



Lower Russian River Municipal Advisory Council

AGENDA

Regular Meeting

April 10, 2025 05:30 PM

West County Services Center, 16390 Main Street, Guerneville

<https://sonomacounty.ca.gov/lrrmac>

<https://sonomacounty.zoom.us/j/94877739130?pwd=zzpFHFLY3ULbjrrlYo3cfubCeA5Bxl.1>

Chair & Rio Nido Representative: Pip Marquez de la Plata • Cazadero / Duncan Mills Representative: Tony Goodwin • Guerneville Representative: Joe Rogoff • Guerneville Representative: Spencer R. Scott • Guerneville South / Pocket Canyon Representative: Betsy Van Dyke • Monte Rio / Villa Grande Representative: Patty Thayer • Vice Chair & Hacienda Representative: Vicki Clewes • Forestville Representative: Lonnie Lazar • Forestville Representative: Thai Hilton • Non-Voting Student Representative: Faye Zamora

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

The Lower Russian River Municipal Advisory Council will make reasonable accommodations for persons having special needs due to disabilities. Please contact the Fifth District Field Representative at 707-565-1219 during regular business hours at least 48 hours prior to the meeting to ensure necessary accommodations are made.

1. Call to Order

A. Announcement from Spanish Interpreter: The Spanish language interpreter will provide information about how to access the interpretation channel via Zoom or obtain a headset if attending in-person.

B. Roll Call

2. Approval of the Agenda

☒ **Discussion** ☒ **Possible Action**

This approval process ensures that the agenda accurately reflects the items to be discussed and decided upon. Members may request adjustments to the agenda, including reordering or deletion of items at this time. Any changes must comply with the Brown Act requirements for public notice and agenda setting. The agenda must be finalized before the Council proceeds with other meeting items.

3. Statement of Conflict of Interest

☒ **Discussion**

This is the time for the Chair, Vice Chair and Council Members to indicate any statements of conflict

of interest for any item listed on this agenda. The River MAC bylaws state that members will not involve themselves in official River MAC activities that could materially benefit them personally, their business interests, or the interests of organizations that they represent. In a conflict of interest, the member will abstain from voting, and the abstention will be recorded in the minutes.

4. Councilmember Comment

☒ Discussion

This is an opportunity for Councilmembers to provide a brief comments, restricted to matters within the Board's jurisdiction. Due to Brown Act regulations, this is not a time for discussion of any item, however a brief dialogue about considering an item for a future agenda is permitted during this time.

5. Public Comment on Matters not listed on the Agenda

☒ Discussion

Comments are restricted to matters within the Lower Russian River MAC's jurisdiction. Please be brief and limit spoken comments to two minutes. While Councilmembers may not respond to or discuss comments except to express interest in agendizing the topic for a future meeting, staff can briefly address or follow up after the meeting.

6. County Update

☒ Discussion

Updates from Supervisor Hopkins and / or Staff

7. Sonoma County's Legislative Affairs: Advocacy at the State and Federal Levels

☒ Discussion ☒ Possible Action

Will Tesconi, Strategic Initiatives (Analyst): Legislative Affairs for the County of Sonoma, will provide an introduction to how Sonoma County engages in legislative advocacy at the state and federal levels. The discussion will cover the county's role in shaping policy, working with legislators, and advancing local priorities through advocacy efforts. This session will help participants better understand the legislative process and how they can stay informed and effectively engage with their state and federal representatives. AB 239, which would allow remote participation for appointed members on non-decision-making legislative bodies if passed, will be covered.

8. Discussion on Takeaways from the All-MAC Convening

☒ Discussion ☒ Possible Action

At the All-MAC Convening, held Saturday February 22, members of MACs and Community Advisory Councils from across Sonoma County gathered to share insights, discuss best practices, and explore ways to strengthen governance in unincorporated areas. This agenda item provides an opportunity for Lower Russian River MAC members to reflect on key takeaways from the convening, including discussions on MAC operations, public engagement strategies, and district formation advisory services.

Lower Russian River MAC members emphasized community outreach challenges in geographically dispersed areas and the importance of collaborating with emergency services due to recurring flood risks. Overall, attendees agreed on updating and expanding the Best Practices Manual to include region-specific needs, more user-friendly onboarding tools, standardized templates, and ongoing

mentorship programs.

We will review highlights from the event, exchange perspectives on how the insights gained may apply to our MAC, and consider potential next steps for enhancing our work in the Lower Russian River community. Members are encouraged to share their experiences and thoughts on actionable ideas that emerged from the convening.

9. Consent Agenda

☒ **Discussion** ☒ **Possible Action**

These items are expected to be routine and non-controversial. The Lower Russian River MAC will act upon them at one time without discussion. Any Representatives, staff member or interested party may request that an item be removed from the consent agenda for discussion.

A. March 13 Minutes

10. Adjournment

County of Sonoma 2025 Legislative Platform

SUMMARY

Sonoma County's Legislative Platform outlines the legislative priorities and positions of the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors. Updated periodically, the Platform guides advocacy efforts by the Board, County Executive, and department/agency leaders that aim to serve Sonoma County's best interests at the state and federal levels. Priorities in the Platform are aligned with the County Strategic Plan and other key County strategic planning documents, however, issue areas listed should not be considered a complete representation of the Board's priorities or policy positions.

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

The following policy goals, listed in alphabetical order, inform Sonoma County's legislative advocacy.

- Governmental Transparency and Public Access: Promote greater access to public meetings and government services while balancing the increasing strain on resources and fiscal burden of Public Record Act (PRA) requests in the digital age.
- Infrastructure Investment: Prioritize advocacy that secures funding for critical infrastructure growth, maintenance, and improvement. Ensure public safety and natural resource protection.
- Public Administration: Preserve and enhance funding and reject cuts to state and federal programs that rely on local governments to deliver program services. Oppose programs, requirements, and service mandates upon local government by state or federal bodies that do not provide a mechanism for reimbursement or subvention. Oppose reductions in local control and any additional fees unrelated to local services. Support fees that account for cost of living and Consumer Price Index (CPI) adjustments for mandated services. Advocate for sufficient funding to deliver mandated services.
- Public Services Access: Preserve critical safety net programs and continue to remove barriers for those utilizing the public benefit. Support collaboration across state and federal agencies and allow for flexible funding to better serve the public.
- Racial Equity & Anti-Racism: Seek to address the racial inequities experienced by systematically underserved populations through deep and meaningful analyses of equity impacts, including which community members benefit and which are most burdened by government decisions.
- Sense of Community: Foster a community that is welcoming to all residents, businesses, and visitors. Eliminate disparities in quality of life, particularly for members of the community experiencing the most negative outcomes, including those who have been historically underserved.

POLICY PLATFORM

The following policy platform statements provide guidance for staff to take a position on anticipated state and federal legislation impacting local government in 2025. The statements are listed in alphabetical order.

Agriculture

- Farmworker Resource Center: Advocate for renewed funding for the Farmworker Resource Center Grant Program previously funded by AB 941 (Bennett, Chapter 203).
- Local Agriculture: Protect and preserve agricultural lands. Maintain and expand capacity for local food production, and provide the resources necessary for local farms, dairies, and ranches to thrive.

