

Contra Costa County Civil Grand Jury Report Summaries 2024-2025

Oursan Ridge EBMUD near Pinole



Oursan Ridge Photograph Courtesy of East Bay Municipal Utility District.



Back row, left to right: George Cleveland (El Sobrante), Bruce McManus (Concord), Mark Peters (Walnut Creek), Stephen McLin (Moraga), Linda Waters (Pleasant Hill), John Anderson, PhD (Richmond), Joseph Vorderbrueggen (Martinez), William Swenson (Oakley)

Middle row, left to right: Louie Gonzalez (El Sobrante), Tavane Payne (Pittsburg), Elizabeth Berke-Dreyfuss, Foreperson Pro Tempore (Moraga), Weldon Theobald (Danville), Brenda Balingit (Danville), Deborah Wiener (Alamo), Patrick Walsh (Oakley)

Front row, left to right: Edward Sarubbi (San Ramon), Hon. Judge Terri Mockler, Susan Rainey (Walnut Creek), Peter Appert, Foreperson (Lafayette)

June 3, 2025

Honorable Terri Mockler
Judge of the Superior Court, Contra Costa County
725 Court Street, Martinez, California 94553

Dear Judge Mockler,

On behalf of the 2024-2025 Contra Costa County Civil Grand Jury, I am honored to present to you and the citizens of Contra Costa County the Grand Jury's final reports. These reports contain our findings and recommendations regarding government agencies within our jurisdiction. We hope they will help inform the public and contribute to continued improvement of local government.

I would like to express my appreciation for your assistance and oversight of the Jury. We are also grateful for the enthusiastic support of Kenia Zarco, Elisa Pantaleon and Melissa Zuniga of Court Administration. In addition, we thank Hannah Shafsky and Rebecca Hooley, County Counsel, for the countless hours they devoted to providing advice, guidance, and thoughtful feedback throughout the

investigative and report writing process.

The Jury greatly appreciates the cooperation of the many public officials who responded to our questions and requests for information. We commend their dedication and expertise. We are also grateful to those who facilitated tours of their facilities and demonstrated such professionalism and pride in their work.

Finally, I want to thank the 2024-2025 Grand Jurors for their exceptional dedication and hard work over the past 12 months. Through team work, perseverance and mutual respect, the Jury was able to produce the excellent reports included in this publication. It has been a privilege to work alongside these outstanding jurors.

Respectfully,

Peter Appert, Foreperson
2024-2025 Contra Costa Civil Grand Jury



Richmond Police Department Hiring in the Face of Dwindling Funds

This Grand Jury chose to undertake an investigation after becoming aware of continuing police department hiring and retention challenges following the reallocation of City of Richmond Police Department (RPD) funds.

In its investigation, the Grand Jury found that hiring RPD officers has been and continues to be a challenge. Although improved hiring results can be seen in recent years police officer staffing remains below the approved level of 146 with a current vacancy of 23 officers.

Raftelis Financial Consultants, Inc. (Raftelis) and Matrix Consulting Group (Matrix), provided the City with two expert reports on staffing

levels. Both recommended an increase in RPD sworn officers. Neither report has been fully discussed by the City Council in a public meeting. The recommendations to increase RPD officers have not been implemented.

Additionally, the Raftelis report noted that the death of George Floyd in 2020 created a negative perception of police officers which increased the difficulty for police agencies across the country, including RPD, to successfully recruit, hire and retain officers. Furthermore, the Raftelis report noted that there is a perception that the majority of the City Council does not support the police department based on the reduction in staffing and budget and comments made by certain Council members.

In 2021, the City Council approved a reallocation of \$3 million from the RPD budget and directed these funds to support the YouthWORKS Program, unhoused services, the Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS), and a new alternative non-police community response

team, ultimately known as the Community Crisis Response Program (CCRP). The CCRP has yet to become fully operational and has been unable to fulfill its mission to channel non-emergency calls to alternative policing methods and to reduce the demand on police services.

