

2023-2024 • VENTURA COUNTY GRAND JURY  
CONSOLIDATED FINAL REPORT



# 2023 - 2024 Ventura County Grand Jury



## Consolidated Final Report

The Ventura County Grand Jury is an independent investigative body that is charged with investigating or inquiring into Ventura County matters of civil concern. This includes looking into issues affecting County agencies, cities, special districts and joint power authorities to ensure that the best interests of County residents are being served.

Investigations may be based on confidential complaints received from the public. They may also be based on internal inquiries into matters brought to the Grand Jury's attention during agency briefings, protocol visits, monitoring meetings of the Board of Supervisors and observing local events.

California Penal Code Section 933 directs the Grand Jury to prepare and issue a final report. California Penal Code Section 916 requires that all problems identified in the final report be accompanied by recommendations for resolution, including financial where applicable.

On the Cover

**Coreopsis gigantea – Pacific Coast Highway**

*Photograph courtesy of Grand Juror Simhan Mandyam*



# COUNTY of VENTURA

## Grand Jury

800 South Victoria Avenue  
Ventura, CA 93009  
Tel (805) 477-1600  
Fax (805) 658-4523  
grandjury.countyofventura.org

July 1, 2024

The Honorable Kevin G. DeNoce  
Presiding Judge  
Superior Court, State of California  
County of Ventura

Dear Judge DeNoce:

On behalf of the 2023-2024 Ventura County Grand Jury and in compliance with Penal Code Section 933(a), it is my honor to present to the Superior Court as well as to the residents of Ventura County, the Consolidated Final Report. This report contains the results of investigations that address issues raised by both the public and by members of the Grand Jury. The intent of the individual final reports is to inform the relevant government agency and the public as well as to improve local government practices.

During their year of service, the members of the Grand Jury brought with them varied backgrounds, experiences and expertise. Each Juror took an oath to..." diligently inquire into, and true presentation make..." of matters brought before them and were charged by the Court to act at all times with impartiality. We believe the Grand Jury conducted itself accordingly.

We have appreciated the cooperation of the officials and employees of the County, the Cities and the Special Districts who were receptive, thorough and candid in the responses to our requests for information. We thank Your Honor as well as the County Counsel, Tiffany North, for your and her accessibility, support and legal advice. Additionally, we would like to thank Ms. Tania Magdaleno and the Jury Services staff for their assistance with the recruiting of the Grand Jury for next term. We want to convey our appreciation to Ms. Carla Alvara, Administrative Officer for the County Executive Office and Fiscal and Administrative Services for their assistance with the onboarding of jurors. We also thank County Executive Officer, Dr. Sevet Johnson and the staff of Information Technology and General Services for the outstanding support they provided us.

As members of the Grand Jury, we have gained a wealth of knowledge and better understanding of the operation of local government and we hope that through our service, we have made a worthwhile contribution to our communities. We are honored to have had the privilege of service. I personally want to thank the Court for the additional privilege of serving as Foreperson.

Respectfully,

Lori Macdonald  
Foreperson  
Ventura County Grand Jury (2023-2024)

**Judge Kevin DeNoce**  
**Presiding Judge of the Superior Court**



**Judge Matthew Guasco**  
**Assistant Presiding Judge of the Superior Court**





# COUNTY of VENTURA

## Grand Jury

800 South Victoria Avenue  
Ventura, CA 93009  
Tel (805) 477-1600  
Fax (805) 658-4523  
grandjury.countyofventura.org

July 1, 2024

To the Residents of Ventura County:

This year's Grand Jury would like to convey what an honor it was to represent you for the 2023-2024 term. We are proud of the work done as represented in the 2023-2024 Consolidated Final Report and want to encourage the public to review its contents.

The primary function of the Ventura County Grand Jury is to act as the public's oversight through the investigation and reporting on local government entities. Its role is to assess the performance of local governmental agencies and officials, and to publish reports that detail the facts, findings and recommendations.

Investigations may be based on confidential complaints received from the public or they may be based on internal inquiries brought to the Grand Jury's attention during agency briefings and protocol visits. They can also come from the observation of Board of Supervisors meetings and site visits. During this Jury's term, it used all methods to evaluate local government processes.

Each year the Superior Court of Ventura County invites residents to apply and serve on the Ventura County Grand Jury. California Penal Code requires that applicants be, a citizen of the United States; 18 years of age or older; a resident of Ventura County immediately prior to selection; of ordinary intelligence, sound judgement, and fair character; and have sufficient knowledge of the English language to reasonably conduct Grand Jury business. Basic computer skills are also an important element of conducting jury business.

Members of the 2023-2024 Ventura County Grand Jury urge you to become actively involved in your community by applying for future service. You will not find a better opportunity to learn about local government while giving back to your community than serving on the Grand Jury. Applications are accepted from January 1<sup>st</sup> through mid-April each year. For more information about the Grand Jury, please visit their website at <https://www.ventura.org/grand-jury/>.

Sincerely,

Lori Macdonald  
Foreperson  
Ventura County Grand Jury (2023-2024)



