

19. Accept and file status report on County commission representation and restructuring efforts, as part of the "A Santa Cruz County Like Me" project, and take related actions ()



County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors

Agenda Item Submittal

From: County Administrative Office

Subject: Status Report on Commission Representation and Restructuring

Meeting Date: March 25, 2025

Formal Title: Accept and file status report on County commission representation and restructuring efforts, as part of the “A Santa Cruz County Like Me” project, and take related actions

Recommended Actions

1. Accept and file a status report on County commission representation and restructuring efforts, as part of the “A Santa Cruz County Like Me” project; and
2. Direct the County Administrative Office to return on or before October 21, 2025, with the next status report, including findings and recommendations based on the work of the Youth Advisory Task Force.

Executive Summary

This item provides a status report on County commission representation and restructuring efforts that are part of the “A Santa Cruz County Like Me” project.

Discussion

The “A Santa Cruz County Like Me” (ASCCLM) project acknowledges that different lived experiences can help inform and shape policy and governance to ensure our County is resilient, prosperous, and equitable.

Commission Representation Update

On October 17, 2023, the County Administrative Office (CAO) presented findings and recommendations from the ASCCLM project related to achieving diverse and inclusive advisory bodies. The Board of Supervisors (Board) unanimously approved the following recommendations:

- Establish a Youth Advisory Task Force to review commissions and propose recommendations to the CAO on how to increase youth involvement.
- Conduct additional outreach and education on County commissions.
- Build a pipeline of County commissioner referrals through collaborations with community-based organizations.
- Support new and youth commissioners from underrepresented groups through onboarding and mentoring programs.
- Operationalize a stipend of \$75 per public meeting attended by community members who serve on County commissions.

The CAO’s progress on these items is summarized in the sections that follow.

Youth Advisory Task Force

The CAO has been working to create a framework for the Youth Advisory Task Force (Task Force), whose purpose is to:

- Review youth participation on County commissions and propose recommendations to the CAO for increased involvement of teens and young adults.
- Explore the potential creation of a Youth Commission, designated at-large youth positions on existing commissions, and continuation/expansion of the Young Supervisors Academy.
- Identify barriers to youth involvement and propose strategies for increased engagement.
- Propose recommendations for enhancing diversity, equity, and inclusion within commissions.

The Task Force is comprised of 24 teens and young adults (ages 14-24). Members were selected to reflect a broad spectrum of backgrounds and perspectives, and they have the option to receive a \$75 stipend per meeting or earn community service hours.

The Task Force held its first meeting October 21, 2024, and has been meeting monthly with a facilitator from Watsonville High School in locations rotating throughout Santa Cruz County. Members are learning about County boards, commissions and other advisory bodies, identifying the needs and concerns of teens and young adults, exploring models of youth engagement in other jurisdictions, and weighing the advantages and disadvantages of various approaches and proposals. To date, members have visited and observed the City of Gilroy Youth Commission, City of Watsonville Teen Action Council, and County of Santa Clara Youth Task Force.

The Task Force is interested in establishing a youth commission in Santa Cruz County, and they will be working on the proposed purpose, membership, and duties. They are also working on a survey to administer among teens and young adults regarding their interests, needs and concerns. We anticipate that this survey will be released in April 2025. The CAO will return on or before October 21, 2025, with findings and recommendations based on the work of the Task Force.

Onboarding and Mentoring

The Clerk of the Board (CoB) continues to work on a phased project to provide standard onboarding procedures and a handbook for commissioners. The CoB previously established a resources library and training for staff liaisons to aid in onboarding new commissioners and align commission practices and procedures. Training sessions and separate office hours have been held tri-annually for staff liaisons.

The CoB has drafted the Commissioner's Handbook and will be finalizing it in 2025; this work has been delayed due to implementation of the new agenda management system. The handbook will provide comprehensive guidelines for conducting meetings,

understanding policies and procedures, and ensuring adherence to basic protocols.

The CoB is also piloting a mentor program with members of the Youth Advisory Task Force to support and foster their interest in County government. This required identifying staff liaisons and commissioners interested in working with young people and conducting Live Scan fingerprinting as a safety precaution.

Lastly, the CoB is preparing to implement Committee Manager, a new module within the updated agenda management system to support the ongoing improvement efforts related to County boards and commissions. Module development is currently scheduled to begin in late spring, with implementation expected by the end of 2025.

Stipend Program

The stipend program for County commissioners was successfully implemented on January 1, 2024. Since its release, the CoB has established a streamlined process that uses DocuSign forms to opt-in or opt-out of the stipend program. This enhancement has made it easier for commissioners to enroll and for staff liaisons to issue payments promptly. Currently, 48% of commissioners have opted in and 52% have opted out, or have not yet signed up. The CoB continues to work with staff liaisons to administer the program.