Economic Development

- Business Equity and Diversity: Prioritize investments in underserved communities, such as outreach and technical assistance to navigate available programs and resources, assisting with new business formation and entrepreneurship, facilitating efforts to support greater equity and inclusion in contracting and procurement opportunities, and supporting capacity-building of small business assistance organizations.
- Business Financing: Fund incentive programs that spur innovation, encourage business opportunities, expand and simplify access to capital, and stimulate local investments throughout the County.
- Creative Economy: Advance a dynamic economy by investing in arts, cultural, and creative districts.
- Industry Support: Sustain the growth of key industry clusters, including healthcare, agriculture, childcare, construction and trades, manufacturing, and climate-driven technology.
- Workforce Development: Help residents secure local employment with career ladders for advancement.

Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery

- Cost Recovery for Local Emergency Operations: Advocate for sufficient funding of the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to ensure reimbursement of costs incurred during local disasters.
- Loss of Pay in a Disaster: Advocate for the expansion of disaster unemployment insurance to all workers, regardless of immigration status, who lose income due to a locally or state declared disaster. Support programs that provide relief or emergency financial assistance to workers, regardless of immigration status, who lose income due to a locally or state declared disaster.
- Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS): Seek to mitigate impacts for those affected by PSPS events. Increase oversight of investor-owned utilities such as Pacific, Gas, & Electric (PG&E), especially when conducting PSPS events. Seek support from the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to ensure PG&E fulfills its commitment to establishing Community Resource Centers (CRC's) during PSPS events.

Health and Human Services

- Aging Services & Long-Term Care: Reduce fragmentation within the long-term care delivery system and adequately fund a system of care that sustains a positive quality of life for older adults and adults with disabilities.
- Behavioral Health Services: Request sufficient funding for local health jurisdictions to implement mandated programs for residents with mental health treatment needs and substance use disorders.
- Child Welfare Services: Stabilize children and families in the foster care system. Promote restorative justice and healing-centered framework initiatives.
- Families, and Childcare: Strengthen early childhood care, support comprehensive health and development, and enhance the ability of First 5 California, local organizations, and commissions to serve communities and families.
- Food Security and Nutrition: Ensure equitable access to affordable, culturally appropriate, fresh, nutrient-rich foods for all communities, address food "deserts" in community plans and development and provide food assistance for all.
- Health Equity: Reduce health inequities by eliminating barriers and disparate outcomes experienced by underserved communities.
- Immigration: Support efforts to create pathways to full citizenship and protect immigrant rights, including keeping families together and funding legal services for all immigrants. Protect birthright citizenship and the

County of Sonoma 2025 Legislative Platform

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Oppose any public charge rules and support expanding eligibility of social services for undocumented immigrants.

- Inpatient Psychiatric Services: Support action to amend the Institution for Mental Disease (IMD) exclusion, which prohibits federal Medicaid reimbursement for patients receiving mental health care in a facility with more than 16 beds.
- Local Emergency Medical Services (EMS): Ensure a coordinated systems approach to delivery of emergency medical services for area residents by maintaining authority for planning, implementing, and evaluating local EMS systems.
- Older Adults and People with Disabilities: Enhance coordination of services for older adults, especially those with disabilities, to promote independent living, protect against financial and physical abuse, and safeguard against neglect and exploitation.
- Social Security: Ensure that Social Security benefits can continue to function as a vital part of the social safety net for County residents, including core services delivered under Title IV-D of the Social Security Act to help reduce child poverty.
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF): Advocate for the reauthorization of TANF, which is a program designed to help families with children experiencing low-income, achieve economic security and stability.
- Veterans Services: Assist veterans in accessing benefits, housing, and stable employment, and resources for County Veterans Services Offices (CSVOs). Expand outreach services and access to mental and health services.

Housing and Homelessness

- Access to Housing: Support extension and expansion of Federal Low Income Housing Tax Credits. Support new resources to help tenants utilize federal Housing Choice Vouchers through landlord recruitment, services, and resources to connect landlords and tenants.
- Affordable Housing: To fulfill Regional Housing Need Allocation (RHNA) obligations, advocate for funding to preserve, rehabilitate, develop and/or convert affordable housing and ongoing operating subsidies needed to serve low-income households. Support efforts to use surplus publicly-owned lands – by the state, county, or schools – to create more affordable workforce housing for local school, healthcare, and municipal employees.
- Homelessness Funding: Advocate for the annualized and consistent funding from the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD). Currently, funding from the Homeless Housing Assistance and Prevention (HHAP) program is provided on a year-to-year basis, making it difficult to plan and fund a safety net system with ongoing needs and preventing the innovation and intervention necessary to serve unhoused persons.
- Housing Supply: Support accessibly designed housing for those living with disabilities and/or older adults. Prioritize projects that focus local resources to meet highest climate readiness and resilience criteria, and to areas impacted by natural disaster, while also ensuring that new state-mandated climate legislation considers unintended impacts on low-income residents. Support legislation that preserves mobile home parks as a valuable housing resource while protecting residents from displacement. Support incentives for housing production that reduce transportation and energy costs for residents.

Parks, Natural Resources, and Climate Adaption

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- Climate Resilience: Prioritize land management that emphasizes climate resilience, especially related to climate-durable park design, water catchment systems, shade structures, carbon-smart forestry and grazing practices, fuels management and prescribed fire. Preserve biodiversity and maintain open space for wildlife to adapt as the climate changes. Protect groundwater recharge areas, riparian corridors and critical waterways, and large landscapes that capture, store, and naturally filter drinking water. Preserve forests and grasslands that sequester and store carbon, and conserve coastal lands, wetlands and marshes, and riparian areas that allow for adaption to rising seas. Support the role of working agricultural lands in carbon sequestration.
- Coastal Protection: Protect the North Coast and proactively take measures to adapt to sea-level rise.
- Outdoors for All: Increase conservation of open space and prioritize diverse recreational experiences that can be accessed and are responsive to the needs of all communities, including those who have been historically underserved.
- Parks and Open Space: Serve as responsible stewards of cultural and natural resources. Prioritize new parks in areas where communities currently experience a deficit of access to the outdoors.
- Sea Otter Reintroduction: Support the planning and facilitation of sea otter reintroduction along the North Coast.

Telecommunications

- Broadband: Fund middle and last mile broadband infrastructure to provide affordable, accessible, and reliable high-speed internet for unserved and underserved locations. Support “Dig Once/Trench Once” and other policies that streamline the deployment for underground fiber optic and minimize regulatory burdens and permitting processes for deployment of internet connectivity. Support efforts to require installation of open access broadband. Oppose efforts that remove, threaten, or otherwise damage public access to communication services. Support efforts to increase access, affordability, and adoption of internet service, including reauthorization of the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). Improve data collection for more detailed broadband mapping resources. Improve transparency in broadband access data to end digital discrimination.
- Carrier of Last Resort: Oppose efforts that would remove the “Carrier of Last Resort” obligation by incumbent providers to areas without a reasonable alternative.

Transportation

- California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Exemption for Minor Road Widening: Support CEQA exemptions for minor road widening projects associated with Active Transportation and Safety Transportation initiatives. The inclusion of a CEQA exemption for minor road widening within these projects would allow agencies to expedite improvements, minimize delays, and allocate resources more efficiently toward advancing public safety and environmental sustainability.

Tribal Affairs

- Fee-to-trust reform: Support fee-to-trust reform that increases noticing and transparency, addresses the full spectrum of impacts on local governments, and requires that all off-reservation impacts are addressed through enforceable intergovernmental agreements.
- Tribal Land Management: Encourage cultural resource protection, integrate traditional ecological knowledge into land management, and help facilitate land back or cultural access agreements.
- Sovereignty: Respect the sovereignty of federally recognized tribes in government-to-government interactions.

