

2024 – 2025 Contra Costa County Civil Grand Jury

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

Report 2502
April 30, 2025

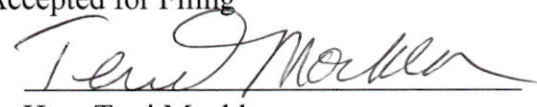
Approved by the Grand Jury


Peter Appert
GRAND JURY FOREPERSON

Date

5/2/25

Accepted for Filing


Hon. Terri Mockler
JUDGE OF THE SUPERIOR COURT

Date

5/1/25



SUMMARY

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.

Our 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. Eight percent of the BCCs do not have a website. For those that do, their websites are hosted by individual County departments and spread across the main County 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.

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 19, 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 some 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.

BACKGROUND

Contra Costa County is governed by a five-member Board of Supervisors (BOS) elected by citizens of the County. The work of the BOS is augmented by various boards, commissions, councils and committees (BCCs). Committees are advisory BCCs. They provide support and input by making recommendations on various issues to non-advisory, decision making BCCs like the BOS or other boards, councils and commissions. Non-advisory BCCs make policy decisions and do not formally report or make recommendation to another BCC.

Even though they serve the County, some BCCs are considered external because their governance is fully independent. These BCCs support community services such as parks, regional planning, fire protection, vector abatement and transportation systems that are often shared by nearby counties.

County BCCs are created for several reasons. Sometimes they arise in response to specific community needs or because of state or federal legislation. Other times they are initiated by contractual agreements with other public agencies. BCCs serve as direct links between governing bodies and the community. They expand communication between the public and County government and thereby enhance the quality of life for residents.

Imagine you are a Contra Costa County resident who would like to volunteer to support county efforts to improve public safety awareness. With that in mind you visit the County website and manage to find a county board, The Community Advisory Board for Safety Realignment, that addresses community involvement in public safety issues. You are eager to see the meeting schedule and review agendas and minutes to understand your opportunities.

However, to your frustration, you encounter roadblocks and dead ends. Instead of finding a clear path to the information you need, you find broken and hard-to-find weblinks, outdated web pages and missing or incomplete data. The agendas and minutes from the previous meetings may exist, but for you, they are nowhere to be found.

This storyline reflects the persistent challenge of navigating public bureaucracies to obtain information that should be readily available. It underscores the crucial role that accessibility of public records, like meeting minutes and agendas, play in the transparency and accountability of county governance.

Unfortunately, this example is not that far from what the Grand Jury experienced while trying to evaluate the operation of County BCCs.

METHODOLOGY

For this investigation, the Grand Jury interviewed County employees. Additionally, Grand Jury members searched the internet for information about County BCCs.

The Grand Jury reviewed the following reports and resolutions:

- Triennial Advisory BCC Review-Phase I Report, dated May 13, 2024
- Triennial Advisory BCC Review-Phase II Report, dated May 9, 2022
- Triennial Advisory BCC Review-Phase III Report, dated May 8, 2023
- Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors, Triennial Sunset Review of Appointed Boards, Committees, & Commissions, Phase III, undated
- RES 2012-261, Establishing a Triennial Review Process for the Evaluation of Certain County Boards, Committees and Commissions
- RES 2024-1, Board Member Assignments to 2024 Board Committees, Special County Committees and Regional Organizations, version 1

DISCUSSION

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 agendas and minutes available to the public 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.

Finding County BCC Websites

There is no master list of all County BCCs contained on the County main website. Information regarding all existing BCCs must be compiled from multiple County website sources such as:

- Board of Supervisors Standing Committees list
www.contracosta.ca.gov/1739/Board-Standing-Committees
- District 2 Standing Committees list
<https://ca-contracostacounty3.civicplus.com/3528/Committees>
- Public Meetings Agenda Center list
www.contracosta.ca.gov/AgendaCenter
- Board of Supervisors Appointed Boards, Commissions & Committees list (which provides a link to the Boards & Commissions Database)
www.contracosta.ca.gov/3418/Appointed-BCCs-Committees-Commissions

