

Response to Grand Jury Report Form

Report Title: Sonoma County's Surplus Property Disposal
Housekeeping takes time but pays long-term benefits

Report Date: June 12, 2025

Response by: Lynda Hopkins Title: Chairperson

Agency/Department Name: Board of Supervisors

FINDINGS:

I (we) agree with the findings numbered: None _____

I (we) disagree wholly or partially with the findings numbered: F1, F2, F3, and F4 _____

(Attach a statement specifying any portions of the findings that are disputed with an explanation of the reasons.)

The Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury determined that:

F1. All but Information Services uses the Purchasing Division's surplus disposal process sparingly, suggesting that many potential assets are not being disposed of timely when they are no longer needed.

The Board of Supervisors (Board) disagrees with this finding.

A review of surplus disposal data for the past two years confirms that the Information Systems Department (ISD) has been one of the more frequent users of the Purchasing Division's surplus disposal process. However, this higher frequency is due to the nature and shorter lifecycle of technology equipment, which becomes obsolete more quickly than other types of departmental assets such as furniture or fixtures.

F2. The Real Estate Division is staffed as a service bureau; it does not actively pursue management of the county's real estate assets. Rather, it acts on request by departments to buy, sell or lease land. If it does not have a request, it does not act.

The Board partially disagrees with this finding.

While it is accurate that the Real Estate Division functions in part as a service bureau and typically acts in response to requests from County departments, its role and responsibilities extend well beyond a reactive posture.

The Real Estate Division does not independently initiate acquisitions, dispositions, or lease agreements; such actions require authorization and direction from the Board of Supervisors, as prescribed by County policy and legal authority. However, within this

framework, the Division operates proactively and collaboratively. The Division routinely monitors lease timelines and notifies departments of upcoming expirations, often up to two years in advance, to allow for strategic planning, site evaluation, and financial analysis. Additionally, the Division identifies opportunities that align with the County's operational needs and long-term objectives and communicates those to relevant departments.

The Division also plays an essential role in supporting Board directives, public inquiries, and cross-agency coordination, and provides technical and logistical support during County emergencies. In this way, while the Real Estate Division operates within a structure that requires departmental requests and Board approval, its function is far more active and strategic than described in the original finding.

F3. No comprehensive list exists that classifies the county's properties; the county does not know if it is managing its land assets to their best use.

The Board partially disagrees with this finding.

Sonoma Public Infrastructure maintains a comprehensive and accessible inventory of County-owned and leased properties. An interactive GIS-based mapping platform is available, which allows users to search County properties by address or Assessor's Parcel Number (APN). In addition, PI manages a detailed database of all County-owned parcels, sortable by key attributes such as size, location, and use. These tools enable the County to assess and manage its property assets effectively. Additional work can always be done by the Real Estate division to actively manage the properties and conduct periodical assessments to determine best use. However, as required by State Law, any land determined to be surplus will initially be offered for affordable housing development, which may limit flexibility in using land for what might otherwise be considered its best use.

F4. No single division is responsible for the disposal of the county's land assets. Appropriate disposal requires expertise in real estate, affordable housing and economic development. Furthermore, no county entity is systemically evaluating land for its potential use for affordable housing or economic development.

The Board partially disagrees with this finding.

While it is true that no single division is solely responsible for the disposal of County-owned land, the Board of Supervisors retains exclusive authority to approve the disposition of County assets, based on recommendations from staff. The Real Estate Division within Sonoma Public Infrastructure (PI) plays a central role in coordinating these efforts, particularly with respect to real estate due diligence, valuation, and legal compliance. The disposal of property is tedious, expensive, and cost prohibitive for the potential buyer as understood by recent dispositions in the Forestville and Windsor areas.

However, the evaluation of County-owned land for potential alternative uses, including affordable housing and economic development, is a collaborative and multi-agency effort. The Real Estate Division proactively considers all County-owned property for possible alternative uses when opportunities or departmental needs are identified. In these cases, PI works closely with the County Executive's Office, Sonoma County Regional Parks, Sonoma Water, Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, and the Economic Development Collaborative, as well as with other County departments. PI does not conduct such evaluations independently, but rather in coordination with appropriate partners who bring expertise in housing, environmental stewardship, and community development.

Additionally in 2019, PI supported a systematic review of the County's property portfolio to identify surplus parcels that may be suitable for affordable housing. As a result of this study a few properties were identified as suitable for housing but none were declared surplus. Annually Permit Sonoma submits a report to the California Department of Housing and Community Development on property in the census-designated urbanized area that could be appropriate for affordable housing.