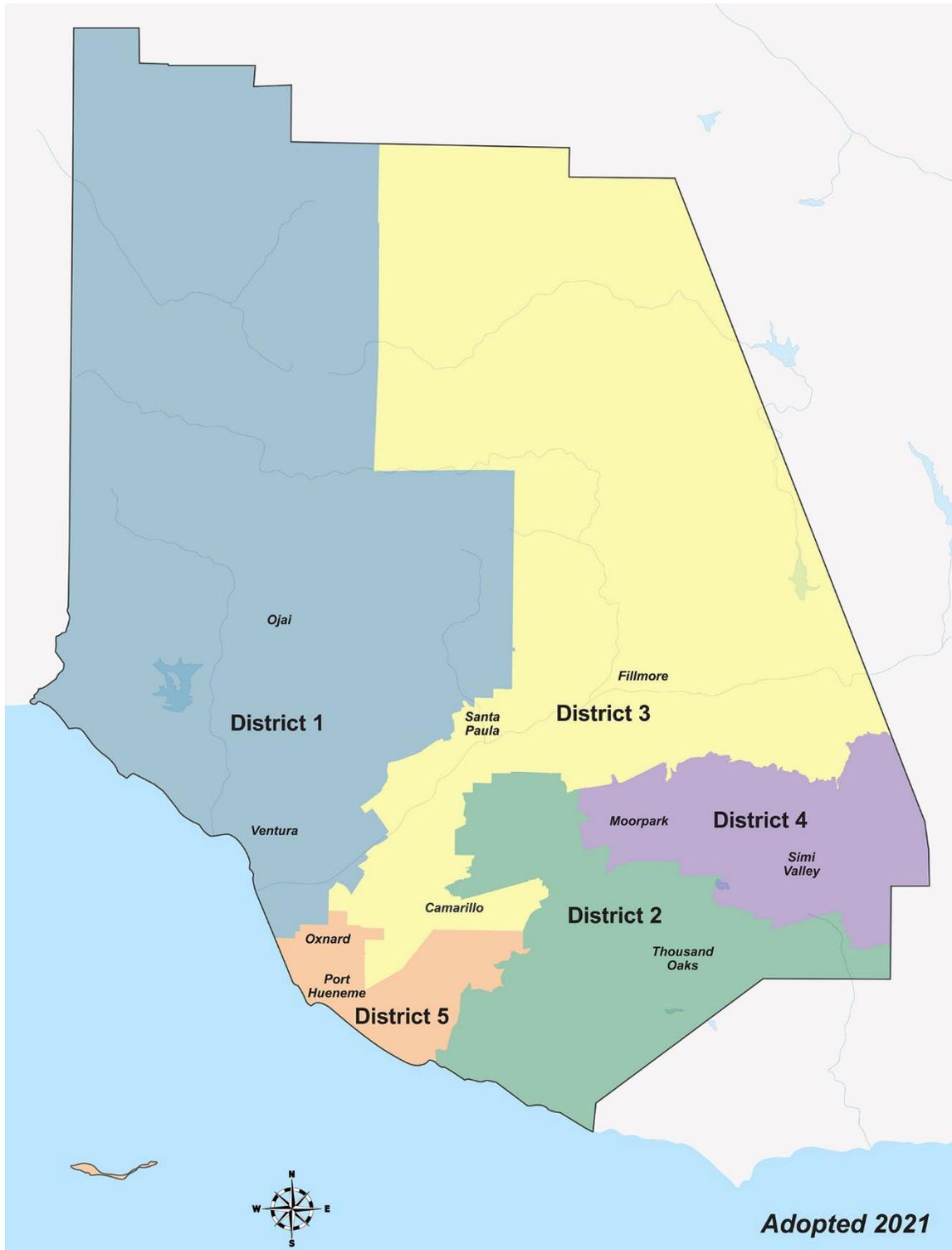
**Ventura County Grand Jury  
2022 – 2023**

**Standing in the Back (L-R):** Robert Keys, James Taylor, Arthur Bliss, Simhan Mandyam, Karen Gindick, Claudia D. Gomez, Laura E.S. Lopez, Brenda Holmes, Craig O'Neill, Gary Frick, Ahmad Razavi, Tom Hamlet  
**Seated in the Front (L-R):** Barbera Jakubanis, Cyndy Taschman, Lori Macdonald, Barbara Rush, Michelle Jordan  
**Not pictured:** Consuella Farrar, Brian Krinsley

## 2023-2024 Grand Jurors

Name	Residence	District
Arthur Bliss	Somis	3
Consuella Farrar	Oakview	1
Gary Frick	Ventura	1
Karen Gindick	Ventura	1
Claudia Gomez	Camarillo	2
Thomas Hamlet	Simi Valley	4
Brenda Holmes	Oxnard	5
Barbera Jakubanis	Simi Valley	4
Michelle Jordan	Ventura	1
Robert Keys	Ventura	1
Brian Krinsley	Oxnard	5
Laura E.S. López	Camarillo	3
Lori Macdonald	Camarillo	5
Simhan Mandyam	Camarillo	5
Craig O'Neill	Ventura	1
Ahmad Razavi	Camarillo	3
Barbara Rush	Oxnard	5
Cyndy Taschman	Oxnard	5
James Taylor	Newbury Park	2

# County of Ventura Supervisory Districts





## List of Reports for 2023-2024

1. Building Better Together - Suggestions for Smoother Permitting Processes
2. Linking First Responders – Ventura County Regional Radio System

These reports, as well as previous years' reports and responses, can be accessed on the Ventura County Grand Jury website:  
<http://www.ventura.org/grand-jury>.



**2023 - 2024  
Ventura County Grand Jury**



**Final Report**

**Building Better Together  
Suggestions for  
Smoother Permitting Processes**

**June 5, 2024**

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# **Building Better Together**

## **Suggestions for Smoother Permitting Processes**

### **SUMMARY**

After receiving public complaints regarding the difficulty developing property in the cities of Oxnard and Ventura, the 2023-2024 Ventura County Grand Jury researched how long it takes to approve building projects in those cities.

The complexity of the approval process and length of time taken mirror the complexity of a project. A development project, like a multi-unit housing project, may take years, involving land use guidelines, laws, environmental regulations, public hearings and detailed plan assessments by multiple city departments. The process for permitting an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) can be less complex.

The Grand Jury found that Oxnard and Ventura are not in compliance with state-mandated timelines in scheduling hearings for multi-unit housing projects and for approving ADUs. According to the housing requirements for Oxnard and Ventura, both cities failed to meet their regional housing needs from 2014 to 2021. These shortcomings are caused by high turnover in leadership and staff, difficulties implementing and using software systems and inefficiencies in the approval process.

The Grand Jury also found that Oxnard and Ventura are striving to improve their processes, hire staff and comply with state laws that combine stricter timelines with more flexible land use.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The Grand Jury interviewed a wide range of stakeholders, including current and former planning staff, Community Development Department personnel, developers and consultants across Oxnard and Ventura. The Grand Jury analyzed project timelines through Planning and Building Department reports. The Grand Jury reviewed Human Resources Department reports, which provided context on staff turnover and experience.