Based on our investigation, the City of Richmond should consider taking a two-pronged approach to addressing the issues of police staffing and implementation of an alternative non-police response program. The City should also consider continuing to invest in and move forward with implementing alternative policing methods such as the CCRP and the ONS. These groups, working together with the RPD, will help the community at large feel more supported, safer, and benefit from a better overall quality of life in the City. Additionally, the City should consider investing in and supporting the efforts of the RPD, with a goal of filling all vacancies and having enough police officers appropriate for a city of its size and complexity.



CFS Needs Improved Social Worker Hiring and Retention

The Children and Family Services (CFS) Bureau, a division of the Employment and Human Services Department (EHSD) of Contra Costa County, is charged with protecting and supporting children and their families. Social workers strive to ensure children's safety from abuse or neglect. They investigate reports of abuse, neglect, and exploitation and intervene when necessary,

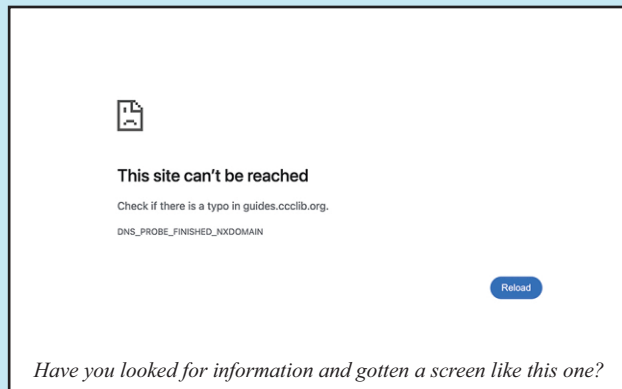
making decisions designed to serve the best interests of children. CFS does impactful and important work, and the Grand Jury commends the staff for its dedication.

Social workers can experience stress when performing their jobs. They meet with families and investigate under difficult circumstances. Parents and guardians can be wary of the inquiry, and angry at the possibility that a social worker might remove a child from the home. Those engaging in illegal activities fear the potential for discovery and arrest. When warranted, social workers recommend to the court to remove children from their families and place them with relatives, adoptive parents, or in a foster home (now referred to as a resource family). These decisions can lead to disputes with family members and other interested parties regarding the best course of action for the child.

Reflecting the difficulty of the position, CFS experiences challenges in recruiting

and retaining social workers, with a current vacancy rate of 19% (31 of 167 authorized positions unoccupied), compared to an overall County average of 13%. The Grand Jury determined that CFS faces an ongoing shortage of social workers. The Jury also confirmed that understaffing increases the workload of existing staff, resulting in a negative impact on services provided to children and families, including a longer time to close cases.

This report examines the shortage of social workers at CFS. The Grand Jury identifies findings related to the understaffing of social workers, and the impact of staff shortages on children, families, and the employees themselves. The Grand Jury makes recommendations to improve the recruiting, hiring, and retention of staff to better serve children and families, and reduce the workload and stress on the existing staff.



Have you looked for information and gotten a screen like this one?

County Boards, Commissions, Councils and Committees Improving Transparency for the Public

Boards, commissions, councils and committees (BCCs) in Contra Costa County play a crucial role in the democratic and efficient functioning of the County. Each BCC, while distinct in its mission, contributes to the overall governance framework in ways that ensure local government remains responsive and accountable to the needs and preferences of county citizens.

BCC success is based upon accountability. And accountability begins with transparency. Transparency is one of the most important traits of successful governance. Government transparency is the practice of making government actions, decisions, and data accessible to the public to promote accountability and trust. It is important because it holds officials responsible for their actions and enables citizen participation.

Making BCC agendas and minutes available to the public in a timely and user-friendly manner ensures that government actions are transparent. It allows citizens to follow discussions, provide feedback and ensure that their voices are heard.

For these reasons, the Grand Jury decided to examine the general operation of County BCCs, public ease of access to their information, and more specifically, the availability of their agendas and meeting minutes.

The Grand Jury's examination shows that Contra Costa County is working to support the effectiveness of county BCCs. Most County BCCs have a website with access to their data. And the County has a review process such that it reviews one-third of all advisory BCCs each year. In this way, the County examines, with some exceptions, all BCCs within a three-year period.