County of Sonoma 2025 Legislative Platform

STATE POLICY PROPOSALS

The following proposals are identified by staff as policy solutions. These proposals authorize staff and the Chair of the Board of Supervisors to sponsor, or join a coalition, seeking to support the following bill ideas in 2025.

Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District Endowment Fund

Bill Proposal: Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (Ag + Open Space) relies on Measure F funding, a quarter cent sales tax approved by Sonoma County voters, which has an initial sunset date of March 31, 2031. However, Ag + Open Space is responsible for stewardship and administration of easements in perpetuity. While Ag + Open Space expects the voters to reauthorize the sales tax for another 20 years, at some point the tax will cease to exist yet the obligation to steward the easements will remain.

Ag + Open Space's perpetual need for funding is akin to the needs of a government pension system or a retiree medical program obligation. Currently, Ag + Open Space investment funds are subject to California Government Code 53600-53610 and only earn 1-2% interest. Staff proposes a policy solution that would allow Ag + Open Space to align their investment to be similar to the pension and post-employment healthcare benefit systems, as defined by Government Code 53620-53622, where yields have greater opportunity to exceed Ag + Open Space's return goal of approximately 4%, but still maintain the safety and liquidity of funds. In 2031 Ag + Open Space expects to hold 450 easement ownerships, which would cost an estimated \$2.5 million per year for required stewardship and related activities. A fund balance of \$124 million, \$62 million, and \$41 million would be required with an earnings rate of 2%, 4%, and 6%, respectively, to generate \$2.5 million in earnings each year.

Department Sponsor: Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Exemption for Public Trail Purposes

Bill Proposal: AB 2091 (Grayson, Chapter 377) was signed by Governor Newsom in 2024. AB 2091 established an exemption from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for a change in use to allow public access for nonmotorized recreation in areas acquired for open space or park purposes. However, AB 2091 only included parks special district agencies formed under Public Resource Code 5500. Staff is proposing that the same CEQA exemption include county park agencies.

Department Sponsor: Sonoma County Regional Parks

California Law Enforcement Telecommunications System (CLETS) Access

Bill Proposal: Currently, federal law provides criminal justice database access for Inspectors General at all levels of government. Staff has received inconsistent administrative interpretation and application of CLETS policy with regards to access for Law Enforcement Oversight local entities, such as the County's Independent Office of Law Enforcement Review and Outreach (IOLERO), in California. Codifying federal law would clarify the authority of the Inspectors General.

Department Sponsor: Independent Office of Law Enforcement Review and Outreach

Highway 101 Airport Boulevard Overcrossing Rename

Bill Proposal: Rename the Highway 101 overcrossing at Airport Boulevard in memory of Sergeant Ed Wilkinson and Deputies Brent Jameson and Bliss Magly.

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After searching for a missing nine-year old girl, Sergeant Wilkinson was killed in the line of duty when the Sheriff's Office helicopter he was piloting crashed in a field on Barnes Road, approximately one-half mile south of River Road.

Deputies Jameson and Magly were killed when the Sheriff's Office helicopter crashed in heavy fog. The location was approximately one-half mile south of the Sonoma County Airport between River Road and Laughlin Road. The deputies were returning from a mission to assist law enforcement officers on the ground around Ludwig Avenue, east of Llano Road, between Sebastopol and Santa Rosa.

The estimated cost of the two signs is from \$8,000 to \$10,000. Memorial overcrossings on state highways require a resolution approved by the California Legislature, but funding is not provided by a state agency. A funding source for the two signs has not yet been identified.

Department Sponsor: Sonoma County Sheriff's Office

Statewide Agriculture Access Verification Card (Ag Access) Program Training

Bill Proposal: Currently, fire safety training certifications for the Ag Access program are provided at the local level, and trainings are specific to animal or plant agriculture. Staff is seeking an online pre-recorded resource that could provide training to all agricultural practitioners statewide. An online resource would expand access, reduce cost, lower the administrative burden, and synchronize public safety protocol statewide.

Department Sponsor: Sonoma County Department of Agriculture/Weights & Measures



District Formation Table of Contents

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Quick Guide: District Formation

Overview

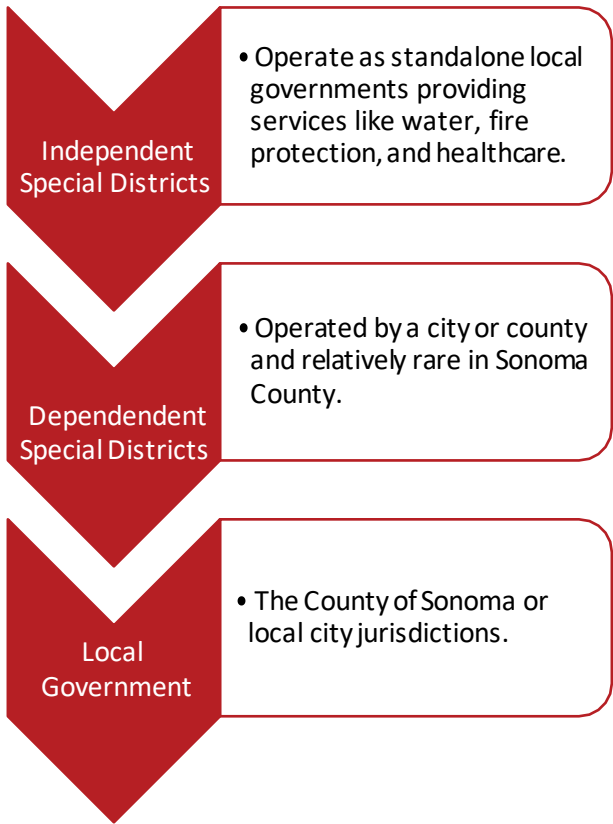
This document provides a high-level introduction to governance and financing mechanisms that can increase services or enhance infrastructure in unincorporated Sonoma County. Generally, governance mechanisms provide services, while financing mechanisms fund those services.

Before creating a district or establishing a financing mechanism communities must assess their service needs and financial feasibility. Forming an independent special district requires a complex process, including public hearings, environmental reviews, and sometimes a public vote. Alternatives include annexation to an existing provider, activating latent powers of an existing district, or increasing local government services through financing mechanisms like assessment districts. Once formed, districts must implement governance structures, comply with transparency laws, and manage finances, while financing mechanisms are typically administered by an existing local government agency.

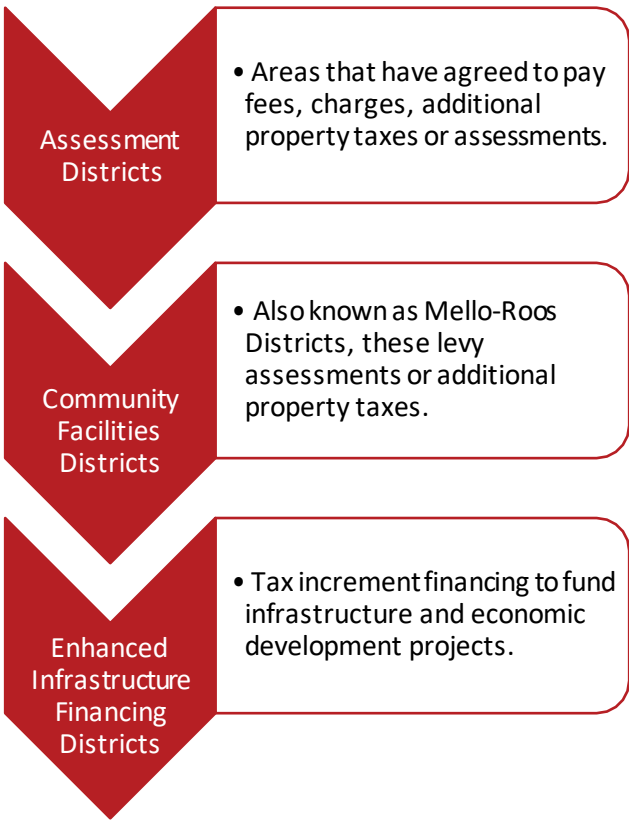
District Overview

California has various types of districts that can generally be classified as either a governance mechanism or a financing mechanism. Governance determines who provides services, while financing mechanisms are a tool to finance the entity providing the infrastructure or service. Although most governance mechanisms provide only one or two specific services, there are several types of governance models that are permitted to deliver a wider range of services. The governance mechanism and specific services will influence available financing mechanisms.