Additionally, the Grand Jury examined publicly available information, including newspaper articles, city council and design/planning commission agendas, minutes, city budgets and committee meeting videos. The Grand Jury reviewed information provided by the County of Ventura Auditor-Controller's and Assessor's offices. Legal statutes, both from California state law and specific city ordinances, were also reviewed.

## BACKGROUND

Securing city approval for a property development project is a multifaceted process. It starts with a city's General Plan, which designates how land can be used. A developer proposes a use for a plot of land. The city evaluates if the use is in compliance with the General Plan, municipal codes and design and historical preservation requirements. After this evaluation, the city holds a public hearing to approve, or entitle, the use. (Ref-01, Ref-02, Ref-03)

After the entitlement is granted, the developer then submits a more detailed building plan to the building department, which checks for compliance with federal and state laws and municipal building codes regarding fire prevention, water, stormwater and wastewater requirements. After this plan check, approval of one or more permits may be granted by city staff. (Ref-04)

Both entitlement and plan checking could involve multiple cycles of plan revision and re-submission if the plan does not meet city requirements. A plan may be approved with conditions to be addressed later in the process.

The process includes the ability for an applicant or the public to appeal a decision. The City Council is the ultimate decision maker. (Ref-05)

Smaller projects, like installing an electric vehicle charger, replacing a water heater, upgrading plumbing or re-roofing, also require a building permit. An applicant can obtain these permits online or during a quick visit to a city's Community Development Department. An evaluation and approval are granted ministerially by city staff.

A developer or applicant must generally pay fees before any of these evaluations take place. (Ref-06)

California has enacted numerous laws in recent years to promote housing development, including more than 30 laws in 2023. These laws often impose timelines, require approval process changes and reduce local control for non-compliance. California's Permit Streamlining Act recommends reducing governmental delays by limiting processing times to one year in most cases and requiring agencies to specify information needed for complete and acceptable applications. (Ref-07, Ref-08, Ref-09, Ref-10, Ref-11, Ref-12)

For multiple-unit housing projects, the Permit Streamlining Act mandates that cities approve or send a Letter of Incompleteness within 30 days for projects of 25 units or fewer, and 60 days for projects with 26 or more units. If an environmental quality assessment is not required, the project must be approved or disapproved within 60 days. (Ref-07, Ref-08, Ref-09, Ref-10, Ref-11, Ref-13, Ref-14)

California Law AB-2221 requires cities to approve or deny applications for Accessory Dwelling Units within 60 days. (Ref-15, Ref-16, Ref-17, Ref-18)

The Grand Jury chose the Permit Streamlining Act and ADU laws to assess compliance because of their required timelines.

Part of a city's General Plan is a state mandated Housing Element, which requires adequate planning to meet the housing needs of everyone in the community. Included in the Housing Element is a required number of housing units from the Regional Housing Needs Allocation process. A Housing Element is an eight-year plan that requires state approval and annual progress reports. A Housing Element includes strategies to promote housing development and maps of developable land. The strategies often focus on multi-unit housing and ADUs to meet the regional housing needs requirement. (Ref-19)

Other factors that can play a role in project timelines are the number of cycles of plan revision and resubmission, environmental reviews, coordination among city departments, the number of public hearings and time spent implementing compliance with new laws.

Per the Permit Streamlining Act, when an application is submitted and fees are paid, the city generally has 30 days to deem the project application complete and forward it to a public hearing or issue a Letter of Incompleteness outlining deficiencies for the applicant to address before resubmitting. This letter is required to list all deficiencies, that if addressed would lead to approval. In practice, there can be different interpretations between the applicant and the city over whether deficiencies have been addressed, which may lead to further delays. (Att-02)

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), depending on the level of analysis required, could add 60 to 180 days between when an application is deemed complete and when a public hearing can take place. (Ref-14, Ref-20)

Coordination between city departments involved in a plan assessment, such as Community Development, Police, Fire and Public Works, can be either sequential or concurrent.

A city's project approval process may require more than one public hearing before a project is approved.

Many of the new state laws lack state funding, placing financial burdens on cities for expenditures such as requiring computer system upgrades. Cities are also tasked with dedicating additional personnel, time and training to updating Municipal Codes, General Plans and Housing Elements to comply with existing and new laws. The state has filed lawsuits against some cities for non-compliance with state laws (e.g., Huntington Beach and Coronado). (Ref-21, Ref-22, Ref-23)

The Grand Jury investigated several areas that may play a role in the length of time it takes to approve a development project.

- Leadership: What priorities and policies did the City Council establish? Was there consistent leadership in the positions of City Manager and Community Development Director?
- Staffing: How did the city manage the challenges of recruiting staff, retaining staff, managing workload and retaining institutional knowledge?
- Process: How is the process defined and implemented? Are process steps done concurrently or sequentially?
- Technology: What technological solutions are used and to what effect?
- Hearings: How many public hearings and for what purpose?
- Compliance: Were state-mandated timelines for ADUs and multi-unit housing met? Did the city meet its regional housing requirement?

Sales tax and property tax are the two main sources of revenue a city uses to pay for public services. If the cost of these public services is rising at the rate of inflation, revenue also needs to increase at the rate of inflation to maintain the same level of public services.

Property tax revenue comes from the assessed value of property. Proposition 13 limits the annual increase for existing property to 2%, making it difficult to maintain city services if the inflation rate is greater than 2%. Cities can mitigate this effect by approving new development projects in a timely manner.

