



County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors

Agenda Item Submittal

From: Community Development and Infrastructure

Subject: Recovery Permit Center Quarterly Report

Meeting Date: March 25, 2025

Formal Title: Accept and file quarterly status report on the Recovery Permit Center, and take related actions

Recommended Actions:

1. Accept and file quarterly status report on the Recovery Permit Center; and
2. Direct the Community Development and Infrastructure Department to return on or before August 5, 2025, with the next quarterly update.

Executive Summary

On December 10, 2024, the Board of Supervisors approved the Recovery Permit Center Phase II Transition Plan, marking a significant shift in disaster permitting services from 4-Leaf, Inc. to County staff. At the conclusion of the hearing, the Board directed staff to provide quarterly updates on the transition and the overall progress of the CZU fire rebuild. Additionally, the Board directed the County to allocate \$150,000 to support the Long-Term Recovery Group in its advocacy and facilitation efforts for property owners who lost their homes in the fire.

Discussion

As directed by the Board, the Phase II Transition Plan commenced on January 1, 2025 with the objective of streamlining recovery efforts while enhancing the County's capacity to manage disaster-related permitting services independently. To facilitate the transition, key measures included ensuring adequate staffing, cross-training County personnel on CZU permitting procedures, and updating the County website to improve accessibility and transparency.

Transition Implementation and Current Status

To ensure a seamless transfer of responsibilities, staff engaged in extensive cross-training with 4-Leaf personnel for several months leading up to the transition. This collaborative effort facilitated knowledge transfer and prepared County staff to manage the permitting workload efficiently.

Further support mechanisms were implemented, including updates to the County's Appointment Scheduler and website to reflect the changes and provide clear guidance to applicants. Additionally, targeted communication efforts were undertaken, with news updates disseminated via the County's official Facebook and Instagram pages to inform residents and stakeholders about the transition.

Upon assuming full responsibility for the Recovery Permit Center, staff successfully managed the transition with minimal disruptions. While a few minor operational issues arose in the initial phase, they were promptly addressed, ensuring continuity in service delivery. Overall, the transition has been smooth, and the permitting process remains efficient and effective.

Ongoing Permit Processing and Reviews

Since the transition, permit activity has remained steady but manageable, allowing staff

to maintain high service levels. Key aspects of the permitting review process include:

- **Zoning and Geology Review:** These reviews continue to be fully conducted in-house by County staff, ensuring a more integrated and responsive process.
- **Environmental Health Review:** Septic improvement evaluations are currently being processed in-house by County staff; however, Environmental Health is pursuing a contract agreement with Ryan Fox and Associates to assist with Pre-clearance Review and to ensure specialized expertise remains available on an expedited timeline.
- **Fire Review:** Fire-related assessments are conducted by the responsible fire agencies, including Boulder Creek Fire Protection District, Cal Fire, and Central Fire District of Santa Cruz County, ensuring compliance with fire safety regulations.
- **Building Permit Review:** While County staff oversee the permitting process, 4-Leaf, Inc. continues to provide building permit review services under an existing consulting contract, maintaining consistency and expertise in evaluating structural compliance.

All CZU fire rebuild permits remain subject to the Board's expedited review timelines, ensuring efficient processing. First building permit reviews are completed within ten days and subsequent reviews are processed within five days.

CZU Recovery Progress

As reported to the Board last December, the submission of CZU rebuild-related permit applications has steadily declined. As of October 15, 2024, when staff last presented CZU rebuild metrics to the Board, a total of 13 new Pre-Clearance applications and 24 building permit applications had been submitted for review. These included 10 single-family residences, 12 Accessory Dwelling Units, and two manufactured homes. To date, 142 replacement homes have been completed and finalized, with an additional 144 homes currently under construction, bringing the total number of replacement homes in progress or completed to 286.

All development-related appointments, including those for building permit and discretionary permit inquiries, are managed through the Unified Permit Center Appointment Scheduler. In July 2024, following the relocation of 4-Leaf staff from the basement of the County Government Center located at 701 Ocean Street in the City of Santa Cruz, inquiries related to the Recovery Permit Center, including CZU rebuild matters, were integrated into the Appointment Scheduler. This enhancement included the introduction of dedicated afternoon appointment slots specifically for the Recovery Permit Center.

When last reported to the Board in December, the average number of Recovery Permit Center/CZU rebuild-related appointments was approximately 19 per month. Since January 1, 2025, County staff have handled a total of 24 Recovery Permit Center/CZU rebuild appointments, averaging about 13 per month. The volume of CZU-related inquiries continues to decline steadily. The Building Division remains adequately staffed to sustain the customer support functions of the Recovery Permit Center effectively.

Long Term Recovery Group Support

At its December meeting, the Board directed staff to allocate \$150,000 to support the Long-Term Recovery Group in its advocacy and facilitation efforts for property owners who lost their homes in the fire. The County 2025-26 Proposed Budget is currently in development. The Board can expect to review the allocation of these funds for the Long-Term Recovery Group as part of the Office of Response, Recovery & Resilience's (OR3)

budget for consideration.

Conclusion

The transition of disaster permitting services to County staff has been successfully executed, with robust mechanisms in place to support ongoing recovery efforts. The collaborative approach between County departments, contracted specialists, and fire agencies continues to facilitate a streamlined and effective permitting process. The next quarterly update, on or before August 5, 2025, will provide further insights into permit activity trends, ongoing process improvements, and continued progress in the CZU fire rebuild efforts.

The County remains committed to ensuring that all disaster-affected property owners receive the necessary support to rebuild efficiently and securely.

Financial Impact

With County staff assuming most of the Recovery Permit Center tasks, the fiscal impacts associated with RPC operations have been minor. There are some unrecoverable costs associated with the transition, such as time spent training County staff and updates to the website and permit processing procedures. Additionally, the remainder of the appropriations associated with the former 4-Leaf contract will be reallocated to Environmental Health to pursue a consulting contract for septic pre-clearance reviews and permitting support.

Strategic Initiatives

Operational Plan - Attainable Housing
Climate Action - Government Operations

Submitted By:

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Recommended By:

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Artificial Intelligence Acknowledgment:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) did not significantly contribute to the development of this agenda item.