Governance Mechanisms



Financing Mechanisms



Addressing Community Needs



Quick Guide: District Formation

Before selecting a governance and financing mechanism, communities must evaluate their service needs. They should determine the specific services desired, such as fire protection, water supply, or parks and recreation. The scope and importance of these services should be assessed—whether the need is limited to a small group or is widely recognized by the community.

Selecting a Feasible Governance and Finance Model

How will services be paid

An accurate assessment of the cost of providing services is required to determine if a community is willing to pay for the services. A variety of funding mechanisms is available to pay the costs of providing public services, each with its own specific calculation, approval, and implementation requirements.

Independent districts

Due to the administrative cost of operating an independent special district, including electing directors, conducting meetings, hiring management, and maintaining insurance, it is often more cost-effective to add new services to existing special districts or utilize financing mechanisms such as an assessment district to provide revenue to a local government to expand or increase services.

Alternatives to forming an independent special district

Creating a new special district can be costly and complex, which may make alternative solutions more practical in certain cases. Some of these include:

- **Annexation to an Existing Service Provider** – Instead of forming a new district, a community may seek to be incorporated into a nearby district or city that already provides the desired service. This can save time and administrative costs.
- **Activation of Latent Powers** – Many special districts have the legal authority to expand the services provided through the existing district, which leverages existing administrative infrastructure services. Communities may work with Local Agency Formation Commissions (LAFCo) to expand an existing district's powers rather than creating a new entity.
- **Increasing Local Government Services** – Residents may elect to provide additional funding to local government for increased services.

The Formation Process

The district formation process depends on the type of district. Independent special district formation begins with a formal application to LAFCo, which requires detailed service plans, financial projections, and legal documentation. The process includes public hearings, an environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and, in some cases, a public vote. If approved, the district's governing board is established, and the district is authorized to begin operations.

To form an assessment district, a licensed engineer prepares a report detailing the improvements, affected properties, and cost allocation. The governing body then adopts a resolution to initiate the process and mails ballots to property owners, who must approve the assessment under Proposition 218. If approved, the assessment is levied on property tax bills, with funds restricted to the designated improvements.

Managing a Newly Formed District

Once established, an independent special district must implement governance structures, financial management systems, and operational policies, including project or service implementation. Compliance with transparency laws, including the Brown Act (open meetings law) and Form 700 (conflict-of-interest disclosures), is required.

In contrast, if a financing mechanism is established by a local government agency for expanded services or infrastructure then the existing agency manages ongoing administration. This includes collecting assessments through property tax bills, managing funds to ensure they are used for approved improvements, and overseeing project implementation or services. Agencies must also provide annual financial reports to ensure compliance with Proposition 218, allow for public oversight, and make adjustments if needed.



Quick Guide: District Formation

Additional Resources

Sonoma County Local Agency Formation Commission

Sonoma County's Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) was created by State law in 1963 to regulate the boundaries of cities and special districts. The objectives of LAFCo are:

- To encourage the orderly formation of local government agencies and promote the efficient provision of public services
- To preserve agricultural land and open-space resources
- To promote orderly growth and discourage urban sprawl

<https://sonomalafco.org/>

Special District Formation Guide

CALAFCO and the CA Special Districts Association (CSDA) partnered in the creation and publication of the 2016 Special District Formation Guide. The intent is to inform anyone considering forming a special district of the many factors involved and resources needed.

https://calafco.starchapter.com/images/downloads/CALAFCO_Publications/special_district_formation_guide.pdf

California Property Tax

California Property Tax provides an overview of property tax assessment in California. It is designed to give readers a general understanding of California's property tax system. The publication begins with a brief history of Proposition 13, which since 1978 has been the foundation of California's property tax system.

<https://www.boe.ca.gov/proptaxes/pdf/pub29.pdf>



Local Landscape of Districts

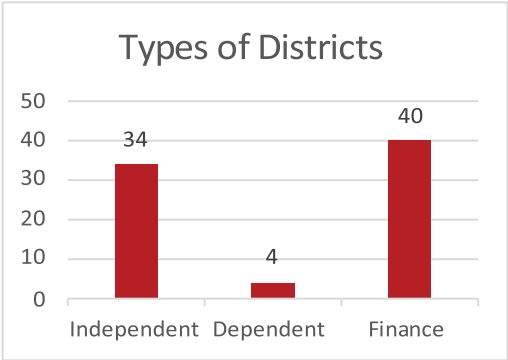
Overview

This document provides an overview of the governance and financing districts in unincorporated Sonoma County. Unincorporated Sonoma County has nearly 80 *independent*, *dependent*, and *finance* districts. These districts provide a variety of services, with some offering multiple services and others focusing on a single function. Funding comes from Proposition 13 property taxes, special property taxes, sales taxes, fees, grants, and other sources.

Across California fewer communities are creating independent districts, while more communities are looking to finance districts to finance local infrastructure or services. In Sonoma County the number of independent districts is decreasing primarily due to consolidating fire districts. New finance districts in Sonoma County are relatively rare due to constricted revenue sources such as Proposition 13 funding, described below.

