



COUNTY OF SONOMA

575 ADMINISTRATION
DRIVE, ROOM 102A
SANTA ROSA, CA 95403

SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 7/14/2026

To: Board of Supervisors and Board of Directors of the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District

Department or Agency Name(s): County Executive's Office

Staff Name and Phone Number: David Guhin, CEO and Brad Hecht, Administrative Analyst; 707-565-2431

Vote Requirement: Majority

Supervisory District(s): All

Title:

Response to the 2025-26 Civil Grand Jury

Recommended Action:

Approve the Board of Supervisors' recommended responses to findings and recommendations in four reports from the 2025-26 Civil Grand Jury: *Animal Services Revisited: A City Asleep at the Wheel*; *Protecting Sonoma County's Most Vulnerable from Abuse and Neglect: For the Children*; *A Review of Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District: It's On Their Website!*; and *Sonoma County Purchasing - Big Dollars with Low Operational Oversight*. Direct staff to formally transmit these responses to the Sonoma County Superior Court.

Executive Summary:

Each year, the Civil Grand Jury completes reports on investigations of potential issues it has prioritized within local government agencies. Between April 28, 2026, and May 11, 2026, the Grand Jury submitted four reports to Sonoma County, all of which require response from the Board of Supervisors within 90 days of issuance: *Animal Services Revisited: A City Asleep at the Wheel*; *Protecting Sonoma County's Most Vulnerable from Abuse and Neglect: For the Children*; *A Review of Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District: It's On Their Website!*; and *Sonoma County Purchasing - Big Dollars with Low Operational Oversight*.

Sonoma County departments and the Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (Ag+OS) appreciate the Grand Jury's commendations in the reports on protecting vulnerable populations and reviewing Ag+OS, as well as the constructive recommendations made in the report on purchasing operations. While the County is in the process of implementing, or intends to implement, many of the recommendations, two recommended Board responses fall within the category of "will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable." In these instances, the CEO believes the Grand Jury's recommendations duplicate existing processes or address processes already in place.

Approval of this item will officially direct staff to take various actions, as detailed in the recommended responses.

All 2025-26 reports are available at

<https://sonoma.courts.ca.gov/general-information/civil-grand-jury/2025-2026-reports-and-responses>

Discussion:

Under California law, the Civil Grand Jury exercises oversight of local government agencies, including counties, cities, and special districts. The Grand Jury investigates topics that are either brought to its attention through citizen complaints or are selected by the Grand Jury members, and issues reports on its findings and recommendations. Sonoma County received four 2025-26 Grand Jury reports between April 28, 2026, and May 11, 2026. A Board of Supervisors response is due within 90 days of acknowledging the reports. For administrative efficiency, all 2025-26 reports requiring responses are included in this Board item and will be submitted to the Grand Jury and Superior Court by July 29, 2026, which is 90 days after April 30, 2026, when the first report was acknowledged.

The reports contain both findings (F) and recommendations (R). The Grand Jury requires responses from the Board of Supervisors or Board of Directors as listed below, for which staff presents recommended responses. Each response must be associated with one of the following prescribed response statements: *recommendations have been implemented; recommendations not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future; recommendations require(s) further analysis; or recommendations will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable.*

Of the Grand Jury's four reports, all require Board responses and one (a review of Ag+OS) also invites, but does not require, agency responses. Recommended responses to Grand Jury *recommendations* appear below, and recommended responses to *findings* appear in the attachments.

Report: Animal Services Revisited: A City Asleep at the Wheel

A citizen complaint prompted the 2025-26 Grand Jury to revisit issues raised in the 2024-25 Grand Jury Animal Services report concerning sub-standard performance by North Bay Animal Services (NBAS); underfunding and lax oversight by the City of Petaluma as contributing factors to NBAS's non-compliance with its contract; and the need for a suitable county-wide governance system to ensure uniformly humane, legally compliant, and cost-effective animal services for the benefit of Sonoma County residents. While the report was primarily directed to the Petaluma City Council, one recommendation requires a Board response, as follows:

R8. By September 1, 2026, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors shall support previously endorsed efforts by the Department of Health Services to convene willing partners from Sonoma County cities to develop a county-wide system of uniformly humane, legally compliant, and cost-effective animal services, including centralized license management for the county's dogs.