However, public access to County BCC information is hindered by a challenging and inconsistent online presence that can make it difficult to find and access BCC information. The majority of BCC websites are hosted by individual County departments and spread across the main County website. And some BCC websites are custom sites that may or may not link to the County's main website. Multiple lists of BCCs, most with links to the respective websites,

are available on the County website. However, each list contains only a subset of all the County BCCs depending on the type of BCC and who the BCC advises. Figuring out which list to use requires a basic knowledge of County BCCs that residents may not possess. Assuming that all BCCs have a website, the Grand Jury found that eight percent are inaccessible due to broken or missing web links.

BCC websites usually provide access to BCC meeting agendas and minutes by including links to one or both of two different search applications, AgendaCenter and Legistar, into which the agenda and minutes .pdf files are posted. Although BCCs are transitioning to Legistar, the County's new web-based repository for agendas and minutes, as of January 2025, 42 percent lag in this effort. There are also 24 instances where a BCC has created a custom website that contains no links to AgendaCenter or Legistar. In these cases, agenda and minutes files are posted directly onto the custom site with no links the County website at all.

The Grand Jury commends the County for its continuing efforts to oversee BCCs and ensure BCC information is available. At the same time, the Grand Jury discovered the aforementioned deficiencies and recommends the County consider the following improvements.

All County BCCs should first post their agendas and minutes in only one database source, Legistar. Secondly, each BCC should have and maintain a website with a link to Legistar and a link to AgendaCenter in cases where the BCC continues to use AgendaCenter to access old data. Thirdly, County staff should create and maintain on the County's main webpage a single complete list of all County BCCs with links to each BCC website. This enables every BCC website, wherever it is hosted, to link to a single launch point on the County website. Finally, Legistar should also contain a link to the master list of BCCs.

These actions will help make the process of finding BCC information fast, easy, and effective for everyone.



Improving the Operation of the Clayton City Council

The City of Clayton has experienced a high level of staff turnover during the past six years as compared to other cities in Contra Costa County. Since 2019, Clayton has had twelve City Managers. By comparison, 15 of 19 cities in Contra Costa County had just one or two city managers during the same operative period of time. During this same period, Clayton also cycled through eight finance directors or managers and five Community Development Directors. Staff turnover can be disruptive to City operations leading to greater costs and operational inefficiency.

The City Council Guidelines specify how Council members may request that topics be added to the agenda of upcoming meetings. These Guidelines were violated when, beginning in Fall 2023, and continuing for 15 consecutive months, the Council refused to add to its agenda the request by one council member to investigate the causes of high levels of staff turnover. These Guidelines were revised in January 2025 to require that agenda requests no longer could be made by Council members in open session but rather had to be made in writing to the Mayor and City Manager. The result is that the public no longer can learn what agenda items are under consideration or their disposition until the City Manager makes an oral report to the Council once each quarter.

The City has run a deficit in its annual operating budget since 2021 relying on its reserve funds to balance the budget. Several City Managers over this time, with expertise in public finance, have encouraged the Council to take steps to reduce or eliminate the deficit. The Fiscal year 2025 City budget is projected to post a deficit exceeding \$560,000. While the Council has discussed the issue on numerous occasions, including the formation of an advisory Citizens Financial Sustainability Committee, the Council has taken no action to increase revenue.

The Council has several committees, each of which focuses on a specific area of City affairs. Some are ad hoc committees with limited scope and duration while others are subject to Brown Act requirements. (The Brown Act is a state law designed to ensure that deliberations of legislative bodies are conducted in a manner open to the public.) The Act requires that

the meeting agenda of any Brown Act committee having a regular meeting, call for the hearing of public comment on non-agenda items. In 2024, such opportunity was listed on the agenda of just six of twelve Brown Act regular committee meetings.

Committees also may call for special meetings from time to time. During 2024, 48% of all committee meetings were posted as special meetings. One consequence of a meeting being declared as a special meeting is that there is no requirement for public comment on non-agenda items, limiting public participation in those meetings.