Because a city has direct control over the timely approval of development projects, looking at assessed property values should provide a good measure of how well a city is doing in maintaining its level of public services. Delayed approval of development projects can directly impact the level of public services. (Ref-24, Ref-25)

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Oxnard**

#### **Leadership**

The Oxnard City Council expanded the Community Development workforce by six full-time positions in 2022 because of new sales tax revenue from the passage of Measure E in 2020. (Ref-26)

The City of Oxnard's 2021-2029 Housing Element lists several goals and strategies to meet its regional housing needs requirement. The city outlines a plan to streamline the process for approving housing development and has established a concierge program to assist with the entitlement process. To meet its regional housing needs requirement, the city has goals to promote the development of ADUs and annex unincorporated areas known as Rio Urbana and Teal Club. (Ref-27 [Programs 7, 24, 34, 36])

The City of Oxnard has employed one City Manager since 2018. (Ref-01, Ref-28, Ref-29)

The City of Oxnard has employed five different Community Development Directors since 2018. (Ref-01, Ref-28, Ref-29, Ref-30)

### **Staff**

The City of Oxnard's 2018 budget funded 53 full-time positions in the city's Community Development Department. That number rose to 66 in the 2024 budget. As of April 2024, there are four open positions. (Ref-31, Ref-32, Ref-33)

As of November 2023, only 24 employees of the original 53 staff members hired in 2018 remained with the City of Oxnard's Community Development Department. (Ref-28, Ref-29)

From 2018 to 2023, 12 applications for housing with more than five units were entitled. The average number of days between application and entitlement was 121 days. (Ref-34, Att-05)

From 2018 to 2023, the number of applications for ADUs in Oxnard increased from three to 191. The average number of days between entitlement and permitting was 406 days. (Ref-34, Att-06, Att-07)

In 2022, Oxnard's Community Development Department had a backlog of more than 400 ADU applications. In order to allow staff time to process the backlog, the Building Division has closed the public counter for half-days. As of November 2023, the backlog of ADU applications was under 200. The City of Oxnard Building Division public counter is open Monday through Thursday, 8:00 AM to 12:00 PM and Friday, 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM. (Ref-01, Ref-04)

### **Process**

For development projects, the City of Oxnard uses some concurrent steps early in its approval process. The Community Development Department Planning Division holds Development Advisory Committee meetings to discuss an application with city departments that will play a role later in the process, such as Building & Safety, Fire, Water and Public Works. (Ref-03)

The Oxnard Building and Engineering Division website indicates extended time frames for evaluating a building permit application of nine weeks for residential projects and 12 weeks for commercial/industrial/multifamily projects. Waiting for acknowledgement that application fees have been paid adds another one to three weeks to the process. (Ref-35)

### **Technology**

The City of Oxnard is using an outdated computerized system for handling building applications in all divisions of the Community Development Department. The city is exploring a new computer program, EnerGov, to improve processing of all application types. It is anticipated that the new system will be installed by the end of 2024. (Ref-01, Ref-36)

## Hearings

Public discretionary hearings for development projects can be conducted by the Community Development Director or the Planning Commission.

The City of Oxnard utilizes a rarely used Downtown Design Review Committee (DDRC), which makes written design recommendations specifically for the downtown area to the Community Development Director and/or Planning Commission. (Ref-01, Ref-37)

At the discretion of the Community Development Director, a pre-application public hearing on a project may be held with the City Council. (Ref-27, Page E-33)

## Assessed Property Values

Assessed property values in the City of Oxnard, adjusted for inflation, have increased about 6% since 2018, and were flat between 2020 and 2023, having recovered to pre-pandemic levels. (Ref-24, Ref-38, App-02)

## Compliance

The City of Oxnard is not in compliance with the Permit Streamlining and ADU Acts. (Ref-01, Ref-07, Ref-08, Ref-09, Ref-10, Ref-11, Ref-13, Ref-14, Ref-15)

The City of Oxnard's 2021-2029 Housing Element has been certified by the California Department of Housing and Community Development with a requirement for 8,549 housing units. Whether or not the city meets this requirement will not be known until 2029. Annual progress reports are submitted. The city did not meet its 2014-2021 Housing Element requirement for 7,301 housing units, falling 2,376 units short. (Ref-27)

## Ventura

### Leadership

In 2019, the Ventura City Council contracted with the Matrix Consulting Group to improve the process for reviewing land use applications. The consulting group conducted a multiphase analysis, examining the organizational and operational aspects of development services across all relevant divisions. The resulting report, with 57 recommendations and an implementation plan, was unanimously approved by the City Council on November 19, 2019. The city's Community Development Department provided implementation progress reports to the City Council on May 21, 2021; November 28, 2021; January 19, 2022; and October 6, 2022. (Ref-39, Ref-40, Ref-41, Ref-42)

Responding to the COVID-19 crisis, on May 18, 2020, the Ventura City Council implemented the Emergency Streamlining Ordinance "to help aid the economic recovery effort in the city and support local businesses by expediting their re-opening and expansion." The Ventura City Council adopted the Permanent Streamlining Ordinance on December 6, 2021, as "Streamlining the Development

Review Process has been a City Council priority for several years.” (Ref-41, Ref-42, Ref-43)

The City of Ventura’s 2021-2029 Housing Element has a goal of producing at least 100 ADUs over the eight-year cycle, with incentives and increased public awareness of ADU opportunities. It has a goal to establish development standards by 2026 to allow for up to six-story residential units in the vicinity of the Pacific View Mall. (Ref-44)

The City of Ventura has employed five different City Managers since 2018. The Ventura City Council hired its latest City Manager on August 8, 2023. (Ref-01, Ref-45, Ref-46, Ref-47)

The City of Ventura has employed five different Community Development Directors since 2018. The Ventura City Council hired its latest Community Development Director on February 17, 2024. (Ref-01, Ref-46, Ref-47, Ref-48)

### **Staff**

The City of Ventura’s 2018 budget funded 42 full-time positions in the city’s Community Development Department. That number rose to 45 in the 2024 budget. As of April 2024, there is one open position. (Ref-49, Ref-50, Ref-51)

As of 2018, only 37 of the 42 full-time positions were on the payroll of the Community Development Department, leaving five unfilled positions. (Ref-46, Ref-47)

As of November 2023, only five employees of the original 37 staff members from 2018 remained with the City of Ventura’s Community Development Department. (Ref-46, Ref-47)