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Response: Implemented in the future

The Board of Supervisors has directed staff to evaluate longer-term county-wide animal service models in collaboration with participating jurisdictions and local non-profits service providers, and to return with recommendations, as appropriate. This includes assessing options to ensure sustainable, coordinated service delivery across the county. As part of this effort, several jurisdictions have expressed interest in exploring the potential for a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) as a future governance and service delivery model.

Given the complexity of a JPA, this would be a longer-term effort requiring thoughtful coordination among interested partners. To

that end, County staff are seeking to identify jurisdictions and nonprofit partners who are interested in participating in an initial discussion to explore the feasibility, benefits, and considerations associated with a JPA or other collaborative models. Invitations for participation were sent on May 1, 2026, from the County Executive's Office and were extended to all Sonoma County cities and all animal shelters and rescues with physical kennels. The discussions are planned to begin during the summer of 2026 and will be ongoing as a model is decided upon and formalized.

Report: Protecting Sonoma County's Most Vulnerable from Abuse and Neglect: For the Children

In response to a complainant's request for investigation, the Grand Jury researched the operation of the Department of Human Services Child Protection Hotline. The Grand Jury found that responses by hotline social workers to reports of abuse were handled in a professional and consistent manner. However, the Grand Jury learned that the Sonoma County Child Death Review Team (CDRT) has not published a mandatory annual report since 2014 and that the CDRT did not employ best practices used by CDRTs in other jurisdictions. Required Board responses are as follows:

R1. By October 1, 2026, the BOS shall direct the FY&C to determine the origin and efficacy of reviewing decisions to evaluate out a case which has been reported to the Hotline four times in the previous 12 months.

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Response: Has been implemented

Regarding origin: The Family, Youth and Children (FY&C) Division of the Human Services Department has an established rationale for an additional review of the 4th evaluated out referral in the previous 12 months. This additional review process is an effort to increase child abuse prevention efforts with earlier intervention. While each individual evaluated out referral does not rise to the standard established by the State of California to warrant an in-person response, the cumulative picture of the family in that 12-month period may suggest that the family is struggling to best meet the needs of their children and keep their children safe. The 4th evaluated out review process does not require an in-person response; rather, it provides a prompt for a deeper dive assessment with a manager to assess if overriding the Structured Decision Making Tool to an in-person response might be warranted. The goal of the in-person response is two-fold. First, it is an opportunity for a thorough investigation during which the social worker will gather all of the information, including interviewing the impacted children, their caregivers, and collaterals, to complete a wholistic safety and risk assessment. Second, it provides an opportunity to offer prevention services to support the family in an effort to reduce the likelihood of future abuse or neglect.

Regarding efficacy: The following steps have been completed to assess the efficacy of the current 4th evaluated out review process.

1. FY&C reports to CDSS incidents of child fatality and near fatality that are reported to the child abuse hotline, investigated, and for whom the fatality or near fatality was determined to be a result of abuse or neglect. FY&C has reviewed the cases for every reported child fatality and near fatality for Sonoma County from 2018-2025. This review included the number of evaluated out referrals and completed in-person investigations that occurred in the 12 months prior to the child's passing or near fatal injury. Based on the data gathered in this review, FY&C has determined that there is no basis to support a modification of the current 4th evaluated out review process.
2. FY&C has implemented the use of a special project code in the statewide Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) for every family for whom the 4th evaluated out review process is triggered. The special project code allows for the tracking of every family for whom this process is completed. FY&C will track these cases for the next 12 months to assess what happens for families and children for whom a 4th evaluate out review has occurred. FY&C will then use this data to assess the efficacy of the 4th evaluated out process and asses for any needed modification to that practice.

R2. By October 1, 2026, the BOS shall direct the Sonoma County CDRT to establish procedures, effective by April 1, 2027, that include the following:

- Identify a single individual as chairperson
- Designate a spokesperson to the community
- Create written bylaws and protocols governing its work
- Develop training for members and members' staffs

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- Publish a report of its findings annually

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Response: Further Analysis Required

The Board supports efforts to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of the CDRT. Additional analysis is necessary to determine the feasibility, resource requirements, governance implications, confidentiality considerations, and legal impacts associated with implementation of the recommendation. To begin this work, the District Attorney's Office and Department of Health Services will work collaboratively with CDRT partners to strengthen governance and operational practices.