The Clayton City Council Guidelines do not permit Council committees to take actions, other than giving advice or recommendations, without the approval of the full Council. The Guidelines further require that committees make routine reports to the Council of their activities. These requirements have not consistently been observed. In March 2023, the Council voted to terminate an agreement between the City and a civic organization, the Clayton Business and Community Association (CBCA). Historically, the CBCA sponsored community events to raise money for a range of programs in the City. The agreement between the City and the CBCA specified the fees to be paid by the CBCA for use of City venues and services. After terminating the agreement, the Council then formed an ad hoc committee to negotiate a new agreement with the CBCA. Negotiations took place between the City and the CBCA and offers were made but the Council was never given updates of those negotiations by the ad hoc committee. Ultimately, the CBCA negotiation committee neither informed nor sought approval from the Council at a public meeting for actions taken, contrary to Council Guidelines.

The Grand Jury recommends that the City consider directing the City Manager to maintain a written list, available for public view, of all agenda items requested by Council members and the disposition of each request. The Jury further recommends that the Council require that its committees come before the full Council to report on their work and request approval of the full Council for any actions to be taken. Finally, the Jury recommends that the Council take actions to increase revenue and eliminate its recurring operational budget deficit.

DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO BE AN ENGAGED CITIZEN? JOIN THE CIVIL GRAND JURY AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE!



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Jurors serve a one-year term and unlike regular jury service, it is not a full-time or in-court commitment.

Inspections, interviews, and meetings are conducted in-person or virtually and do not require travel to Martinez.

Through these investigations, they develop findings and recommendations that agencies must legally respond to in writing.

Grand jurors must be US Citizens and residents of Contra Costa County for at least one year and eighteen years of age or over.



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WANTED: DEAD, NOT ALIVE! The Invasive *Aedes* Mosquito



Source: Public Health Image Library (PHIL), public domain image

Mosquitos are the world's deadliest creatures. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), mosquitos kill more people than any other creature on Earth by spreading diseases like malaria, dengue fever, West Nile, yellow fever, Zika, and chikungunya. These diseases kill, sicken, disable, and cause birth defects. Local and national media have reported on the West Nile Virus, which is carried by the common *Culex* mosquito, since 1999, when it was discovered in the United States. But not as well-publicized is that the dangerous disease-carrying mosquitos, *Aedes aegypti*, were first discovered in Contra Costa County in 2022. These small, black mosquitos are recognized by black and white stripes on their backs and legs. They are aggressive daytime biting mosquitos that can carry dengue fever, Zika, chikungunya, and yellow fever.

And the frightening reality is that these mosquitos are here in California to stay. They are our new neighbors, and they like to bite. Eradication is no longer feasible; suppression is now the only attainable goal.

Luckily, Contra Costa County has a well-run Mosquito and Vector Control District (MVCD). The problem is that county residents largely do not know about the MVCD, or they do not know what services the MVCD provides. The MVCD needs the public's help and support to meet its public health goals.