The employees designated to be subject matter experts with initial training in 2021 on the department’s new EnerGov computer system (OPS) are no longer employed by the City of Ventura. Training records for the OPS software system were requested by the Grand Jury, but not provided. (Ref-01, Ref-36, Ref-52)

From 2018 to 2022, the City of Ventura did not report any housing with more than five units in the Housing Element annual progress report. There was no data for the average number of days between application and entitlement. (Ref-34)

From 2018 to 2022, the number of applications for ADUs in the City of Ventura increased from zero to 23 annually. There was no data for the average number of days between entitlement and permitting. (Ref-34)

The City of Ventura public permitting services counter is open Monday through Thursday, 8:00 AM to 12:00 PM and 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM. (Ref-53)

## Process

For development projects, the City of Ventura uses some concurrent steps early in its approval process. The Community Development Department Planning Division holds Development Advisory Committee meetings to discuss an application with city departments that will play a role later in the process, such as Building & Safety, Fire, Water and Public Works. The city recently consolidated public counter permitting service for Building and Safety, Ventura Water, Fire Prevention, Land Development, and Planning while enabling scheduled appointments. (Ref-64, Ref-54)

The Matrix Consulting Group conducted a survey of prior customers of the City of Ventura's development services process. The survey revealed:

- The development community is dissatisfied with lengthy delays in approval of projects. (Ref-39, Survey Section 3.8-3 and 4.2, Ref-40)
- Slow review time frames, multiple review committees and a lack of coordination are identified as the areas with the greatest opportunity for improvement in the development review process. (Ref-39, Survey Section 4.2)

The Matrix Consulting Group Report makes several recommendations about process improvements. The Grand Jury found many of these recommendations yet to be fully implemented, such as:

- The City of Ventura has not created a decision-making authority matrix and posted it on its website. (Ref-39, Matrix recommendation #1, Status report (October 17, 2022) indicates "In Progress," Ref-40)
- The City of Ventura has not developed a consolidated list of review timelines for all building application types and posted it on its website. (Ref-39, Matrix recommendation #17, Status report (October 17, 2022) indicates "In Progress," Ref-40)
- The City of Ventura has not created a developmental review webpage that acts as a central hub and provides an overview of permitting requirements and links to departments for more information. (Ref-39, Matrix recommendation #20, Status report (October 17, 2022) indicates "In Progress," Ref-40)
- The City of Ventura is not starting the CEQA process as soon as possible, regardless of whether or not the application has been deemed complete, as stated in interviews. (Ref-39, Matrix recommendation #13, Status Report (October 17, 2022) indicates "Completed," Ref-20, Ref-40, Ref-55)

## Technology

An upgraded version of EnerGov software, named Ventura Online Permitting System (Ventura OPS), was launched in August 2021 before it was fully configured. A common complaint was that the system was difficult to use. The City of Ventura held a user training session in June 2022, however the Planning and Building and

Safety Divisions have not been able to utilize EnerGov software and coordinate with other divisions of the Community Development Department. For entitlement, the Planning Division is still using manual spreadsheets to track projects. For building permits, the Building and Safety Division uses the system to track projects. The City of Ventura has contracted with a consulting group to build custom reports after finding standard reports noncomprehensive.

The Matrix Consulting Group Report makes several recommendations regarding technological improvements. The Grand Jury found that many of these recommendations have yet to be fully implemented, though stated otherwise. Among these are: (Ref-01, Ref-36, Ref-52, Ref-56)

- User training to all plan review staff involved in the development review process, including a formalized training program for new hires (Ref-39, Matrix recommendation #31, Status report (October 17, 2022) indicates "Completed," Ref-40, Ref-52)
- Features to calculate the appropriate plan check and permitting fees (Ref-39, Matrix recommendation #32, Status report (October 17, 2022) indicates "Completed," Ref-40, Ref-52)
- Proper configuration to allow utilization for all development review activities (plan review and inspections) across all departments (Ref-39, Matrix recommendation #33, Status report (October 17, 2022) indicates "Completed," Ref-40, Ref-52)
- Proper configuration to allow electronic application and plan submittals for all development application types (Ref-39, Matrix recommendation #34, Status report (October 17, 2022) indicates "Completed," Ref-40, Ref-52)
- Proper configuration to allow for tracking workload data and performance measures to accurately track information (Ref-39, Matrix recommendation #40, Status report (October 17, 2022) indicates "Completed," Ref-40, Ref-52)
- Proper configuration to allow for tracking time spent on all stages of the development review process (e.g., inspections, plan check, etc.) (Ref-39, Matrix recommendation #41, Status report (October 17, 2022) indicates "In Progress," Ref-40, Ref-52)
- Proper configuration to allow utilization of features to generate comprehensive reports on time spent on development review activity (Ref-39, Matrix recommendation #42, Status report (October 17, 2022) indicates "Completed," Ref-40, Ref-52)

## Hearings

The City of Ventura utilizes the combination of Design Review and Historic Preservation committees in addition to a Planning Commission for discretionary hearings of development projects. (Ref-57, Ref-58)

One of the three main recommendations made by the Matrix Consulting Group Report is to reduce reliance on the Design Review Committee and Historic

Preservation Committee, stating these committees should be eliminated or reduced in scope. (Ref-39, Ref-40, Ref-57, Ref-58)

The Permanent Streamlining Ordinance deemed these committees advisory only, with no decision-making authority. The Matrix Report observed that no other cities in Ventura County employ a similar tri-committee configuration that could potentially cause three discretionary hearings. Grand Jury analysis of agendas from the past three years reveals minimal activity within both the Design Review and Historic Preservation committees.

Notably, in all cases considered by the Design Review Committee, the final decision was ultimately referred to either a Director's Hearing or the Planning Commission, raising the question of the true necessity for these committees.