- Boards & Commissions list (accessed on the County's Granicus.com web service)
<http://contra-costa.granicus.com/boards/w/b7a9779a56d394f7>
- External Meeting Agendas list (custom website list from the County Clerk of the Board website, accessed from tab in Legistar)
<https://www.contracosta.ca.gov/10336/External-Meeting-Agendas>
- Committees list (showing only committees staffed by the County Administrator's office)
www.contracosta.ca.gov/2285/Committees
- Municipal Advisory Councils (MAC) list (provides input on unincorporated communities)
<https://www.contracosta.ca.gov/1773/Municipal-Advisory-Councils-MACs>
- Municipal Advisory Councils, District 3 list
www.contracosta.ca.gov/6444/Municipal-Advisory-Councils
- The Maddy Book and Local Appointments List for 2025
www.contracosta.ca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/85171/2025-Local-Appointments-List-Maddy-Book
- List of BCCs contained in the County's new meeting data repository Legistar
contra-costa.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx

As of January 19, 2025, the Grand Jury identified 111 active BCCs in Contra Costa County (See Appendix A). Information for nine (eight percent) of those BCCs could not be accessed online because of broken links on the BCC's website or no BCC website at all.

Finding BCC Agendas and Minutes

It is one thing to find a BCC website. It is quite another to find its agendas and minutes. Online access to meeting agendas and minutes consists of several iterations. A few BCC's post their agenda and minutes files directly on their website. Whereas most BCC websites contain links to one or two of the County's repository database applications, AgendaCenter or Legistar, into which agenda and minutes files are posted and then displayed. From each of the BCC websites, the Grand Jury determined whether the site contained links to posted agenda and minutes files.

Until recently, a web-based database system called AgendaCenter was the County's legacy database for storing and displaying all BCC agendas and minutes. The County is now transitioning to a new system called Legistar. In August 2024, AgendaCenter was made unavailable for posting additional agendas and minutes. Going forward, all BCCs must post agendas and minutes in Legistar.

Of the identified County BCCs, the Grand Jury inspected each BCC's website and determined that, as of January 19, 2025:

- 42 percent (47 of 111) of BCCs do not have agendas posted in Legistar
- 56 percent (62 of 111) are not posting meeting minutes in Legistar
- Of those minutes posted in Legistar, over half (27 of 49) are posted incorrectly, with links to their approved minutes not in the Minutes column of Legistar but buried within Legistar agenda packets.

Note that some BCCs meet infrequently and may not have had the opportunity within the time frame of our investigation to approve minutes in a Legistar agenda packet and subsequently post them into the Minutes column of Legistar. However, there were many instances of BCC's that met regularly yet continued to leave links to their approved minutes files in agenda packets.

Because of the transition to Legistar, County BCC agendas and minutes are now spread across two database applications, depending on when a BCC makes the transition. New data goes into Legistar while older data remains in AgendaCenter. Both have different interfaces and search tools. For this reason, the county considered copying the data from AgendaCenter to Legistar. However, the cost to reconcile the structural differences between the two systems precluded this effort. Going forward, links to one or both applications will be included on a BCC website depending on whether it contains records in that system.

BCC Oversight

The County's Internal Operations Committee (IOC) oversees BCC operations and compliance with applicable County policies. In 2012, the BOS adopted a regular, ongoing review process, formalized by Resolution 2012/261, which directs the IOC to review all advisory BCCs every three years. The purpose of the triennial review is to allow the BOS to evaluate the purpose, performance, and effectiveness of appointed BCCs. Since the installation of the triennial review process, three full rounds, as well as the first of a second round of reviews, are complete.

The triennial report process focuses on advisory BCC's. With a few exceptions noted in the report, 17 BCCs are identified as exempt from the review because their governance is fully independent of the County, they are a temporary (ad-hoc) BCC, or they advise a body other than the BOS.

The review begins with a survey (see Appendix B) to examine BCC compliance with public meeting requirements. Each of the BCCs is required to answer a variety of questions and provide materials as part of the review. The survey includes the following topics:

- Staffing and Contact Information – basic administrative support to the BCC
- Membership – Composition, Members, Vacancies, Turnover, Recruitment
- Meetings – Schedule, Attendance, Meeting cancellation rate, Subcommittees
- Community information – Outreach, Stakeholder engagement
- Meeting notices - Postings of BCC information, meeting agendas and minutes.

- Mission and purpose – Regulations, Bylaws, Responsibilities, Consistency
- Budget – Operating budget, Supporting organizations
- Challenges – Concerns, Affected persons/organizations, Recommendations
- Impact and accomplishments – Achievements and effectiveness

Each BCC is also required to provide agendas and minutes for its previous five meetings, by-laws currently in effect, and the most recent annual report if required. The review process requires the staff of the Clerk of the Board to review the agendas for whether the agenda descriptions are adequate for a layperson or outsider to understand what would be discussed at the meeting.