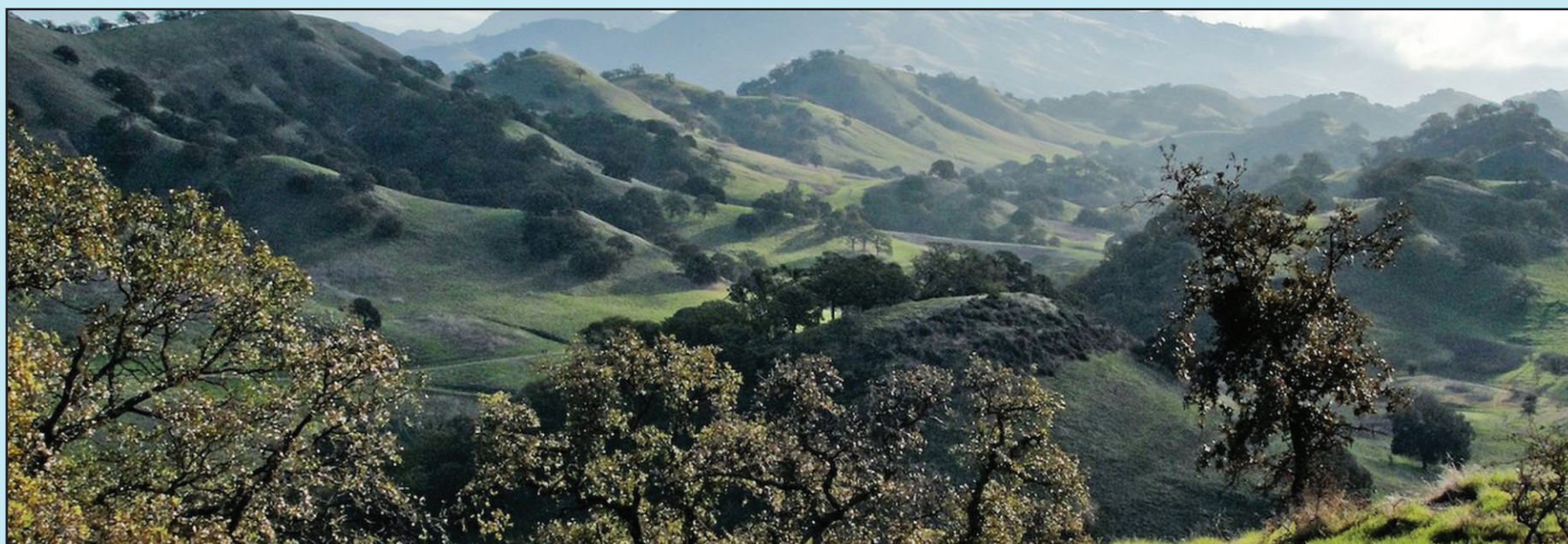
How can the public help the "good guys"—the MVCD—to do its job? They can identify and report invasive mosquitos. In Martinez in 2022, the *Aedes* danger was quickly eliminated by MVCD because a resident reported *Aedes* mosquitos before they spread to a wide area. So, too, in Antioch, a resident reported unusual day-biting mosquitos. That report was instrumental in the MVCD's large scale effort to curtail the spread of *Aedes* in Antioch in 2024.

But in May 2025, *Aedes* mosquitos were again discovered breeding in Antioch. This illustrates the need for consistent diligence in taking steps to prevent continued growth and spread.

Public awareness is an essential first step in stopping the spread. The MVCD needs residents to report suspected *Aedes* mosquitos and to be at the forefront of the fight by learning how to eliminate breeding in their yards and homes.

City leaders, schools, and other local organizations need to be supportive of the MVCD and assist in that effort. In that way, mosquito and other vector-borne diseases can be controlled before they cause widespread and difficult to stop outbreaks. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of pesticide!

Mosquitos bite...but they do not have to suck.



Shell Ridge Open Space in Walnut Creek

Contra Costa County Hiring Challenges



This report offers an overview of Contra Costa County's hiring process and highlights areas for improvement to enhance its efficiency.

The hiring process in Contra Costa County is complex and lengthy. The Grand Jury found that there are 27 steps in the recruiting and hiring process. For most departments, execution of these steps is shared between the Human Resources (HR) department and the department requesting the job. To ensure progress, close coordination between the hiring department and HR is necessary. Other departments choose to be responsible for all 27 steps.

The average time to hire (the duration between a job requisition being opened and an employee being hired) for the County is 113 days. Although this has improved from levels several years ago, there are still opportunities for improvement.

The County's lean HR staff contributes to challenges in hiring. The HR department supports 50% more county employees per HR staff member than neighboring counties. Due to limited staff, there are sometimes delays in posting job openings. As of January 6, 2025, 74 percent of the jobs pending posting have remained in that status for 30 days or more. Until a job is posted, recruiting cannot begin.

The large number of job classifications in the County also influences the complexity of hiring. With 1,300 job classifications, recruitment becomes more challenging when job requirements are highly specific. Furthermore, maintaining and updating the job classification list adds extra work for HR.