### **Assessed Property Value**

As the staff report states, "Streamlining the development review process is critical to enable investment and business growth in Ventura.... A process that supports investment into private property translates into economic development and quality city services." (Ref-42)

Assessed property values in the City of Ventura, adjusted for inflation, have increased about 10% since 2018, and were flat between 2020 and 2023, having recovered to pre-pandemic levels. (Ref-24, Ref-38, App-02)

### **Compliance**

The City of Ventura is in compliance with the state ADU Act. (Ref-15, Ref-16, Ref-17, Ref-18)

The City of Ventura is in compliance with California's Permit Streamlining Act to respond to applications in 30 days. It is not in compliance, as the lead agency, to schedule a public hearing to approve or deny a project within 60 days if there is a negative declaration or exempt from CEQA. (Ref-01, Ref-07, Ref-08, Ref-09, Ref-10, Ref-11, Ref-13, Ref-14, Ref-20, Ref-58)

The City of Ventura's 2021-2029 Housing Element has been certified by the California Department of Housing and Community Development with a requirement for 5,312 housing units. Annual Progress Reports are submitted but appear to have misclassifications and missing data. The city did not meet its 2014-2021 Housing Element requirement of 3,654 housing units, falling 1,658 units short. (Ref-34, Ref-59, Att-08)

## FINDINGS

### Oxnard

- F-01.** The City of Oxnard is not in compliance with California’s Permit Streamlining Act with regard to mandated timelines for development projects, taking 171 days, on average, between application and entitlement for housing with more than five units.
- F-02.** The City of Oxnard is not in compliance with the California State ADU Act with regard to the mandated 60 days from application (entitlement) to permitting, taking 406 days, on average.
- F-03.** Since 2020, assessed property values adjusted for inflation in the City of Oxnard have not increased. This indicates that city services may be maintained but could be expanded by streamlining the approval process.
- F-04.** Inadequate staffing, leadership turnover and increased workloads have led to lengthy delays in project approvals for the City of Oxnard.
- F-05.** Out-dated computer systems have led to lengthy delays in project approvals for the City of Oxnard.

### Ventura

- F-06.** The City of Ventura is in compliance with California’s Permit Streamlining Act for the 30-day requirement to deem Complete or issue an Incomplete Letter, but not for the lead agency approving or disapproving a project with an exempt CEQA status within 60 days.
- F-07.** The City of Ventura did not meet the regional housing-needs requirements from its 2014-2021 Housing Element, and little data was available from the annual progress report dashboard.
- F-08.** There has been inadequate training for the EnerGov system from deployment to present.
- F-09.** Inadequate staffing and leadership turnover have led to lengthy delays in project approvals.
- F-10.** Departures of experienced individuals have caused a lack of continuity and institutional memory in several Community Development Divisions.
- F-11.** The City of Ventura’s Community Development Department is unable to generate meaningful reports using EnerGov software.

- F-12.** The City of Ventura has not implemented several of the 2019 Matrix Consulting Group Report recommendations as highlighted in the Discussion Section of this report.
- F-13.** Lengthy delays in project approvals and increased costs are causing dissatisfaction among the development community and discouraging development activities.
- F-14.** Since 2020, assessed property values adjusted for inflation have not increased. This indicates that city services may be maintained but could be expanded by streamlining the approval process.
- F-15.** The lack of training on the EnerGov software system is causing inefficiency and workplace stress for entire divisions of the Community Development Department.
- F-16.** The staffs of the Community Development Department and the Information Technology Department are attempting to fix implementation and configuration deficiencies in using EnerGov software, causing increased workloads.
- F-17.** Utilizing the Historic Preservation Committee and the Design Review Committee in non-decision-making roles has delayed project approvals.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Oxnard

- R-01.** The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Oxnard identify specific steps that will be taken to reduce turnaround times to comply with California's Permit Streamlining and ADU Acts and include expected completion dates for those steps by January 1, 2025. (F-01, F-02, F-03)
- R-02.** The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Oxnard identify and recruit potential hires having EnerGov experience in the Planning and Building Divisions of the Community Development Department by January 1, 2025. (F-04)
- R-03.** The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Oxnard utilize EnerGov personnel, expert consultants and IT personnel of Oxnard to properly configure meaningful reports regarding compliance, workload and timeliness EnerGov reports for the Community Development Department by June 30, 2025. (F-05)

### Ventura

- R-04.** The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura identify specific steps that will be taken to reduce turnaround times to comply with

California's Permit Streamlining Act and include expected completion dates for those steps by January 1, 2025. (F-06, F-14)

- R-05.** The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura work with the California Department of Housing and Community Development to correct errors in annual progress reports by January 1, 2025. (F-07)
- R-06.** The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura identify and recruit potential hires having EnerGov experience in the Planning and Building Divisions of the Community Development Department by January 1, 2025. (F-09, F-10)
- R-07.** The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura create a standardized training protocol for new hires and existing employees for the EnerGov software system, including ongoing periodic training, by January 1, 2025. (F-08, F-15)
- R-08.** The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura properly configure and put into practice all originally purchased EnerGov modules by January 1, 2025. (F-15, F-16)
- R-09.** The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura, in conjunction with the IT department and expert consultants, implement and properly configure meaningful reports regarding compliance, workload and timeliness within the EnerGov software system by January 1, 2025. (F-11, F-12, F-16)
- R-10.** The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura implement recommendations #1, 13, 17, 20, 31, 32, 33, 34, 41 and 42, from the Matrix Consulting Group Report by January 1, 2025. (F-12)
- R-11.** The Grand Jury recommends that the City Council re-examine the roles of the HPC and DRC, taking into consideration the goals outlined in the Matrix Consulting Group Report to streamline the entitlement approval process by January 1, 2025. (F-13, F-17)

## **RESPONSES REQUIRED FROM:**

Responses required from: Oxnard City Council within 60 Days: for the findings listed: [F-01, F-02, F-03, F-04, F-05, R-01, R-02, R-03]

Responses required from: City of Oxnard Community Development Director within 90 Days: for the findings listed: [F-01, F-02, F-03, F-04, F-05, R-01, R-02, R-03]

Responses required from: Ventura City Council within 60 Days: for the findings listed: [F-06, F-07, F-08, F-09, F-10, F-11, F-12, F-13, F-14, F-15, F-16, F-17, R-04, R-05, R-06, R-07, R-08, R-09, R-10, R-11]