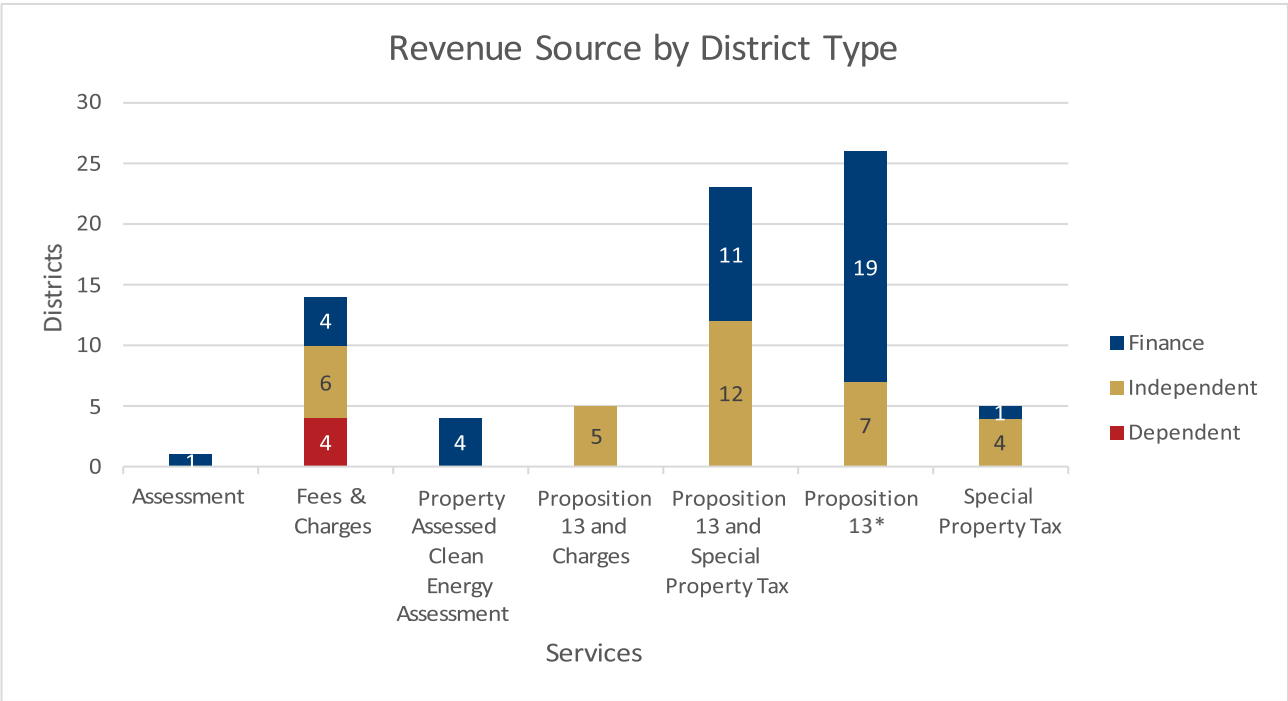
Types of districts

Independent special districts operate as standalone local governments with an elected governing board that operates autonomously from city or county governments, while dependent special districts are governed by a city council or county board of supervisors and operated by the city or county government. In this overview, finance districts is a catch-all category for areas that provide additional funds to special districts or local government for infrastructure or services. The table to the right shows the number of each type of district in unincorporated Sonoma County.



Revenue Sources

There are seven main revenue sources for districts in the unincorporated area.



*Districts that receive Proposition 13 funding almost always supplement their funding with special property taxes,



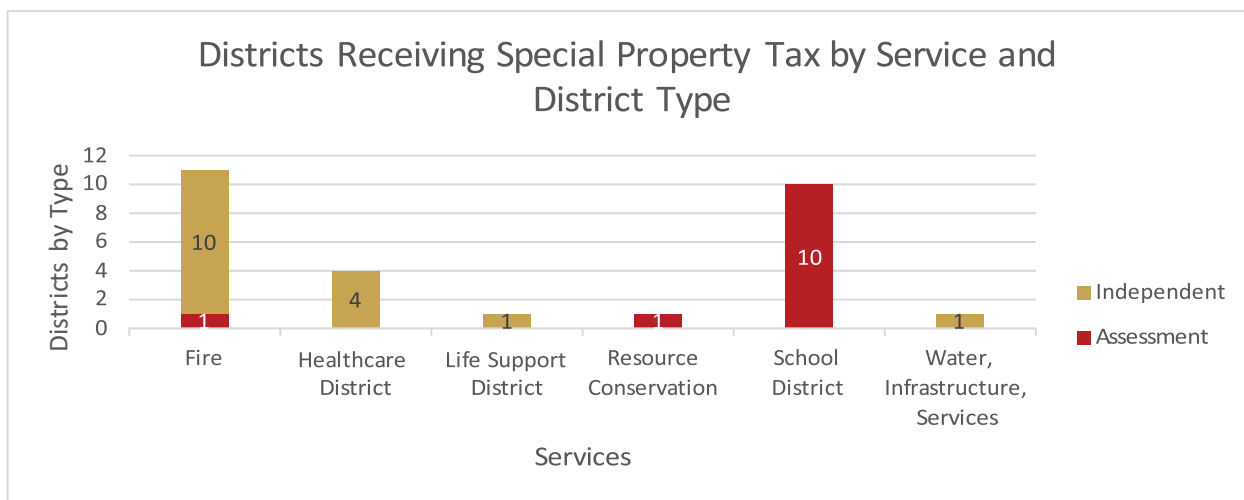
Local Landscape of Districts

sales tax, charges or fees for service, grants, or other sources. It is nearly impossible for a district to solely provide or finance services with Proposition 13 funding.

Out of the 78 special districts in Sonoma County, most get their funding from property taxes limited by Proposition 13, a law passed by California voters in 1978. Proposition 13 caps property taxes at 1% of a property's assessed value and limits how much taxes can increase each year.

Of the 78 districts, 54 receive a portion of the property tax revenue collected by the County under Proposition 13. However, because the total tax rate is fixed at 1%, any new district that wants funding must ask existing districts to give up a part of their share. Established districts rarely give up their funding.

The second most common way that districts raise money is through special property taxes, which add extra taxes on top of Proposition 13 funding. These special taxes help fund 28 of the 78 districts in unincorporated Sonoma County, and fund the services displayed in the chart below.



Common types of special property taxes include:

- Parcel taxes – a fixed amount charged per property, regardless of property value
- Bond measures – loans that are repaid through additional property taxes over time

These extra taxes require voter approval:

- Parcel taxes usually need a two-thirds majority (66.7%)
- School bond measures need at least 55% voter approval

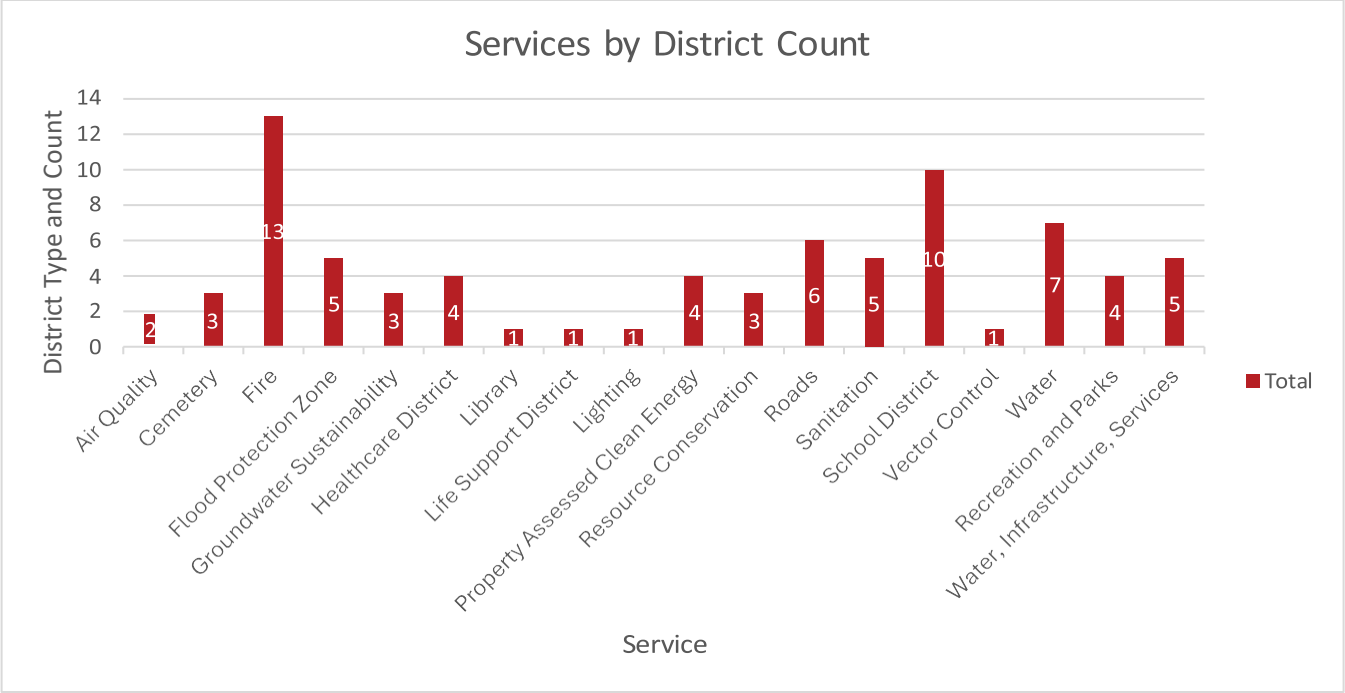
The chart above shows that in Sonoma County, voters have been most likely to approve additional property taxes for fire services and schools, possibly due to the recent fires and the lower voter threshold for school bond measures.