The Grand Jury also determined that several County departments use alternative hiring methods. The first is a process called dedicated resources, employed by the Employment and Human Services Department (EHSD). Under dedicated resources, EHSD funds three positions to work in HR, with these employees focused exclusively on recruiting efforts for EHSD. The second approach, known as delegated authority, is utilized by Contra Costa Health Services and Public Works. In this approach, the department assumes full responsibility for all recruiting and hiring steps to fill their positions, with no reliance upon or coordination with HR for any part of the recruiting and hiring process. These initiatives have been well-received by the departments utilizing them, suggesting that other departments might also benefit.

This report outlines the Grand Jury's research and findings regarding the challenges in the hiring process in Contra Costa County. We conclude with recommendations to help address these challenges.



Measure J Citizen's Bond Oversight Committee Mt. Diablo Unified School District A Case of Impeded Oversight

In November 2018, voters approved \$150 million in bonds for Measure J, issued by the Mount Diablo Unified School District (MDUSD). As a condition of approval under Proposition 39, MDUSD was required to establish an independent Citizens' Bond Oversight Committee (CBOC). The CBOC is required to review and report on the expenditure of taxpayers' money for school construction and to verify that funds are only spent on authorized purposes.

However, MDUSD has failed to establish an independent oversight committee. The current CBOC is not independent as its bylaws are written and controlled by MDUSD. These bylaws give MDUSD the authority to control who is appointed as a member of the CBOC. In addition, under the bylaws, the CBOC is prohibited from amending the bylaws without MDUSD consent and approval. This undermines the principle of independence that is essential for effective oversight.

Further, under the California Education Code (EDCODE), MDUSD is obligated to provide the CBOC with the necessary technical and administrative support it requests. The CBOC has formally asked for independent legal counsel to support its review of Measure J expenditures, but MDUSD has failed to provide that support. The lack of independent legal representation has impeded the committee's ability to carry out its oversight duties.

As a result, the current structure and operation of MDUSD's Measure J CBOC does not satisfy the requirements of the EDCODE and does not meet the best practices for creation and operation of a CBOC.

This report provides recommendations for the MDUSD and the Measure J CBOC to follow the best practices and align with the EDCODE, to ensure the CBOC can function as an independent oversight committee on behalf of taxpayers.

Would YOU Make A Good Grand Juror?

Do you feel the need to increase the efficiency of County and Local government, reduce costs, and improve services?

- Are you willing to devote your time and energy to that goal?
- Are you willing to take a position on an issue even though there will be those who will disagree with you?

How are your Listening and Analytical Skills?

- Are you a good communicator?
- Are you a good listener?
- Do you have a good memory for detail?
- Can you separate the “Wheat from the Chaff?”

Can you ask penetrating questions, examine documents, and help prepare clear, concise reports?

- Are you good at separating facts from rumor, emotional responses, and personality or ideological differences?
- Can you express yourself well in writing?

Are you willing to cooperate with 18 others in reaching a consensus?

- Do you value diversity of views?
- Can you evaluate differing ideas?
- Can you take direction from others?
- Are you willing to assume leadership responsibility?

Can you maintain confidentiality outside the Grand Jury?

- The Grand Jury operates in secrecy
- Your work must be confidential from everyone other than fellow Grand Jurors
- Grand Jurors are sworn “Officers of the Court”
- There are penalties for violating the “secrecy” of the Grand Jury

Are you willing to commit to a full year of productive work?

- The Grand Jury terms runs from July 1 to June 30
- Can you make a substantial contribution?
 - ...at least three half-days a week in meetings
 - ...30 hours a week or more in reading and research
- It is necessary that absences be minimized and if possible planned
- Can you sustain enthusiasm under prolonged demands?

Are you willing to receive your “rewards” through personal satisfaction?

- There is little, if any, public recognition for individual contribution
 - ...Your reports may be unpopular and subject to criticism by the “subjects” and the media
- Financial compensation is small
 - ...You will receive a stipend for meeting attendance and compensation for mileage
 - ...Parking is provided

Go on-line: www.cc-courts.org/grandjury or call (925) 608-2621 for an application.