Activities could include:

- Development and adoption of bylaws, governance structures, and operating procedures.
- Identification of leadership and communication roles within the team structure.
- Incorporation of training requirements into annual confidentiality and participation processes.
- Review of available CDRT Toolkit resources and development of an ongoing training plan for members.
- Publication of a comprehensive ten-year report summarizing child mortality trends and findings.
- Establishment of a process for future public reporting consistent with statutory requirements.

The departments will begin this analysis by November 2026.

R3. By October 1, 2026, the BOS should allocate appropriate resources to assist the Sonoma County CDRT in its activities.

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Response: Further Analysis Required

Dedicated administrative and analytical support could assist the CDRT in meeting its statutory objectives, and the Board supports evaluation of appropriate funding mechanisms to support report preparation, data management, training, and administrative functions.

Participation in CDRT activities, including case review, data collection, trend analysis, and report development, is currently supported through existing staff assignments and available funding sources. The County has the capacity to continue these core review functions, report trend data publicly, and support ongoing multidisciplinary review activities. However, implementation of prevention strategies identified through the CDRT process will need to be evaluated as it lies outside the statutory scope of the CDRT.

The Board remains committed to collaborating with community partners, policymakers, and stakeholders to strengthen the CDRT and advance efforts to improve child health and safety outcomes in Sonoma County.

The Board will begin evaluating potential funding mechanisms by November 2026, and as part of the FY 2027-28 budget process, the Board will consider any requests for resources to assist the CDRT alongside other County funding priorities.

Report: A Review of Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District: It's On Their Website!

Citizen interest prompted the 2025-26 Grand Jury to investigate how, and how well, the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District is fulfilling its voter-approved mission to purchase property and conservation easements that protect the county's agricultural resources and create spaces for public use and recreation. While the Grand Jury concluded that Ag+OS is very effective at achieving its mission, it provided three recommendations, all of which require Board responses:

R1. By August 1, 2026 the Ag+OS Board of Directors/Board of Supervisors direct Ag+OS staff to include notification of Board of Directors meetings, with a link to the agenda, in the location established on its website for Public Meeting announcements.

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Response: Has been implemented

Ag+OS staff have updated the website to include notification of Board of Directors meetings with a link to the agenda on the Public Meetings page here: www.sonomaopenspace.org/public-meetings <<https://www.sonomaopenspace.org/public-meetings/>>

R2. By August 1, 2026 the Board of Supervisors direct the Auditor-Controller-Treasurer-Tax Collector and the Administrator of the Sonoma County Employees' Retirement Association Investment Managers to collaborate in pursuing a higher rate of return on the Ag+OS Stewardship Reserve Fund and report their recommendations to the Board of Directors by December 31, 2026.

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Response: Implemented in the future

The Board agrees that a greater rate of return is necessary to meet the long-term goal for perpetual stewardship. In conjunction with the Auditor Controller Treasurer Tax Collector (ACTTC), Ag+OS released a request for proposals for a discretionary Investment Advisor on March 24, 2026. Once selected, the Investment Advisor will be charged with investing the Stewardship Reserve within the confines of the current County Investment Policy. Additionally, the ACTTC plans to amend its Policy to specifically allow Ag+OS to invest in certain securities with maturities of up to ten years, as permitted under Government Code Section 53601. Ag+OS and ACTTC will return to the Board of Directors by December 31, 2026, to award the contract for Investment Advisor services.

There is potential to invest these funds outside the County Investment Policy, but doing so would require a California State legislative change. Should ACTTC and Ag+OS determine that is the best course of action, staff will consult the Sonoma County Employee Retirement Association to better understand and learn from their experience with that process.

R3. By August 1, 2026 the Board of Supervisors direct the Recorder's Office to flag properties under Ag+OS Stewardship and create a system to notify Ag+OS of changes in ownership within 30 days of recording.

