



It's Time To Get Serious About Climate Change, Starting with The Southern Nevada Economic Development and Conservation Act

January 13, 2020

To Nevada's Congressional Delegation and Clark County Commissioners:

Greetings,

Thank you for your work and discussions around the proposed [Southern Nevada Economic Development and Conservation Act](#) (SNEDCA). We appreciate that you are pursuing legislation to accommodate Southern Nevada's growing population. However, we believe the language in the current discussion draft (linked above) will excessively expand the footprint of Las Vegas, impact our natural environment, and perpetuate urban sprawl. The potential consequences of this sprawling development include:

- The wildlife habitat, biodiversity, carbon sequestration, and outdoor recreation currently provided by open spaces surrounding the city will be lost in the expansion of Las Vegas' growth boundary.
- The bill appears to make a legislative end-run around the Endangered Species Act, removing the Fish & Wildlife Service and science-based data from determining the best landscapes to protect the Desert tortoise and other species.
- Greenhouse gas emissions from more vehicles, more buildings, more roads and more construction will greatly intensify climate impacts;
- Inequity will increase between those who will benefit from the growth and those who will be left behind in an ever-sprawling city designed for cars they cannot afford. Sprawl exacerbates economic inequality and housing inequality, while doing nothing to address the affordable housing crisis.
- Diminished air quality will cost Nevadans millions in health care dollars and lost school days each year; Asthma rates are already high in lower-income neighborhoods.
- The inefficient expansion of infrastructure (roads, sewers, water, power, etc.) and services (police, fire, etc.) will increase the burden on taxpayers.

- Sprawling development will increase demand for water. At the same time, current language in the proposed draft would facilitate development of the proposed Las Vegas water pipeline from eastern Nevada. This is unacceptable.

For evidence to support these claims, and detailed suggestions, [please click here](#).

The proposed conservation designations, although they will protect some key scenic areas and wildlands, are not enough to offset the damage inflicted on the region by the “Economic Development” portion of the County’s proposed legislation.

This proposed bill, and the process of drafting it, should be an opportunity for Nevada’s Congressional delegation, working with Clark County leaders and our broader community to create meaningful climate solutions to these many challenges and for our community to become a leader in sustainability and climate action. By working together at all levels, we can create win-win-win-win outcomes for Clark County:

- Accommodate the many people who are moving to this region;
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions, save energy and resources;
- Protect public lands, habitats and Nevada’s outdoor recreation economy;
- Improve air quality and public health;
- Improve the prosperity and quality of life of the region and all residents.

Recommendations

So far, there has been too little discussion of sustainability in the future development of Las Vegas, and virtually no discussion of what our communities in the region will be like in the decades to come. It’s time to start those discussions now. There are numerous sustainability best practices in planning and legislation that could be applied to address the region’s population, equity, environmental, climate, and economic challenges. We, the undersigned, respectfully submit these recommendations as a start to make the bill and regional planning stronger:

1. Postpone passing legislation that has the potential to expand Las Vegas’ footprint—and the associated climate and equity impacts—until strong sustainability, climate-resiliency and equity policies are in place at the county level.
2. Instigate a transparent, inclusive community visioning process to help residents and other stakeholders imagine a sustainable, climate-friendly Las Vegas. We suggest this process be led by staff knowledgeable and trained in sustainable urban planning; and that it include broad cross-sections of the community.
3. Commit Clark County to aggressive climate action by signing onto the [County Climate Coalition](#), [Ready For 100](#), or another commitment platform. This would

include commitments to meet or exceed renewable energy and greenhouse gas-reduction targets in Clark County government facilities and operations.

4. Utilize local experts. [Steffen Lehmann is the Director of UNLV's School of Architecture](#) and author of the 900-page [Principles of Green Urbanism](#). Kristen Avery leads UNLV's Climate Resiliency and Urban Sustainability initiative. Opportunities abound to engage quality university programs in designing the climate-resilient Las Vegas of the future.
5. Las Vegas can grow up, not out. Provide incentives and requirements to develop land within the current disposal boundary, and redevelop older properties, before expanding the development boundary to build on undeveloped BLM lands.
6. Pursue electric vehicle adoption targets for municipal fleets and local transit. Adopt [Electric Vehicle Supply Equipment targets](#) for public spaces, hotels, employment centers, etc. Commissioner Justin Jones' recommendation to extend the EV tax credit is a great step in that direction. Work in concert with the state, local municipalities and other stakeholders to implement priorities in the state-commissioned report [Electrifying Nevada's 21st Century Transportation System](#).
7. Provide financial incentives or requirements for developers to build affordable housing in transportation-oriented development districts and corridors.
8. Improve energy conservation and renewable energy adoption by incentivizing or requiring net-zero energy buildings and residences, energy-efficient appliances, solar-ready and EV-ready building codes, etc.
9. Adopt aggressive targets to transition all residences and business from gas heat, electric and appliances to those powered by clean, renewable energy.

We urge Nevada's federal delegation to include climate-friendly recommendations such as those we suggest in the proposed legislation. Without addressing the climate, public health, equity, resource and energy impacts of sprawl in Las Vegas, Clark County and Nevada will be increasingly challenged to thrive in a climate-uncertain future.

Thank you for your time and attention to these concerns. We look forward to working with you and other stakeholders to design and support a climate-friendly Clark County lands bill.

Sincerely,

(names below)



Brian Beffort, Director,
Sierra Club Toiyabe Chapter



Chris Giunchigliani



Cynthia Moore, Las Vegas Field
Consultant, Moms Clean Air Force and
Ecomadres



Ainslee Archibald, Las Vegas Hub
Coordinator, Sunrise Movement



Jackie Chiakulas, Climate Action
Organizer, 350



Laura Martin, Director, Progressive
Leadership Alliance of Nevada



Cecia Alvarado, State Director,
Mi Familia Vota