Services

The chart below shows that in Sonoma County most districts typically provide or finance only one or two services, but that a small number of districts can provide multiple services. Across the state there is a trend away from single-purpose independent districts, but an increase in districts that provide multiple services.



Local Landscape of Districts





District Formation Advisory Services

Background and Overview:

The Unincorporated Governance Ad Hoc committee, comprised of Supervisors Gorin and Hopkins, encouraged the Board of Supervisors to approve \$150,000 to hire a consultant to evaluate if districts are a feasible way to increase services.

With Ad Hoc input, the County developed a scope of work for a consultant to evaluate if districts are a feasible way to increase services, and to determine communities' interest in forming districts.

At completion, the County hopes to understand which unincorporated areas have the greatest potential to form a district to address unmet needs.

Project Components:

The County issued a Request for Proposals in January and anticipates entering into a contract with a consultant by the end of March.

The County anticipates that the consultant's scope of work will include:

Initial Scoping (April)

During initial scoping, the consultant will work with the County to review the current landscape of special districts and areas that have local financing mechanisms such as special property taxes. The consultant will also review community needs (see "What We Need From You"). This effort will provide the consultant with some perspective on opportunities for developing new districts or utilizing existing districts in new ways to better meet the communities needs.

Community Meeting and Screening (May)

To effectively utilize the \$150,000 allocated by the Board the consultant will develop screening criteria to prioritize areas for the initial feasibility analysis. The consultant will facilitate a stakeholder meeting to gather feedback on the screening criteria and to provide the community with an overview on how districts can provide

local control of infrastructure and services and/or finance infrastructure and services.

The consultant will apply the screening criteria to the unincorporated areas of the County, which will result in a short list of areas that will receive the initial feasibility analysis and provide a written update to stakeholders on the results of the screening criteria.

Initial District Feasibility Analysis (June-July)

The consultant will conduct an initial feasibility analysis for areas prioritized with the screening criteria to evaluate which areas are suitable for district formation or alternatives, such as activation of latent district powers or expansion of existing districts.

The consultant will facilitate a community meeting for each area that was selected for an initial feasibility analysis to discuss the results and to assess community interest in pursuing feasible options identified in the initial analysis.

Final Report (July-September)

The consultant will provide a final report documenting the completed work and outlining recommendations and next steps. The report will help the County target efforts for district formation or alternative solutions.

WHAT WE NEED FROM YOU

Please review, update and prioritize your community's needs. The "Unincorporated Community Needs" document may be a helpful starting place. For each need, please indicate the specific area with the need – for instance, is the need isolated to one neighborhood, or does it extend to a larger region?

By April 1, 2025, email your prioritized needs to Maggie.Luce@sonoma-county.org.



Unincorporated Community Needs

Below is a summary of needs identified by unincorporated County communities during the August 16, 2023, Municipal Advisory Community (MAC) convening with the County Unincorporated Ad Hoc (Supervisor Hopkins and Supervisor Gorin), community conversations, and other available input and documentation. Common themes are needs related to: Public Safety, Infrastructure, Health Services, Recreation, Homeless Services, and Community Development.

Lower Russian River Area Municipal Advisory Council

- *Public Safety:* Enhanced sheriff patrols, better enforcement of traffic laws, response to homelessness, and drug activity.
- *Government Services:* Poor service from Permit Sonoma; lack of responsiveness from county public works.
- *Infrastructure:* Road repairs, new sidewalks, crosswalks, and better streetscape improvements.
- *Vacation Rentals:* Negative impacts from short-term rentals; lack of enforcement on noise and congestion.
- *Youth Services:* Limited activities, parks, and skate parks.
- *Connectivity:* Poor broadband and cell service affecting emergency response.
- *Waste Management:* Limited trash collection in some towns.
- *Economic Development:* Lack of county support and resources for local businesses.
- *Public Restrooms:* Few facilities for residents and visitors.
- *Housing:* Affordable housing shortage, concerns about vacation rentals reducing availability.
- *Emergency Preparedness:* Poor evacuation plans and lack of Spanish-language resources.
- *Water & Wastewater:* Failing septic systems, limited county water services, river pollution concerns.
- *Health Services:* Lack of mental health, substance use disorder treatment, and bilingual support.
- *Homeless Services:* Need for more shelter, safe parking, and crisis response.
- *Transit:* Poor public transportation coverage and infrequent service.
- *Food Security:* Limited resources for those facing food insecurity.
- *Medical Care:* Lack of urgent care, primary care, specialty doctors, affordable dental care, and teen health programs.

Dry Creek Citizens Advisory Council

- *Infrastructure:* Road repairs.
- *Community Development:* Impact of development proposals, specifically use permits, rezoning applications and General Plan amendments.

Geyserville - Alexander Valley Municipal Advisory Council

- *Water:* Water supply and conservation.
- *Fire Risk:* Fire protection resources.
- *Health Services:* Outreach for the Latinx community.
- *Recreation:* River access through regional parks.

Mark West Area Municipal Advisory Council

- *Infrastructure:* Road repairs, sidewalks, community meeting spaces, parks.



Unincorporated Community Needs

- *Fire Risk:* Vegetation management, fire breaks, homeowner insurance challenges.
- *Communication:* Emergency communication systems, broadband access.
- *Environment:* Creek restoration, flood risk mitigation.

Sonoma County Coast Municipal Advisory Council

- *Communication:* Broadband access.
- *Health Services:* Better access to healthcare services in remote areas.
- *Infrastructure:* Parking and traffic management.
- *Housing:* Limited housing availability impacting workforce.
- *Economy:* Challenges from fishing industry collapse; financial issues with the marina.

Sonoma Valley and Springs Municipal Advisory Councils and Community Advisory Council

- *Infrastructure:* Road repairs, sidewalks, traffic management, emergency evacuation routes.
- *Housing:* Affordable housing, encourage ADU development.
- *Health Services:* Senior services.
- *Community Development:* Need for a gathering place and better integration with county services.

Unincorporated Communities Outside of Municipal Advisory Council Boundaries

Penngrove

- *Infrastructure:* Sewer system, sidewalks, parking, flood mitigation.
- *Traffic:* Speeding concerns and the need for stoplights.
- *Housing:* Affordable housing.
- *Community Development:* Advocacy for a community service district (CSD).

Graton

- *Infrastructure:* Garbage collection, sidewalks, road repairs, lack of meeting spaces.
- *Housing:* Affordable housing, streamline ADU permitting.
- *Communication:* Better access to local government actions.
- *Financial Resources:* Grant writing support.
- *Community Development:* Interest in a town square and enhanced county support.

Occidental

- *Infrastructure:* Garbage collection, public restrooms, road and sidewalk repairs, broadband access.
- *Financial Resources:* Grant writing support for projects.
- *Community Development:* Renovation of the community center.

Fitch Mountain

- *Infrastructure:* Road repairs, septic regulations.
- *Fire Risk:* Fire protection resources.
- *Parks:* Management of tourism impacts and access resources.
- *Community Development:* Need for a gathering space.

Moorland

- *Traffic:* Speeding and noise ordinance enforcement.
- *Infrastructure:* Sidewalks, animal control enforcement.
- *Community Issues:* Graffiti, homelessness, safe school routes.



Lower Russian River Municipal Advisory Council

Minutes

Regular Meeting

March 13, 2025 05:30 PM

West County Services Center, 16390 Main Street, Guerneville

<https://sonomacounty.ca.gov/lrmac>

1. **Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 5:33 pm by Vice Chair & Hacienda Representative: Vicki Clewes.

Meeting Recordings: <https://www.youtube.com/@sonomacounty5thdistrict>

Direct Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2AkI7QvtnbY>

A. Announcement from Spanish Interpreter: The Spanish language interpreter will provide information about how to access the interpretation channel via Zoom or obtain a headset if attending in-person.

B. Roll Call

Present: Guerneville Representative: Spencer R. Scott, Guerneville South / Pocket Canyon Representative: Betsy Van Dyke, Monte Rio / Villa Grande Representative: Patty Thayer, Vice Chair & Hacienda Representative: Vicki Clewes, Forestville Representative: Thai Hilton, Forestville Alternate Cari Hernandez, Rio Nido Alternate Jenn Otten

Absent: Chair & Rio Nido Representative: Pip Marquez de la Plata, Cazadero / Duncan Mills Representative: Tony Goodwin, Guerneville Representative: Joe Rogoff, Forestville Representative: Lonnie Lazar, Non-Voting Student Representative Faye Zamora

2. **Approval of the Agenda** Guerneville South / Pocket Canyon Representative: Betsy Van Dyke motioned to approve. Non-Voting Student Representative Faye Zamora seconded the motion.

The motion passed with the following vote:

7 In Favor 0 Opposed

 Abstained Absent Recused

3. **Statement of Conflict of Interest**

There were no statements of conflict of interest.

4. **Councilmember Comment**

Betsy suggested inviting Russian River Recreation and Park District to a MAC meeting for an

update on the Dam installation and other topics. Additionally, Betsy requested to hear updates about impacts on our community to healthcare / Medi-Cal due to Federal administration. Perhaps an update from West County Community Health?

5. Public Comment on Matters not listed on the Agenda

Cynthia Halliday (representing the new Hollydale Canyon Terrace COPE group):

Cynthia Halliday introduced a newly formed COPE (Communities Organizing to Prepare for Emergencies) group in the Hollydale Canyon Terrace area. She explained the group's mission to organize neighbors in preparation for emergencies, complementing existing Fire Safe and Firewise efforts. She acknowledged mentorship from the Northern Sonoma County COPE and initial encouragement from Vicki Clewes and Steve Finnegan. Halliday emphasized the group's focus on emergency preparedness activities and their continued engagement on issues like egress and communication.

Steve Finnegan (resident, Russian River Terrace):

Steve Finnegan raised concerns about a damaged section of Summerhome Park Road near Russian River Terrace. He highlighted the potential risk to emergency egress during wildfires or floods and requested a comprehensive plan to address both the road repair and emergency access. Finnegan also expressed appreciation for the County's ongoing efforts and asked for an update by May to share with his neighborhood association.

Vesta Copestakes (online public commenter): Vesta Copestakes announced an upcoming Forestville Town Hall scheduled for March 27 at the El Molino Library. She also requested a future agenda item inviting Public Infrastructure staff to present updates on road repairs and planned projects, emphasizing the value of in-person presentations.

6. County Update

Supervisor Lynda Hopkins provided a broad update on key initiatives and ongoing issues in West County. She began with the exciting news of a major land acquisition—1,500 acres being added to Monte Rio Redwoods Park. The expansion is expected to go before the Board of Supervisors in May for final approval. A public survey will be launched soon to help guide the park's master plan. In addition to this parcel, other properties owned by the Sweetwater Springs Water District are being considered, which could expand the total area to over 2,000 acres and potentially connect Monte Rio all the way to the coast.

On the infrastructure front, the major slide on Westside Road remains a critical concern. Public Infrastructure Director Johannes Hoevertsz is exploring engineering options to allow at least a one-lane reopening, with a Bailey Bridge also under consideration. Avoiding simultaneous closures of Westside Road and the Wohler Bridge is a priority, especially with fire season on the horizon. Emergency road funding will be discussed during the April budget hearings, and community support may be needed to push those efforts forward—especially given similar road failures in other districts.

Community members were encouraged to review and comment on CAL FIRE's updated Fire Hazard Severity Zone maps, which influence building standards, defensible space rules, and real estate disclosures. Although the state claims the maps won't affect insurance decisions, there's concern that insurance providers may still use them as justification for dropping or denying coverage.

The conversation then turned to local grant funding. The Fifth District office recently reviewed applications for the Community Investment Fund (CIF) and the Tourism Impact

Fund (TIF), prioritizing support for West County nonprofits. Not all of the funds have been distributed, so a second round of applications will be reviewed later this year. Community groups who haven't yet applied are encouraged to do so. Links to both grants can be found at <https://sonomacounty.ca.gov/district5>.

Acknowledging the continued hardships for downtown Guerneville businesses impacted by state-led construction, plans are in place to recommend funding for the Russian River Chamber. The goal is to hire an expert to assist businesses in filing claims with Cal OES—since other routes, including outreach to state representatives and agencies, haven't yielded results. In fact, the most useful information has come not from the state, but from the project contractor.

A proposed update to Permit Sonoma's public hearing and administrative procedures also drew attention. These changes aim to streamline permitting by shifting certain responsibilities, consolidating oversight, and eliminating some advisory bodies. However, after receiving significant public feedback, the proposal is being sent back to the Planning Agency for further review, ensuring meaningful public input remains a top priority.

Hopkins also clarified that the seasonal dam on the Russian River is managed by the Russian River Recreation and Park District, while the bridge crossing is handled by County Public Infrastructure—a point of confusion for many residents.

Reflecting on the recent All-MAC meeting, she expressed pride in the MAC's leadership and effectiveness, noting that other districts were impressed by the group's ability to make things happen locally. Credit was given to staff, particularly Che and Debbie, for their dedication and consistent follow-through.

Regarding the proposed asphalt plant, Supervisor Hopkins may not take stance, due to legal constraints—Board members must remain neutral ahead of land use hearings. Taking a position now would require recusal from the final vote. However, the public is encouraged to submit feedback directly to the project planner, Stephen Schurke (stephen.schurke@sonoma-county.org), as the project is still in early stages and likely several years from coming before the Board.

Supervisor Hopkins concluded by noting that decisions about certain County-generated funds—particularly those relevant to West County—will be coming up soon. Updates will be shared with the community as more information becomes available.

7. Sonoma County Tourism: Diversity, Sustainability & Stewardship

Kelly Bass Siebel, Vice President of Community Engagement for Sonoma County Tourism, was welcomed to speak about a new initiative titled *Wine Country for All of Us*. She began by thanking the group for including her on the agenda and expressed appreciation for their engagement with tourism in the community, noting that public sentiment has ebbed and flowed over the years.

She emphasized the important role tourism plays in the local economy of West County and provided an overview of Sonoma County Tourism, which is a 501(c)(6) destination stewardship organization. It was one of the first of its kind in the country, shifting its focus in 2018 from solely promoting tourism to also stewarding the community and preserving local resources.