The Clerk of the Board and the IOC review the responses from each BCC. From the analysis, a formal report is distributed that includes an assessment of each reviewed BCC and identifies recommendations for improved performance. Such recommendations may include a reminder that agendas must be posted to the Contra Costa County website.

For 2022, 2023 and 2024, each triennial report explains the origin of the review process and the three phases of the review. It also states the year each phase was completed and the number of BCCs reviewed in each phase. Finally, the report includes a description of the purpose and function of the advisory BCC and a summary of the IOC's findings and recommendations.

The triennial review process is providing sufficient oversight to ensure the BCCs perform as required and provide the information that is beneficial to the BOS and the community at large.

FINDINGS

F1. The current County triennial review process for County BCCs provides an effective way to measure and thereby manage their operation and oversight because it establishes a predictable, thorough examination.

F2. As of January 19, 2025, eight percent (nine of 111) of County BCCs have no website or other online presence making it difficult for the public to obtain information about the existence, purpose, membership and progress of these BCCs.

F3. The 111 existing BCC websites are spread across multiple department web pages on the County's main website, making online BCC information difficult to find.

F4. There is no master list of all County BCCs contained on the County main website.

F5. As of January 19, 2025, 42 percent (47 of 111) of County BCCs do not have agendas posted in Legistar, the County's BCC data repository, which results in a lack of transparency to the public.

F6. As of January 19, 2025, 56 percent (62 of 111) of County BCCs do not have their meeting minutes posted in Legistar on the central County website, resulting in a lack of transparency to the public.

F7. As of January 19, 2025, of the 49 County BCCs that post their minutes in Legistar, 27 (55 percent) incorporate them into the agenda packets rather than in the Minutes column of Legistar, making it difficult to locate meeting minutes.

F8. Historic County agenda and minutes data are stored and accessed in two different applications, Legistar and AgendaCenter, which can make the information difficult to find.

F9. Even though it is preferred to use only one system, Legistar, to access meeting agendas and minutes, those presently contained in AgendaCenter cannot easily be moved or copied to Legistar due to technological constraints too costly to overcome.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1. The Board of Supervisors should consider requiring each County board, commission, and committee to create a basic internet presence by June 1, 2026, that includes, at minimum, links to their charter (if available), by-laws (if available), membership information, agendas, and minutes.

R2. The Board of Supervisors should consider directing the appropriate staff to create, by January 1, 2026, an online master list of all County BCCs where each listing contains a link to the associated BCC website and a link to the master list is made available on the home page of the main County website and on the home page of Legistar.

R3. The Board of Supervisors should consider directing each County BCC to post all meeting agendas and minutes in the appropriate section of Legistar on the central County website by January 1, 2026.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

Pursuant to California Penal Code § 933(b) et seq. and California Penal Code § 933.05, the 2024-2025 Contra Costa County Civil Grand Jury requests responses from the following governing BCCs:

Responding Agency	Findings	Recommendations
Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors	F1-F9	R1-R3

These responses must be provided in the format and by the date set forth in the cover letter that accompanies this report. An electronic copy of these responses in the form of a Word document should be sent by e-mail to ctadmin@contracosta.courts.ca.gov and a hard (paper) copy should be sent to:

Civil Grand Jury – Foreperson
725 Court Street
P.O. Box 431
Martinez, CA 94553-0091

APPENDIX A

A List of All Contra Costa County Boards, Councils, Commissions & Committees As of January 19, 2025

2020 Census Complete Count (Ad Hoc) Steering Committee
Abandoned Vehicle Abatement Service Authority
Advisory Council on Aging
Affordable Housing Finance Committee
African American Holistic Wellness Hub Committee
Agricultural Advisory Task Force
Airport Committee
Airport Land Use Commission
Alamo Municipal Advisory Council
Alamo Police Services Advisory Committee (CSA P-2B)
Alamo-Lafayette Cemetery District Trustees
Alcohol and Other Drugs Advisory Board
Arts & Culture Commission (Outsourced)
Assessment Appeals Board
Aviation Advisory Committee
Bay Point Municipal Advisory Council
Behavior Health Board
Bethel Island Municipal Advisory Council
Blackhawk Police Services Citizens Advisory Committee (Area P-2A)
Board of Supervisors Compensation Committee
Byron Municipal Advisory Council
Byron-Brentwood-Knighten Union Cemetery District Board of Trustees
Commission for Women and Girls
Community Advisory Board on Public Safety Realignment
Contra Costa Community Corrections Partnership
Contra Costa Community Corrections Partnership Executive Committee
Contra Costa Council on Homelessness
Contra Costa County Countywide Oversight Board
Contra Costa County Employees Retirement Association (CCCERA)
Contra Costa County Fire Protection District Advisory Fire Commission
Contra Costa County Transportation Authority Citizens Advisory Committee
Contra Costa Health Plan Joint Conference Committee