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Response: Will not be implemented as recommendation is not warranted

It is critical for Ag+OS to identify properties that have changed ownership as soon as possible after that change occurs, so that easement stewardship activities are not interrupted. Though many landowners apprise Ag+OS staff when a sale is pending or completed, sometimes ownership of a property will change without staff's knowledge. The Recorder's Office's current system is unable to flag Ag+OS property interests and notify Ag+OS when ownership of a property changes. However, Ag+OS has implemented the following procedure to check for changes in ownership. Every 90 days, an Ag+OS GIS Analyst conducts an automated search of the parcel database for Ag+OS interests and compares those data to recent sales and merger records, then shares the search results with the Stewardship Supervisor. Stewardship staff then send out a welcome letter to new landowners, requesting a meeting (that typically would include a monitoring visit) for staff to provide an overview of the easement terms and time to discuss the new landowners' plans for the property. In this way, staff are able to answer any questions and address any concerns in a timely manner.

The Recorder's Office provides constructive notice to the public regarding recorded documents through an online grantor / grantee (name) index, as mandated by law. The Recorder's Office does not track ownership activity by parcel number, address, property location, usage or restrictions. While a limited number of recorded documents do include Assessor Parcel Numbers (APNs), which are indexed for interagency assistance, there is not a way to produce reports or histories based on parcel activities. It should be noted that some transfers of ownership do not occur via recorded documents, or are done via documents that do not have APNs required on them, and individuals researching properties are warned that APNs should not be relied on for accurate and complete title searching. The Recorder's Office has made the grantor/grantee index and all the associated documents available to all county departments and employees, who are able to search via grantor/grantee or APN (if indexed), at any time.

Report: Sonoma County Purchasing - Big Dollars with Low Operational Oversight

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The Grand Jury investigated the functional design of the County's procurement program. The investigation reviewed Purchasing group oversight, management, and organizational structure. It also included a review of operational controls related to purchasing functions and the resources available to support the procurement process. The Grand Jury's findings included that Purchasing had not implemented recommendations from previous internal and external audits completed in 2023, had inadequate controls and oversight, and had insufficiently trained employees. Required Board responses are as follows:

R1. Direct the County Executive Office to review the purchasing Internal Audit report issued in 2023 and the 2023 report from Civic Initiatives LLC to determine further recommendations and appropriate timeframe for implementation. This should be completed by 12/31/26.

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Response: Implemented in the future

Explanation and Timeframe: CEO shall provide a written update to the Board by 12/31/26. Update shall include what recommendations or measures are being focused on, and estimated timeframe for when Board action (if needed) is expected or when implementation will be started/completed.

R2. Direct the County Executive Office to implement processes to review and confirm that updated Purchasing policies and procedures are followed by individual departments. This should be completed by 12/31/26, and annually thereafter.

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Response: Implemented in the future

Explanation and Timeframe: The Purchasing Division will recommend a process to review and confirm compliance. The CEO will direct departments to review and confirm with SPI and the Purchasing Division that policies and procedures are followed. Departments and the Purchasing Division will be required to confirm to the CEO compliance by 12/31/26.

R3. Direct the County Executive Office to identify the actions taken by individual departments to confirm purchasing policies and procedures are followed. This should be completed by 12/31/26.

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Response: Implemented in the future

Explanation and Timeframe: The CEO and Purchasing Division will develop a process for departments to provide confirmation on how departments have reaffirmed that current purchasing policies and procedures are being followed. Departments shall provide a written update to the CEO on actions taken by 12/31/26.

R4. Direct the County Executive Office to evaluate options presented by the Internal Audit report and the Civic Initiatives LLC report to create checks and balances for purchasing compliance. The solution selected or created should include a method to improve department accountability in following purchasing policies and procedures. This evaluation should be completed by 12/31/26 and the implementation of the selected plan should be by 12/31/27.

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Response: Further analysis required

Explanation and Timeframe: Staff will review the Internal Audit and Civic Initiatives LLC reports to consider if any recommendations should be implemented, considering among other things organizational needs, identified priorities, and resource options and constraints. Analysis will be completed by 12/31/26.

R5. Direct the County Executive office to create comprehensive purchasing procedures and communicate them to individual

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departments. These should be of similar quality to the procedures prepared by Civic Initiatives LLC. This should be completed by 12/31/26.

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Response: Further analysis required

Explanation and Timeframe: Purchasing has detailed policies and procedures. SPI and the Purchasing Division previously initiated a review and update of all Purchasing Policies and Procedures; that project remains underway. Staff will evaluate current policies and procedures taking into account the Civic Initiatives recommendations, considering among other things organizational needs, identified priorities, and resource options and constraints. Analysis of changes to current procedures and identifying next steps will conclude by 12/31/2026.