Organizational Structure and Funding

The organization is primarily funded through a 2% Business Improvement Area (BIA) assessment on lodging properties generating over \$350,000 in annual revenue—excluding those in the cities of Sonoma and Healdsburg, which opted out when the BIA was established

20 years ago. Additionally, 1.25% of the County's Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) from the unincorporated areas supports Sonoma County Tourism's broader stewardship and community engagement efforts.

The board consists of lodging industry professionals and appointees from the Board of Supervisors. West County is well represented, with local board members including Kirstyne Lange, Margaret Grahame (Timber Cove), Crista Luedtke, and Joe Bartolomei.

Economic Impact and Current Trends

Kelly Bass Siebel reviewed tourism's economic impact in 2023, noting:

- \$2.2 billion in visitor spending
- Nearly 22,000 jobs (approximately 1 in 10 local jobs)
- \$121 million in local tax revenue, with \$60 million coming from the unincorporated areas
- Over 10,000 tourism-related jobs in unincorporated Sonoma County

She acknowledged that the tourism industry has faced compounding challenges since 2017—including wildfires, floods, and the pandemic. In 2023 and into 2024, recovery continued to be uneven. Businesses in West County were especially impacted by winter rain and ongoing economic slowdowns.

A recent non-visitor study revealed that lack of awareness and negative perceptions of San Francisco have deterred potential visitors, particularly from outside California.

New Campaign: Wine Country for All of Us

Sonoma County Tourism is launching a multi-year initiative titled *Wine Country for All of Us*, which expands on the organization's commitment to inclusivity, sustainability, and stewardship. It builds on their brand slogan, *Life Opens Up*, and aims to position Sonoma County as an inclusive and welcoming destination.

Key Components:

1. Accessibility – Partnership with Wheel the World

A booking platform for travelers with physical disabilities, visual impairments, or hearing loss. Wheel the World will assess at least 70 local businesses and offer verified accessibility data to users, increasing traveler confidence and comfort.

2. Hospitality Training – Partnership with HospitableMe

Launching a curriculum titled *Seven Secrets of Hospitality*, focusing on inclusivity training for frontline hospitality staff. The training addresses diverse needs of travelers, including those from the LGBTQ+ community, Black travelers, Jewish travelers, and more.

3. Paid Marketing Campaign

The new campaign leans into the identity of “Wine Country,” while showcasing diverse experiences such as zip-lining, coastal adventures, and farm-to-table cuisine. All imagery is sourced from real user-generated content, reflecting authentic visitor experiences.

The campaign is running in the Bay Area, key flight markets, and, for the first time, in Chicago and New York. Pixel tracking is used to better measure ROI, monitoring visitor engagement from ad click to physical arrival.

Sustainability Efforts

Sonoma County Tourism continues its sustainability programming with initiatives such as:

- **Black Cod Week**, promoting sustainable local seafood in partnership with the fishing community, the Economic Development Board, and District 5 staff.
- **Leave No Trace Partnership**, creating unified messaging and providing free toolkits to businesses, including signage, window stickers, table tents, and posters tailored to river, coastal, and inland environments.
- **Geo-fenced App Messaging**, using the SonomaCounty.com app to send real-time messages to visitors in targeted areas (e.g., Russian River beaches) to encourage responsible recreation.

Potential collaborations were proposed to further reduce summer impacts, such as parking congestion and litter in sensitive areas like river beaches. Additionally, it was recommended to explore more ways to integrate visitor education at vacation rentals, hotels, and through permitting processes.

Discussion & Community Feedback

During the discussion, several community members and MAC members raised concerns and suggestions:

- **Vacation Rental Messaging:** There was interest in creating mandatory in-room materials for rentals (similar to Tahoe), including sustainability and parking rules. The idea of providing reusable “pack-it-in, pack-it-out” bags was also suggested.
- **Family-Friendly Content:** Several attendees noted that the campaign visuals were too focused on wine and lacked representation of families, children, and affordable or outdoor recreation. There was support for adding a prominent “Family” tab to the tourism website.
- **Cultural and Language Inclusion:** A community member suggested expanding materials into Spanish and ensuring bilingual communication in public-facing content.
- **Broader Recreation and Culinary Representation:** There was a request to more explicitly

promote Sonoma County's trail systems, surf spots, crabbing, wildlife viewing, and high-quality yet affordable culinary options.

- **Neighborhood Impacts:** Residents stressed the importance of managing summer traffic, parking issues, and day-visitor impacts in residential neighborhoods, calling for clearer rules and neighborhood outreach.
- **Stronger Inter-Agency Collaboration:** Several participants urged more coordination with Permit Sonoma and vacation rental permitting processes to ensure tourism education materials are disseminated consistently.

Kelly Bass Siebel welcomed the feedback and expressed interest in forming a working group or community brainstorming session before the summer season to explore signage solutions, targeted messaging, and new partnerships.

8. Ad Hoc Committees

A. Land Use Ad Hoc: Discussion re: PLP25-0001: Cargo Container Storage Facility in Pocket Canyon

The Ad hoc met on March 4 to review the Completeness Referral Packet and have several questions about the project. This is an opportunity for the full MAC to discuss the application and draft feedback to the Planner. The applicant has been invited to attend to answer questions.

Ad hoc members: Betsy Van Dyke, Thai Hilton, Cari Hernandez, and Patty Thayer

The River MAC instructed staff to provide the following feedback to Brendan Norton, the Planner:

The Lower Russian River MAC reviewed the project referenced in the attached referral packet, PLP25-0001, at their March 13 meeting, at which the Applicant was present to answer questions. Please see below for comments and request for additional information.

1. The River MAC sees merit in this project. There is a need for this service in the area and the applicant has been a good steward of the property.
2. The application proposes eight storage units. Would additional permitting be required for expansion?
3. Will the applicant be required to add concrete slabs? If so, what are the environmental implications? For example: impacts on nearby creeks, runoff, potential flooding?

Guerneville South / Pocket Canyon Representative: Betsy Van Dyke motioned to approve. Guerneville Representative: Spencer R. Scott seconded the motion.

The motion passed with the following vote:

 7 In Favor 0 Opposed
 Abstained Absent Recused

B. Community Engagement & Outreach Plan Ad Hoc

The MAC will review and consider adoption of the 2025 Community Engagement and Outreach Plan

Ad hoc members: Vicki Clewes, Patty Thayer, Cari Hernandez, Betsy Van Dyke, and Faye Zamora

The 2025 Community Engagement and Outreach Plan was adopted.

Forestville Representative: Thai Hilton motioned to approve. Monte Rio / Villa Grande Representative: Patty Thayer seconded the motion.

The motion passed with the following vote:

7 In Favor 0 Opposed
 Abstained Absent Recused

9. Consent Agenda

A. February 13 Minutes

Patty Thayer and Jenn Otten abstained because they did not attend the February meeting.

Forestville Representative: Thai Hilton motioned to approve. Guerneville South / Pocket Canyon Representative: Betsy Van Dyke seconded the motion.

The motion passed with the following vote:

5 In Favor Opposed
2 Abstained Absent Recused

B. 2024 Lower Russian River Annual Report

The 2024 River MAC Annual Report was accepted.

Forestville Representative: Thai Hilton motioned to approve. Guerneville South / Pocket Canyon Representative: Betsy Van Dyke seconded the motion.

The motion passed with the following vote:

7 In Favor 0 Opposed
 Abstained Absent Recused

10. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 7:26 PM