Contra Costa Resilient Shoreline Ad-hoc Committee
County Connection Citizens Advisory Committee
County Service Area P-2A (Blackhawk) Citizens Advisory Committee
County Service Area P-5 (Roundhill) Citizens Advisory Committee
County Service Area P-6 (Discovery Bay) Citizens Advisory Committee
Countywide Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee
Countywide Oversight Board
Covid 19 Economic Impact and Recovery Committee
Crockett-Carquinez Fire Protection District Fire Advisory Commission
Debt Affordability Advisory Committee
Development Disabilities Council (all elected members)
Diablo Municipal Advisory Council
Dougherty Valley Oversight Committee
East Bay Regional Park District's Park Advisory Committee - BOS Appointee
East Contra Costa Habitat Conservancy
East Richmond Heights Municipal Advisory Council
Economic Opportunity Council
El Sobrante Municipal Advisory Council
Emergency Medical Care Committee
Emergency Services Policy Board
Equal Employment Opportunity Advisory Council
Equity Committee (previously: Hiring Outreach Oversight Committee)
Family & Children's Trust Committee
Family and Human Services Committee
Finance Committee
First 5 Contra Cost Children and Families Committee
Fish and Wildlife Committee
Governing Body of the Green Empowerment Zone
Hazardous Materials Commission
Head Start Policy Council
Historical Landmarks Advisory Committee
Housing Authority - BOS Appointees
Illegal Dumping Ad Hoc Committee
In-Home Supportive Services Public Authority Advisory Committee
Industrial Safety Ordinance/Community Warning System Ad Hoc Committee
Integrated Pest Management Advisory Committee
Internal Operations Committee
Iron Horse Corridor Management Program Advisory Committee
Juvenile Justice Commission
Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council
Keller Canyon Mitigation Fund Review Committee
Kensington Municipal Advisory Council

Knightsen Town Advisory Council
Legislation Committee
Library Commission (BOS Appointments Only)
Local Enforcement Agency Independent Hearing Panel
Local Planning and Advisory Council for Early Care and Education (LPC)
Los Medanos Health Advisory Committee
Managed Care Commission
Measure X Community Advisory
Measure X Community Fiscal Oversight
Medical Services Joint Conference Committee
Merit Board
Mosquito and Vector Control
North Richmond Muni Advisory Council
North Richmond Waste and Recovery Mitigation Fee Committee
Northern Waterfront Economic Development Initiative Ad Hoc Committee
Open Space/Contra Costa County and East Bay Regional Park District Liaison Committee
Pacheco Municipal Advisory Council
Planning Commission
Pleasant Hill BART Leasing Authority
Public Law Library Board of Trustees
Public Protection Committee
Racial Justice Oversight Body
Regional Measure 3 Oversight Committee
Resource Conservation District
Rodeo Muni Advisory Council
Sustainability Committee-implement CLIMATE action plan
Sustainability Commission
TRANSPLAN- Committee
TRANSPLAN- Technical Advisory Committee
Transportation, Water and Infrastructure Committee
Treasury Oversight
Tri Delta Transit Authority BOD
Tri Valley Transportation Council
Tri Valley Transportation Council - Finance Subcommittee
Western CC County Transit Authority BOD
Workforce Development Board
Zoning Administrator

APPENDIX B

Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors Triennial Sunset Review of Appointed Boards, Committees, & Commissions

PART I: QUESTIONS

STAFFING & CONTACT INFORMATION

Name of Advisory or Independent Body:

Name of Person Completing the Triennial Review Survey:

Chairperson Name:

Main Staff Person Name:

Staff Agency/Department:

Main Staff Telephone Number:

Main Staff Email:

Website (enter "N/A" if the body does not have a website):

How many staff members provide support for this body?