R6. Direct the County Executive office to require that each department and agency provide the Purchasing group with the names of individuals responsible for purchasing and contracting. Additionally, a method to keep this list current should be implemented. This should be completed by 12/31/26.

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Response: Implemented in the future

Explanation and Timeframe: The CEO, in conjunction with the Purchasing Division, will develop a list of names of individuals who conduct purchasing and contracting in their respective departments. This will be completed by 12/31/26.

R7. Direct the County Human Resources and Purchasing groups to work together to provide comprehensive purchasing training that covers contracts and the purchase of goods and services. This training should be provided to all individuals responsible for purchasing and/or contracting and should be completed by 6/30/27.

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Response: Implemented in the future

Explanation and Timeframe: Purchasing training is available to all departments. Purchasing Division will work with Central HR to identify appropriate trainings for specific job roles and implement training and tracking procedures by 6/30/2027.

R8. Direct the County Executive Office to consider options to relocate the Purchasing Group within the County organizational structure to alleviate the appearance of any conflict of interest and increase proximity to the leadership. This should be completed by 12/31/26.

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Response: Further analysis required

Explanation and Timeframe: The CEO will review the Internal Audit, the Civic Initiatives Report, and other resources, including conducting stakeholder outreach, to consider whether the Purchasing Division should be relocated, considering among other things organizational needs, best practices among comparable public agencies, and resource options and constraints. Because a review of this magnitude will take considerable time, it will be completed by 12/31/2027.

R9. Direct the Chief Executive Office to ensure that Department Heads comply with approved hiring practices related to minimum qualification requirements by 12/31/26.

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Response: Will not be implemented as recommendation is not warranted

Explanation: Such processes are currently in place. Sonoma County's centralized Human Resources Department and decentralized departmental human resources divisions and partners currently have processes in place to ensure that new hires meet minimum qualification requirements.

R10. Direct the County Executive office to revisit the procurement software proposal previously presented to the CEO, including figures for any potential cost savings to the County. This should be completed by 12/31/26.

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Response: Further analysis required

Explanation and Timeframe: Staff will evaluate the currently utilized software and consider available replacement options for operational impact as well as cost analysis. Because an evaluation of this magnitude will take considerable time, it will be completed by 12/31/2027.

R11. Direct the Chief Executive Office to provide appropriate resources to implement changes recommended in the internal and external audit reports issued in 2023 and this Grand Jury report. This should be completed by 3/31/27.

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Response: Further analysis required

Explanation and Timeframe: The CEO will work with the Purchasing Division to review the various audit reports and consider potential resources needed to strengthen the Purchasing function. Should additional resources be recommended, these will be presented to the Board through the standard resources request process during FY 27/28 budget development.

Conclusion

Upon Board approval, staff will file the recommended responses with the Grand Jury and Superior Court.

Strategic Plan:

N/A

Racial Equity:

Was this item identified as an opportunity to apply the Racial Equity Toolkit?

No

Prior Board Actions:

The Board responds annually to the Civil Grand Jury requests.

FISCAL SUMMARY

Expenditures	FY26-27 Adopted	FY27-28 Projected	FY28-29 Projected
Budgeted Expenses			
Additional Appropriation Requested			
Total Expenditures			
Funding Sources			
General Fund/WA GF			

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State/Federal			
Fees/Other			
Use of Fund Balance			
General Fund Contingencies			
Total Sources			

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

N /A

Staffing Impacts:			
Position Title (Payroll Classification)	Monthly Salary Range (A-I Step)	Additions (Number)	Deletions (Number)

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

N/A

Attachments:

- A. Recommended response from the Board of Supervisors to Grand Jury report *Animal Services Revisited: A City Asleep at the Wheel*
- B. Recommended response from the Board of Supervisors to Grand Jury report *Protecting Sonoma County's Most Vulnerable from Abuse and Neglect: For the Children*
- C. Recommended response from the Board of Supervisors to Grand Jury report *A Review of Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District: It's On Their Website!*
- D. Recommended response from the Board of Supervisors to Grand Jury report *Sonoma County Purchasing - Big Dollars with Low Operational Oversight*

Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:

None