In addition, on January 1, 2025, the stipend program was extended to community members who serve on department advisory groups. These members are eligible for the \$75 stipend per meeting up to a maximum of six meetings per year.

Commission Restructuring Update

On January 30, 2024, the CAO presented initial recommendations on County commission restructuring based on conversations and coordination with department heads, commission staff liaisons, commission members, and community leaders. Recommendations included commission consolidations, retirements, and transitions to other methods of accomplishing the same purpose or duties.

Over the past year, the Board adopted ordinances to sunset the following six commissions:

- Environmental Health Appeals Commission
- Fire Department Advisory Commission
- Hazardous Materials Advisory Commission
- Human Services Commission
- Substance Use Disorder Commission
- Syringe Services Program Advisory Commission

As part of this work, the CoB updated and reorganized the [County Commissions, Committees and Advisory Bodies](#) webpage. Staff liaisons notified commissioners and updated individual commission webpages. The original webpages have been preserved for informational purposes only and will be available for a limited time. Commission records have been retained, per the County of Santa Cruz record retention schedule, and are available upon request by going to our [NextRequest](#) portal or by emailing staff liaisons.

Department Advisory Groups

When the ASCCLM project began, the County did not have any existing department advisory groups, although Santa Cruz County Code Chapter 2.38 has permitted this type of subordinate body. The primary purpose of department advisory groups is to serve as a circle of advisors to departments heads or agencies and provide informal feedback and discussion. The Human Services Department, General Services Department, and County Administrative Office have each taken steps to establish a department advisory group. Since last fall, these departments have established the following three advisory groups:

- Human Services Advisory Group ([9/10/24 Item 39](#))
- Fire Department Advisory Group ([2/11/25 Item 10](#))
- Circle on Anti-Racism, Economic, and Social Justice Advisory Group ([2/25/25 Item 18](#))

Departments are required to file a notice of intent to establish an advisory group with the Board and submit an annual report on attendance and activities, in addition to following other meeting requirements set forth in Chapter 2.38. The Board items linked above provide these notices.

Commission Updates

Due to ongoing restructuring efforts, the County continues to work on changes and updates to the following commissions:

- *Emergency Medical Care Commission* – The Emergency Medical Care Commission (EMCC), which advises the local Emergency Medical Services (EMS) agency on program development and EMS advocacy, has a new strategic plan in place. The Health Services Agency (HSA) is revising the bylaws for the EMCC to better achieve its objectives. Once finalized and reviewed by County Counsel, the updated bylaws will be presented to the Board for approval.
- *Environmental Health Appeals Commission* – Since the Environmental Health Appeals Commission sunset on March 31, 2024, The HSA Environmental Health Division has been working on updates to County Code to handle these appeals through the administrative hearing process and will present these changes at an upcoming Board meeting.
- *Hazardous Materials Advisory Commission* – Since the Hazardous Materials Advisory Commission sunset on March 31, 2024, County Counsel has been working on changes to County Code that remove other references to the commission. HSA will present these changes at an upcoming Board meeting.
- *Housing Advisory Commission* – The Housing Advisory Commission held a special meeting on March 19, 2025, and was presented with options to update the commission, including but not limited to updating the membership to enhance demographic representation and provide at-large representation from key stakeholders. Community Development and Infrastructure staff will work on

revisions to County Code and bylaws based on the outcome of the meeting.

- *Mental Health Advisory Board* – In coordination with the Mental Health Advisory Board, HSA and County Counsel are revising County Code and bylaws to expand the membership to encompass the spectrum of Behavioral Health Services, including mental health and substance use disorders. HSA will present these changes to the Board as part of a separate item on today's agenda.
- *Mobile and Manufactured Home Commission* – The Personnel Department currently staffs the Mobile and Manufactured Home Commission (MMHC). The support function transitioned from County Counsel to the Personnel Department with budget reductions during the Great Recession. Because there is not a clear nexus between the MMHC and Personnel Department, whose mission is to recruit, develop, support and retain the County workforce, the CAO is working on a proposal to move the MMHC support function to another department.

Financial Impact

A \$100,000 budget to support the stipend program has been approved by the Board and included in the Fiscal Year 2024-25 Budget. This budget accommodates stipends for members of commissions and department advisory groups.

Strategic Initiatives

Equity Framework - Community Voices & Partnership

Operational Plan - Comprehensive Health & Safety, Operational Excellence

Submitted By:

Carlos Palacios, County Administrative Officer

Recommended By:

Carlos J. Palacios, County Administrative Officer

Artificial Intelligence Acknowledgment:

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