On average, how many hours per week of staff support does this body utilize?

MEMBERSHIP

1. How many authorized, voting seats are on the body?
2. How many authorized, voting seats are currently filled?
3. Does the body have a sufficient number of members to achieve its mission?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If “No”, do you recommend an adjustment to the number of seats (an increase, decrease, or other restructuring)?

4. Does the body have a sufficient composition of members/types of seats to achieve its mission?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

If “No”, please indicate which seats you would modify and why.

5. Has the body experienced any membership challenges (i.e. high vacancy rates, trouble filling seats, high member turnover, difficulty meeting quorum, or issues with recruitment and retention)?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

If “Yes”, please describe the membership challenges experienced.

6. Are there special qualifications, requirements, or prerequisites for members to serve on the body?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

If “Yes”, please explain whether the requirements are important and necessary, or describe any issues where these requirements have limited recruitment of potential candidates.

MEETINGS

1. How many “full body” meetings were scheduled during the last 36 months?
2. How many “full body” meetings were cancelled during the last 36 months?
3. How many “full body” meetings were cancelled during the last 36 months *specifically due to lack of quorum*?
4. How many subcommittees does the body have and how frequently do they meet?

COMMUNITY INFORMATION, OUTREACH & MEETING NOTICES

1. How does the body engage stakeholders and the general public on issues and

programs within the body's area of responsibility?

2. How are stakeholder and public input incorporated into the body's mission and objectives?
3. What outreach efforts are undertaken to encourage public participation in meetings and sponsored activities?
4. How far in advance of the meeting date does the body post its meeting notice?
5. Where are meeting notices posted? Please note all locations, both physical and electronic.
6. What information is regularly presented to the body's members to keep them informed of the body's performance?

MISSION & PURPOSE

1. Is this body or its activities mandated by state or federal law or regulations?
☐ Yes
☐ No

If "Yes", please provide the citation to the applicable law.

2. What is the original purpose and responsibility of the body, as prescribed in its establishing documents?
3. Have there been major changes to the body's responsibility (such as changes in legal mandates or in the major activities that it has undertaken)?
☐ Yes
☐ No

If "Yes", please describe these changes.

4. Are the body's bylaws reflective of the body's current mission, purpose, and focus?
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ N/A - body does not currently have bylaws

If "No", please describe how the body's current mission, purpose, or focus differ from the existing bylaws.

5. Do you recommend changes to the body's mission, purpose, or focus?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If “Yes”, please explain the changes you would suggest and why.

6. What target population or priority communities are served by the body?
7. List activities, services, programs, and/or special projects the body delivers to achieve its current mission.

BUDGET

1. Does the body have an annual operating budget?
☐ Yes
☐ No
2. Does the body collaborate with any private organization (not the county or an associated governmental agency) that provides, holds, and/or disburses funds on behalf of the body, such as a “Friends” committee or other organization?
☐ Yes
☐ No

If “Yes”, please list the organization.

CHALLENGES

1. Are there any additional challenges or problems that the body has been unable to resolve or wishes to bring to the attention of County Administration and/or the Board of Supervisors?
☐ Yes
☐ No

If “Yes”, please provide a description of the challenge or concern.

If “Yes”, please also list who is affected by this challenge or problem.

If “Yes”, please also list what changes or other recommendations the committee has considered in response.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS & IMPACT

1. Describe the specific impact of the work of the body and its work in achieving its

mission.

2. Describe any effects the body has had on the target population or community.
3. Optional: Describe any additional comments on the effectiveness of the accomplishments and impact of the body. You may use this space to share additional comments about the work of the body, its effectiveness, the services it provides, or any other related achievements.

PART II: MATERIALS

Please attach or provide links to the following materials.

- ☐ Agendas from the last 5 meetings
 - ☐ Attached; *or*
 - ☐ Link:
- ☐ Minutes (or records of action) from the last 5 meetings
 - ☐ Attached; *or*
 - ☐ Link:
- ☐ Bylaws currently in effect
 - ☐ This body does not have bylaws; *or*
 - ☐ Attached; *or*
 - ☐ Link:
- ☐ Annual Reports for the previous three years, if available, as submitted to the Board of Supervisors
 - ☐ There are no annual reports for the previous three years; *or*
 - ☐ Attached; *or*
 - ☐ Link: