



SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 9/16/2025

To: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors

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

Staff Name and Phone Number: M. Christina Rivera, CEO; and Brad Hecht, Administrative Analyst 707-565-2431

Vote Requirement: Majority

Supervisory District(s): All

Title:

Response to the 2024-25 Civil Grand Jury

Recommended Action:

Approve the Board of Supervisors proposed responses to findings and recommendations in five reports from the 2024-25 Civil Grand Jury: "Permit Sonoma 2025," "Animal Services in Sonoma County," "Sonoma County Emergency Evacuation Plans," "Who Can Afford to Live in Sonoma County?," and "Sonoma County's Surplus Property Disposal." Direct staff to formally transmit these responses to the Sonoma County Superior Court.

Executive Summary:

Each year the Civil Grand Jury completes reports on its investigations of potential issues that it prioritizes in local government agencies. In June 2025, the Grand Jury issued its final 2024-25 report, which covered seven issues, five of which require response from the Board of Supervisors within 90 days of issuance: "Permit Sonoma 2025," "Animal Services in Sonoma County," "Sonoma County Emergency Evacuation Plans," "Who Can Afford to Live in Sonoma County?," and "Sonoma County's Surplus Property Disposal." The report "Sonoma County Airport Addressing Challenges and Preparing for the Future" required responses from Public Infrastructure and the County Executive.

A number of the suggested Board responses fall within "will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable." In these instances, and consistent with department/agency subject matter experts who submitted responses, the CEO believes Grand Jury recommendations duplicate services already available in a different form and/or proceeding with implementation would divert limited department staff capacity from core services.

Additionally, we appreciate the Grand Jury's investigation aimed at elevating the importance of mitigating potential short- and long-term risks to the community resulting from natural disasters. However, it is important to note that the Grand Jury report Recommendation 2 in Attachment K confuses the Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) and the Sonoma County General Plan Safety Element within the Sonoma County Emergency Evacuations Plans. We are happy to report that the Board on August 12, 2025, adopted the updated General Plan Safety Element which satisfies the requirements of AB 747 and related bills, including AB 1409 (2021) and Senate Bill 99 (2019). Furthermore, the Safety Element contains an Evacuation Routes and Locations Assessment (Appendix C to the Safety Element) to be prepared in compliance with AB 747 and

related AB 1409. The Safety Element also includes a Residential Egress Assessment, prepared in compliance with SB 99 that identifies residential developments in hazard areas that lack at least two emergency evacuation routes.

The complete Grand Jury Final Report is available at <https://sonoma.courts.ca.gov/general-information/civil-grand-jury/archived-reports-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 issues that are either brought to its attention through citizen complaints or are selected by the Grand Jury members, and by issuing reports on its findings and recommendations. Sonoma County received the 2024-25 Final Report on June 23, 2025. A Board of Supervisors response is due 90 days later, which is September 21, 2025. Additionally, most Grand Jury reports required departmental responses within 60 days, which were filed with the Superior Court in August 2025.

The report contains the published investigations' findings (F) and recommendations (R). The Grand Jury requested responses from the Board of Supervisors as listed below, for which staff presents proposed 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*. This Board report also includes official directions to staff regarding Board actions.

Of the Grand Jury's seven reports, three required both departmental and Board responses, two required Board-only responses, one required department-only responses, and one required no County response.

Report: Permit Sonoma | Management Review is a Beginning not an End

The intent of this investigation was to answer 1) Is Permit Sonoma meeting the requirements for permit review and issuance established by AB 2234? and 2) Has Permit Sonoma made significant progress toward adopting and implementing the recommendations included in the Berry Dunn report?

"The Civil Grand Jury concluded that Permit Sonoma is doing a good job of accepting and reviewing permit applications on a timely basis and has both opportunity and organizational capability to be more ambitious. A moderate additional investment in the workflow platform - and staff with the skills to improve it as needed - will produce significant gains in Permit Sonoma efficiency and an excellent return on investment for Sonoma County's builders and taxpayers." Requested Board Response is as follows:

R11. By May 1st, 2026, the County Executive shall review Permit Sonoma's resource requirement noted in Recommendation 7 for inclusion in the Board of Supervisors' 2026-27 budget review.

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future. Each year, the County Executive considers existing and emerging county needs within the context of limited County resources, and makes

recommendations to the Board of Supervisors who ultimately determine and adopt the County budget. As part of the FY 2026-27 budget process the County Executive will review any requests from Permit Sonoma related to recommendation 7 along with other County needs and make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors for consideration.

