

Date: August 1, 2025
To: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors
From: RSG, Inc.
Subject: District Formation Advisory Services – Update and Summary of Initial Engagement Phase

The County of Sonoma (“County”) engaged RSG, Inc. (“RSG”) to support the development and implementation of a District Formation Advisory Services Study. The objective of this effort is to assist the County with the related community education and outreach involved with evaluating needed service delivery improvements in the unincorporated communities of the County. As part of this Study, RSG has been tasked with identifying service gaps and exploring how these service needs could be met through existing and/or other governance options. This includes, but is not limited to, working with existing public agencies, activating agency latent powers, modifying jurisdictional boundaries, or forming a new special district, where appropriate.

Initial Outreach and Identification of Priority Areas

Beginning in May 2025, County staff from the Strategic Initiatives Division collaborated with Supervisorial District offices to identify contacts within the eight Municipal Advisory Councils (“MACs”) and Citizen’s Advisory Councils (“CACs”), as well as additional unincorporated community groups that had previously engaged in discussions through the Unincorporated Governance Ad Hoc. Staff contacted these representatives via phone and email to assess both their interest in district formation and the extent of any ongoing conversations or activities related to district formation or governance changes.

The following communities, representing all five Supervisorial districts, were contacted as part of this initial outreach effort:

- ☐ North Sonoma Valley MAC
- ☐ Sonoma Valley CAC
- ☐ Springs MAC
- ☐ Unincorporated East Santa Rosa
- ☐ Penngrove
- ☐ Moorland
- ☐ Dry Creek CAC
- ☐ Geyserville Alexander Valley MAC
- ☐ Mark West Area MAC
- ☐ Lower Russian River MAC
- ☐ Sonoma Coast MAC
- ☐ Graton
- ☐ Occidental

As of August 1, 2025, the following communities have expressed interest in participating in introductory meetings with RSG: Dry Creek CAC, Graton, Lower Russian River MAC,

Moorland, North Sonoma Valley MAC, Occidental, and Penngrove. These areas will serve as priority areas for the next phase of work.

Community Engagement Approach

Community engagement is a central component of this initiative. The engagement process is designed to elevate local voices and ensure that potential governance strategies are grounded in the priorities, lived experiences, and readiness of residents and community stakeholders. RSG and County staff adopted a two-track approach to engagement. The first track focuses on conversations with local leaders to confirm priority needs, assess interest in governance options, identify any ongoing discussions, and determine appropriate next steps based on each community's readiness.

The second track builds on those discussions with tailored support based on local context. This may include technical assistance for communities with clearer goals or broader education and outreach for those building awareness. Both tracks are supported by accessible educational materials to clarify governance options and promote informed decision-making. Recognizing that each community is at a different stage, this approach is designed to provide responsive, phased support that meets communities where they are.

Summary of Initial Engagement Activities

To date, RSG has held two introductory meetings with community representatives from the Lower Russian River and Moorland areas.

Lower Russian River MAC – July 7, 2025

RSG and County staff met with representatives of the Lower Russian River MAC Ad Hoc to review the goals of this effort, reflect on progress since the Blue Sky study, and identify priority needs. Key takeaways from the meeting included:

- **Diverse Needs Across the Region:** Participants emphasized the importance of recognizing the distinct characteristics and needs of the various communities within the Lower Russian River area.
- **Interest in Targeted Engagement:** There was a preference for smaller, community-specific discussions over broader regional meetings. Monte Rio, Forestville, and Hacienda were mentioned as potential areas for follow-up based on localized needs.
- **Need for Accessible Information:** Participants expressed a need for clear, easy-to-understand educational materials to support local understanding of governance options, including the LAFCO process and potential implementation pathways.

Moorland Neighborhood Action Group – July 23, 2025

RSG and County staff met with representatives from the Moorland Neighborhood Action Group to initiate dialogue around community priorities and awareness of governance structures. Key takeaways from the meeting included:

- **Early Educational Phase:** Community leaders noted that residents have limited familiarity with governance concepts such as annexation, district formation, and other potential pathways.

- **Interest in Broader Engagement:** The group expressed interest in hosting a broader community session during one of their regular monthly meetings to provide education on governance options and potential pathways.
- **Need for Accessible Materials:** Participants emphasized the importance of clear, easy-to-understand educational materials to help residents understand governance options and participate meaningfully in the process.

Next Steps

The initial engagement phase has helped establish connections with key community leaders, identified a set of priority areas for focused support, and surfaced early themes regarding needs, preferred engagement strategies, and information gaps.

In the next phase, RSG will continue working in partnership with County staff to:

- Hold introductory meetings with remaining interested communities;
- Develop outreach materials that explain governance options and implementation pathways; and
- Assist communities in evaluating the feasibility of district formation or related governance solutions.

This memo serves to close out the first phase of engagement and inform the County's broader efforts to evaluate service delivery improvements in unincorporated communities.