Responses required from: City of Ventura, Community Development Director within 90 Days: for the findings listed: [F-06, F-07, F-08, F-09, F-10, F-11, F-12, F-13, F-14, F-15, F-16, F-17, R-04, R-05, R-06, R-07, R-08, R-09, R-10, R-11]

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**ATTACHMENTS**

- Att-01.** Based on Interviews and Data Provided by City of Ventura.
- Att-02.** Entitlement Process (Development Projects), City of Ventura.
- Att-03.** 2019 and 2023: Population vs. Number of Planning Staff.
- Att-04.** Percent Change in Real Assessed Property Value since 2018.
- Att-05.** Housing Development Timeline. Jurisdiction: Oxnard. Structure type: Five or more units per structure. Submitted to entitled.
- Att-06.** Housing Development Timeline. Jurisdiction: Oxnard. Structure type: Accessory Dwelling Unit. Average days from entitled to permitted.
- Att-07.** Construction Structure Type. Jurisdiction: Oxnard. Structure types: Five or more units per structure and accessory dwelling unit.
- Att-08.** Construction Structure Type. Jurisdiction: Ventura. Structure types: Five or more units per structure, accessory dwelling unit and mobile home unit.

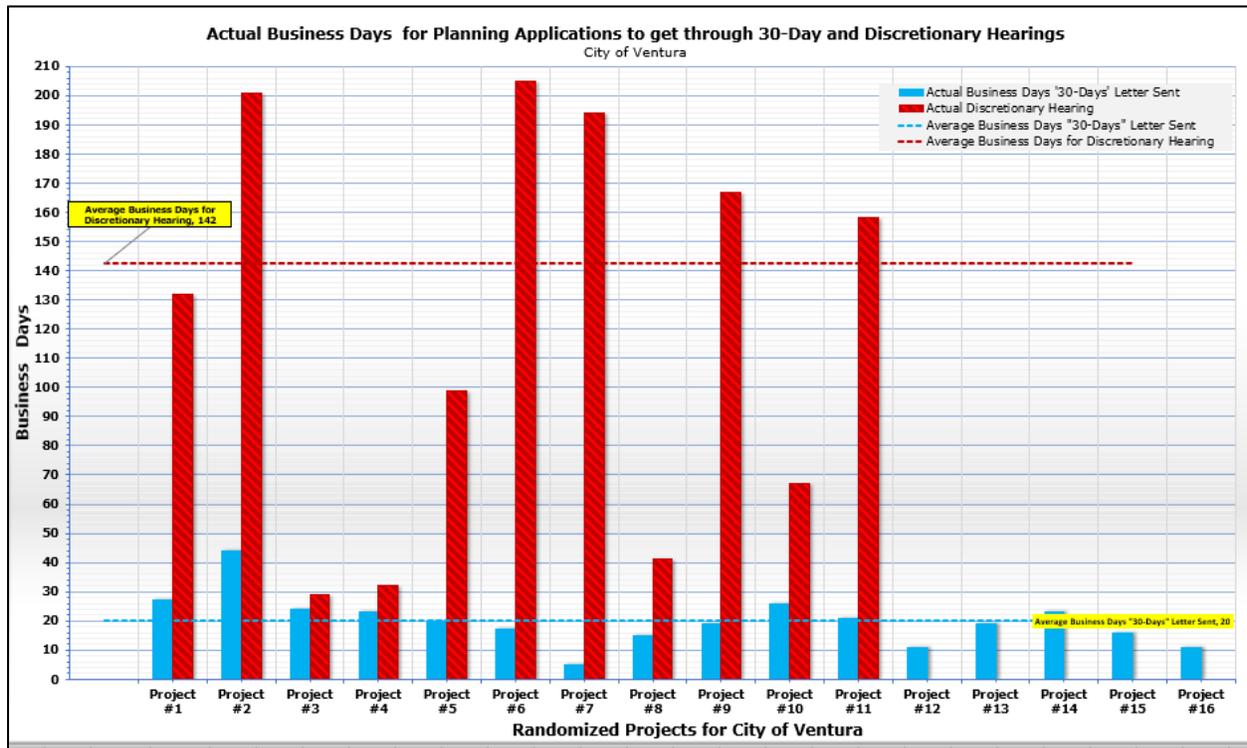
**APPENDICES**

- App-01.** Table 01. Decision Making Matrix
- App-02.** Table 02. Unequalized Ventura County Assessment Roll (in billions)
- App-03.** Table 03. 2019 Comparison of Development Review Processes
- App-04.** Table 04. 2023 Comparison of Development Review Processes