Departmental responses were filed with the Superior Court in August 2025 as attachment C: Response from the County Executive Officer to Grand Jury report "Permit Sonoma 2025."

Report: Animal Services in Sonoma County | *Separate and Not Equal The Costs and Consequences of Decentralization*

A citizen complaint prompted the 2024-2025 Civil Grand Jury to investigate Petaluma-based North Bay Animal Services. This led to a broader study of county-wide animal services. The work was guided in part by a 2012 study of animal services and subsequent updates undertaken for the Board of Supervisors by the Department of Health Services (DHS). Requested Board Responses are as follows:

R1. By November 1, 2025, the Board of Supervisors will direct DHS to establish an Animal Services Task Force comprising county, city, and shelter representatives to revisit the 2012 DHS Animal Services Report and recommend a governance structure for animal services that will: 1) provide county-wide oversight to ensure compliance with State Law; 2) standardize fees and engage a common licensing vendor to enhance public health and safety, licensing rates and revenue, and; 3) achieve economic efficiencies through shared resources.

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Requires further analysis. The establishment of a countywide Animal Services Task Force could be a valuable step toward addressing longstanding fragmentation in governance, service delivery, and public communication. However, success will depend on inclusive representation, respect of jurisdictional differences, and a shared willingness to explore innovative governance solutions. An analysis of this recommendation, including an evaluation of the feasibility and readiness with our partners, will be brought to the Board of Directors by December 22, 2025. If there is capacity and interest, the Department will evaluate scope during the next budget or work plan cycle.

Departmental responses were filed with the Superior Court in August 2025 as attachment F: Response from Health Services to Grand Jury report "Animal Services in Sonoma County."

R4. By May 1, 2026, the Board of Supervisors will direct DHS to launch a county-wide public information campaign in cooperation with the cities to explain the legal imperative and benefits of licensing pets. The campaign will commence no later than July 1, 2026.

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future. The County supports the recommendation to launch a county-wide public information campaign to raise awareness about the legal requirement and benefits of pet licensing. DHS plans to implement a campaign in FY25-26, however conducting such an effort in

coordination with other jurisdictions may not be feasible within the timeline recommended by the Grand Jury.

A county-wide campaign with meaningful reach will require investment, including formalizing agreements with partner agencies and vendors, and developing approaches may be difficult in the current climate of budget limitations. SCAS will conduct outreach with its local partners to determine capacity for initiating this effort over the current fiscal year. The nature of a final campaign will be dependent on available funding.

Departmental responses were filed with the Superior Court in August 2025 as attachment F: Response from Health Services to Grand Jury report "Animal Services in Sonoma County."

Report: Sonoma County Emergency Evacuation Plans | Are We Ready for the Next Major Evacuation?

The Grand Jury suggests that Sonoma County leadership accelerate compliance with state mandates by completing evacuation route assessments and other safety plan updates well before 2030. Staff wants to remark that the listed California legislative statutes, AB 747 (2019), SB 99 (2019), and AB 1409 (2021) are requirements for the "safety element" for city and county general plans, intended to focus on improving local emergency evacuation planning. On August 12, 2025, the Board approved the General Plan Update Safety Element Update which aims to reduce the potential short- and long-term risks to the community resulting from fires, floods, geologic and seismic hazards, and climate change hazards. Requested Board responses are as follows:

R1. By December 5, 2026, the Board of Supervisors shall direct Sonoma Public Infrastructure to estimate and report the necessary cost and location of radio repeaters needed to fully implement GMRS repeaters serving the entire County.

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Has been implemented. Sonoma Public Infrastructure has conducted a preliminary evaluation and estimates that approximately \$750,000 to \$1.5 million would be required to install GMRS radio repeaters capable of providing reliable coverage across the majority, if not all, of Sonoma County.

The most significant challenges to achieving full coverage are found in the West County and certain parts of the East County, where complex terrain and limited line-of-sight reception hinder radio signal propagation. Despite these geographic constraints, the department believes that, with strategic repeater placement, the estimated investment would support a robust and effective countywide GMRS repeater network.

Departmental responses were filed with the Superior Court in August 2025 as attachment I: Response from the Sonoma Public Infrastructure department to Grand Jury report "Sonoma County Emergency Evacuation Plans."

R2. The Board of Supervisors shall direct the Department of Emergency Management to report on the resources required to accelerate Emergency Operations Plan Annex Goals SE2 and SE5 from 2030 to 2027 by February 2, 2026, and shall evaluate this resource requirement for inclusion in the 2027 County budget.

