e., segments of the areas that are adjacent to homes or roads) canopy pruning is being performed. On the interiors of the areas, we will focus on dying or declining trees to be removed and weed abatement.

The Fire Department looks at all of those parcels and creates a mitigation plan, working with biologists to determine how those efforts will move forward in a way that protects sensitive habitats.

Follow-up comment: The city should share written best practices for other agencies to learn from!