F5. No online access is provided for public viewing of county properties. As a result, underutilized lands are not easily identified and pursued by the public.

F5 Response. The Board disagrees with this finding.

The County does provide parcel and ownership information through existing public resources such as SoCo Maps and Permit Sonoma's GIS platform, which offer transparent access to property data, including County-owned lands. These tools are widely used by real estate professionals, community members, and developers who are familiar with parcel research and property evaluation.

The Real Estate Division regularly collaborates with real estate agents, developers, non-profits, and interested parties when property inquiries arise or when the County identifies potential surplus assets. While the County does not actively solicit input on its portfolio without a specific departmental or operational need, it remains open to productive conversations when opportunities emerge.

Declaring County property as surplus and pursuing a sale or lease involves a rigorous legal and procedural framework, including compliance with the California Surplus Land Act, public agency notification, and Board of Supervisors approval. These safeguards are essential to ensure transparency, equity, and stewardship of public assets. While this process is appropriately resource-intensive, the goal is to balance responsiveness with the County's fiduciary responsibility to manage its real estate portfolio efficiently and in the public interest.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Recommendations numbered: None_____ have been implemented.
(Attach a summary describing the implemented actions.)
- Recommendations numbered: None_____ have not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.
(Attach a timeframe for the implementation.)
- Recommendations numbered: None_____ require(s) further analysis.
(Attach an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or director of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. ***This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the Grand Jury report.***)
- Recommendations numbered: R1, R2, R3, R4_____ will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable.
(Attach an explanation.)

The Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury recommends that:

R1. By December 31, 2025, the Board of Supervisors will direct their Sonoma Public Infrastructure Agency to develop a list of all the county's properties in three parts: properties which have a use or restriction precluding it from other uses; properties currently full utilized; and, properties potentially available for reuse now or in the near future.

The Board does not agree with this recommendation.

An inventory of all County-owned property is maintained in SoCo Maps and Permit Sonoma's GIS platform. Uses and restrictions of property is defined by Zoning Coded administered/enforced by Permit Sonoma. Permit Sonoma's online Zoning Parcel Search tool allows users to identify zoning and land use information for individual parcels.

R2. By June 1, 2026, the Board of Supervisors will direct County Executive to form a

multi- disciplinary team with expertise in real estate, affordable housing and economic development to review underused land assets for potential reuse or sale.

The Board does not agree with this recommendation.

Staff undertook a real property asset review in early 2019 and provided information to the County Administrator on potential surplus opportunities. Staff conducted a step-by-step process to screen all County-owned parcels in each supervisorial district for surplus for potential affordable housing development. As a result of this review, staff concluded that only a few of the over 2,000 County-owned parcels are suitable for housing since many sites are unbuildable. None of the few properties identified were declared surplus due to their current use.

While it is important to actively manage County-owned land assets strategically, it is not necessary, or prudent, to proactively assemble a multidisciplinary team for the purpose of identifying parcels for surplus or reuse at this time. Land use priorities and departmental needs evolve over time, and properties that may appear underutilized today could serve critical public functions in the future.

Surplus of County property is a significant action that requires careful consideration, including legal, operational, environmental, and strategic factors. Without clear and consistently applied criteria for surplus designation, a review process could result in premature or misaligned decisions.

R3. By December 1, 2026, after the county develops a plan to evaluate properties, the Board of Supervisors will designate some periodic land review, such as every three to five years because land use changes and properties once needed may no longer be needed in the future.

The Board does not agree with this recommendation.

The Board does not recommend conducting a periodic land review on a defined schedule. The land review takes a significant amount of staff time across numerous departments. The Board can direct staff to conduct such an analysis when warranted.

R4. By December 1, 2026, the Board of Supervisors will direct County GIS to make the Sonoma County Surplus Property map publicly available.

The Board does not agree with this recommendation.

At present, there is no county property that has been declared surplus. Surplus designation requires formal action by the Board of Supervisors during a public meeting, following a thorough review of current and future operational needs, legal restrictions, and compliance with the California Surplus Land Act. Until such determinations are made by the Board, it would be premature and potentially

misleading to present properties as “surplus” on a public-facing map.

Date: _____ Signed: _____

Number of pages attached: 0 _____

(See attached PC Civil Grand Jury Response Requirements)