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable. As noted in the proposed response to F2, the report confuses the Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) and the Sonoma County General Plan Safety Element. The General Plan Safety Element is not part of the EOP. The Safety Element and the EOP are separate documents, with different functions and legal requirements. The County's EOP does not contain goals SE2 or SE5. The County's updated General Plan Safety Element, adopted by the Board of Supervisors on August 12, does contain Goals SE-2 and SE-5 and also establishes policies and implementation programs intended to help achieve each goal. Several policies and implementation programs under Safety Element Goals SE-2 and SE-5 have a nexus to emergency management but may be overseen by other County departments. For example, DEM has a role in Safety Element Policies SE-2a, -2b, -2i, -2k, and -2n related to alert and warning strategies and evacuation planning. DEM is the lead department for some implementation programs under Safety Element Goal SE-2, including Programs 7, 8, and 9. Similarly, for some implementation programs under Goal SE-5, such as Programs 33 and 35, DEM is the primary department, while responsibility for other programs is assigned to other departments that have authority or programs/services related to the policy.

The report states that the County has not yet complied with requirements of Assembly Bill 747 (2019), and that compliance is not expected until 2030. The County's recently updated General Plan Safety Element satisfies the requirements of AB 747 and related bills, including AB 1409 (2021) and Senate Bill 99 (2019). The Safety Element includes an Evacuation Routes and Locations Assessment (Appendix C to the Safety Element), prepared in compliance with AB 747 and related AB 1409. The assessment evaluates roadway capacity and the time required to evacuate geographically large areas under current and projected future population conditions under three potential scenarios. The Safety Element also includes a Residential Egress Assessment, prepared in compliance with SB 99 that identifies residential developments in hazard areas that lack at least two emergency evacuation routes.

Various Safety Element policies and programs under Goals SE-1 and SE-2 direct the County to continue evacuation preparation and planning efforts, including but not limited to Policies SE-1e, -1g, -2a, -2i, -2j, -2k, -2l, -2m, and -2n, and Programs 2, 6, and 11.

R3. By July 1, 2026, the Board of Supervisors shall fund Department of Emergency Management acquisition of evacuation management modeling and simulation software which will facilitate advance identification of zone-specific evacuation routes and evacuation messaging.

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Requires further analysis. The Department of Emergency Management, in collaboration with the Sheriff's Office and the County Fire Marshal/Warden within Permit Sonoma, will continue to review options and operational needs from the three departments. The review of options and recommendations will be presented for Board review before July 1, 2026.

Departmental responses were filed with the Superior Court in August 2025 as attachment H: Response from the Department of Emergency Management to Grand Jury report "Sonoma County Emergency Evacuation Plans."

R4. The Board of Supervisors shall direct the Department of Emergency Management to report on the

resources required to identify and include within County Evacuation Maps the location of all predesignated county-operated evacuation shelters by March 2, 2026.

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Has been implemented. The Department of Emergency Management (DEM), in partnership with the Human Services Department (HSD), the American Red Cross (ARC), and the County Information Systems Department (ISD) maintains a list of over 100 locations to use within the County as an emergency shelter. These locations have been uploaded into ISD's Geographic Information System (GIS).

Once the County's Unified Evacuation Team (UET) or Emergency Operations Center is notified of an evacuation event, a temporary evacuation point (TEP) and shelter are identified away from the threat, and are turned on to be displayed on the County's emergency map (www.SoCoPSA.org). ISD's GIS team uses ArcGIS to power the County's map system and is considered open-source data. As open-source data, apps like Watch Duty and other maps that incorporate open-source data can share live updates of our data points (road closures, shelters, TEPs, and local assistance centers) within their apps and maps.

Departmental responses were filed with the Superior Court in August 2025 as attachment H: Response from the Department of Emergency Management to Grand Jury report "Sonoma County Emergency Evacuation Plans."

R5. By July 1, 2026, the Board of Supervisors and the Sonoma County Sheriff shall review Sonoma County evacuation plans to determine whether trained and certified Sonoma County employees (using the authority granted by California Government Code Gov. Code §§3100-3102) should become a resource for emergency traffic control operations.

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable. The County does not believe it is reasonable to train and certify Sonoma County employees (using the authority granted by California Government Code Gov. Code §§3100-3102) to become a resource for emergency traffic control operations. Law enforcement personnel are used for traffic control for emergency road closures and in evacuation zones due to the extensive training that sworn officers receive, including disaster-response specific training.

Evacuated areas present significant public safety risks, including the potential for looting. Additionally, based on prior experience, emergency road closures and evacuation zones can become contentious when residents and/or motorists insist on accessing evacuated properties.

When the Sheriff's Office lacks sufficient staffing for emergency traffic control operations, existing protocols are in place to address the issue. These include local and regional mutual aid, as well as access to national assistance through the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) Law Enforcement Division.

Departmental responses were filed with the Superior Court in August 2025 as attachment J: Response from the Sheriff's Office to Grand Jury report "Sonoma County Emergency Evacuation Plans."

Report: Who Can Afford to Live in Sonoma County? | A Tale of Two Cities

In 2022, the Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury released a report titled “Affordable Housing: Past, Present, and Future,” which provided an in-depth analysis of the affordable housing landscape in Sonoma County. That report examined historical policies, current obstacles, and future strategies to tackle the region’s housing crisis, including a discussion of the Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) process. Building upon the 2022 report, the 2024-25 Grand Jury focused on two communities-Healdsburg and Rohnert Park-and their progress in meeting RHNA goals for 2023-2031.

R2. By January 30, 2026, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors (BOS) and each of the nine city councils will agree to create an ongoing Affordable Housing Collaborative, which includes jurisdiction leaders, community members, grass roots organizations and housing advocates, who will share both positive and negative experiences and identify “best practices.”

Recommended Response for the Board’s Consideration:

Will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable. The recommendation will not be implemented as written because it is duplicative of existing, cross-jurisdictional affordable housing collaboratives including the Sonoma County Transportation and Climate Authorities (SCTCA) staff discussion on Housing in Sonoma County, the SCTCA Planning Advisory Committee, and the Napa-Sonoma Collaborative. These collaboratives complement an extremely robust publicly noticed, participatory planning process present in all jurisdictions within in the County.

No departmental responses were requested in this report.

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

The purpose of this investigation was to answer the following questions and evaluate the effectiveness of the County's process for handling surplus assets.

- What happens to county assets when they reach the end of their useful life or are no longer needed?
- Is office furniture, computer equipment, and other items given away or discarded?
- What about vehicles used by county employees?
- What happens to vacant land and unused or under-used buildings?
- Is Sonoma County effectively managing these assets?

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 fully utilized; and, properties potentially available for reuse now or in the near future.

Recommended Response for the Board’s Consideration:

Will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable. 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.

No departmental responses were requested in this report.

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.

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable. 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.

No departmental responses were requested in this report.

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.

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable. 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.

No departmental responses were requested in this report.

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

Recommended Response for the Board's Consideration:

Will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable. 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.

No departmental responses were requested in this report.

Upon Board approval, staff will file the proposed responses with the 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	FY25-26 Adopted	FY26-27 Projected	FY27-28 Projected
Budgeted Expenses			
Additional Appropriation Requested			
Total Expenditures			
Funding Sources			
General Fund/WA GF			
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)

Agenda Date: 9/16/2025

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

N/A

Attachments:

- A. Response from the County Executive Officer to Grand Jury report "Sonoma County Airport."
- B. Response from the Sonoma Public Infrastructure department to Grand Jury report "Sonoma County Airport."
- C. Response from the County Executive Officer to Grand Jury report "Permit Sonoma 2025."
- D. Response from Permit Sonoma to Grand Jury report "Permit Sonoma 2025."
- E. Proposed response from the Board of Supervisors to Grand Jury report "Permit Sonoma 2025."
- F. Response from Health Services to Grand Jury report "Animal Services in Sonoma County."
- G. Proposed response from the Board of Supervisors to Grand Jury report "Animal Services in Sonoma County."
- H. Response from the Department of Emergency Management to Grand Jury report "Sonoma County Emergency Evacuation Plans."
- I. Response from the Sonoma Public Infrastructure department to Grand Jury report "Sonoma County Emergency Evacuation Plans."
- J. Response from the Sheriff's Office to Grand Jury report "Sonoma County Emergency Evacuation Plans."
- K. Proposed response from the Board of Supervisors to Grand Jury report "Sonoma County Emergency Evacuation Plans."
- L. Proposed response from the Board of Supervisors to Grand Jury report "Who Can Afford to Live in Sonoma County?"
- M. Proposed response from the Board of Supervisors to Grand Jury report "Sonoma County's Surplus Property Disposal."

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

None