## GLOSSARY

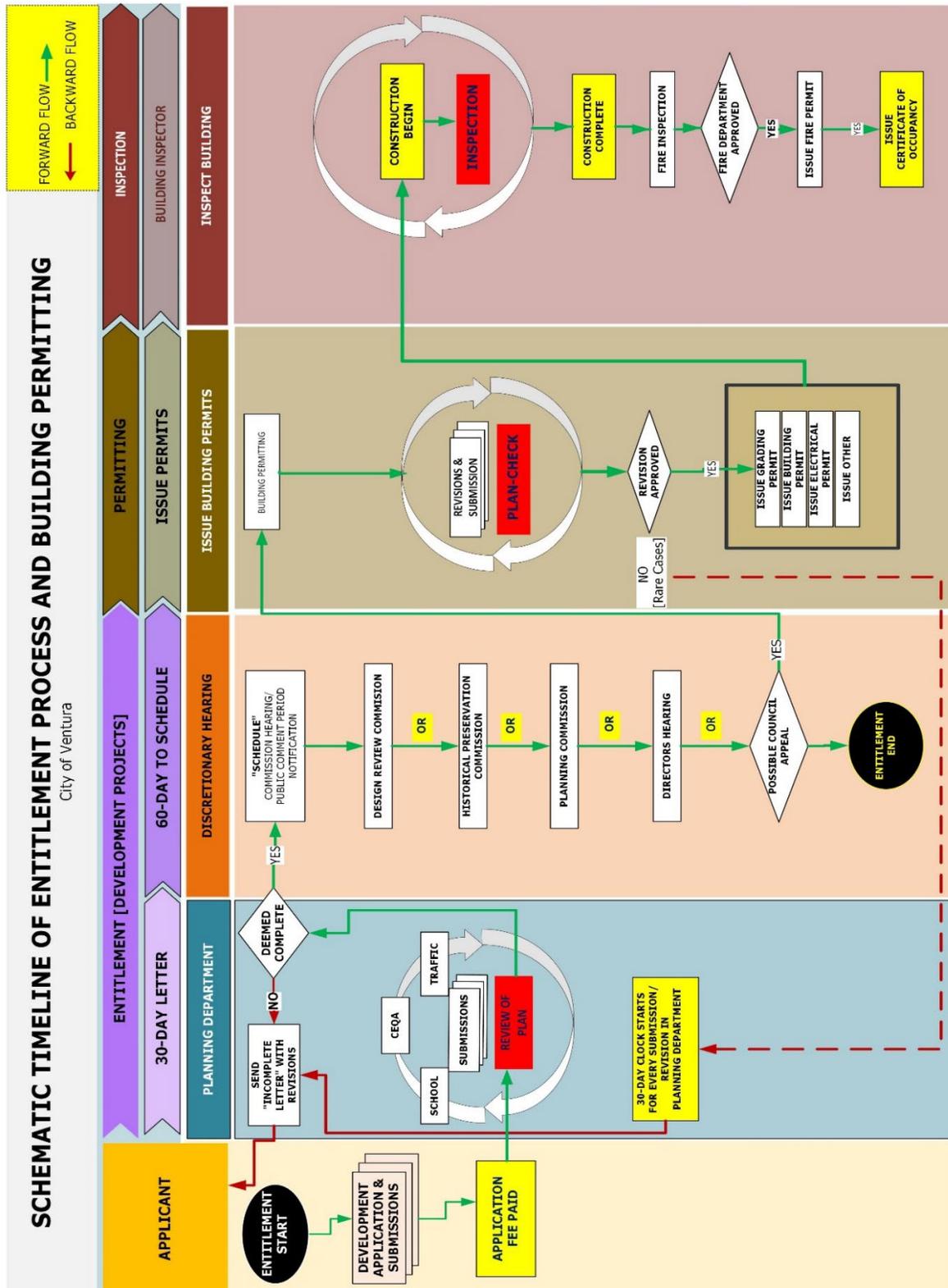
<b><u>TERM</u></b>	<b><u>DEFINITION</u></b>
CDD	Community Development Department
CEQA	California Environmental Quality Act
DAC	Development Advisory Committee
DRC	Design Review Committee, City of Ventura
DDRC	Downtown Design Review Committee, City of Oxnard
Development Entitlement	This is a broad term encompassing various approvals and authorizations required for a development project. It could include land use entitlements, as well as environmental permits, building permits and infrastructure approvals. An "Entitlement" in this context would represent any official permission necessary for a specific development stage.
Development Project	'Development project' means any project, whether mixed use or not, which involves the following: The construction, demolition, or change of use of buildings or structures, the division of real property, including the creation of lots or the reconfiguring of lot lines, the creation of a mining pit, excavation, or landfill, the placing or removal of fill material or vegetation.
EnerGov	Permitting and Licensing software for government agencies from Tyler Technologies, recently renamed Enterprise Permitting & Licensing
HPC	Historic Preservation Committee

Attachment-01



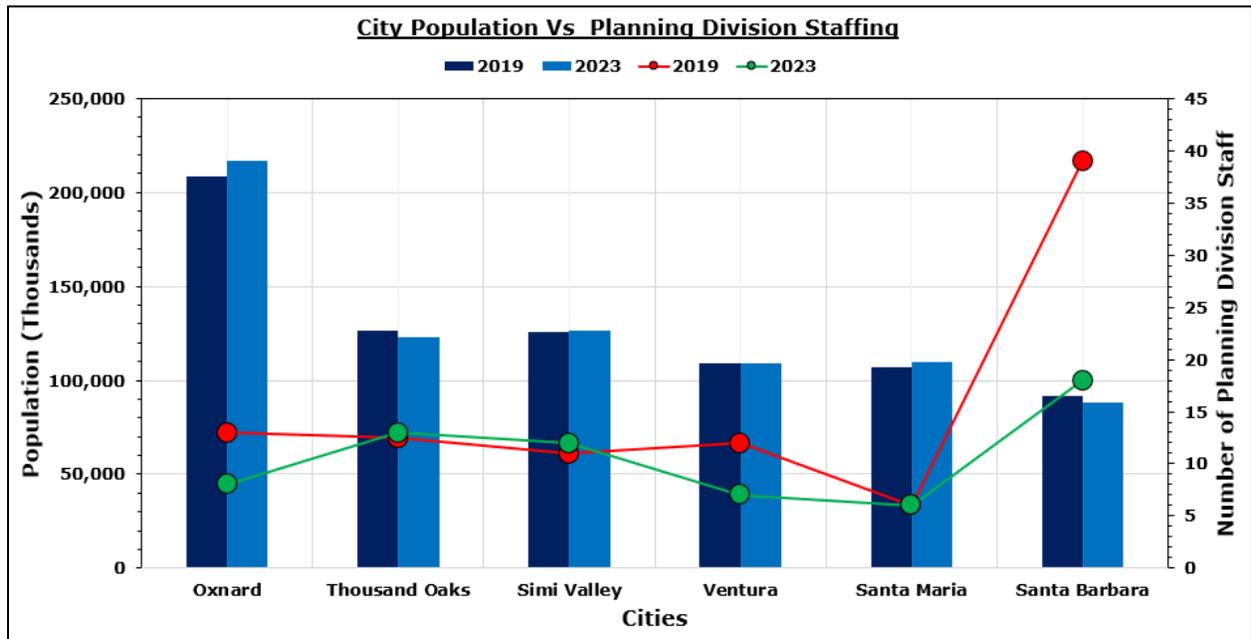
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Attachment-02



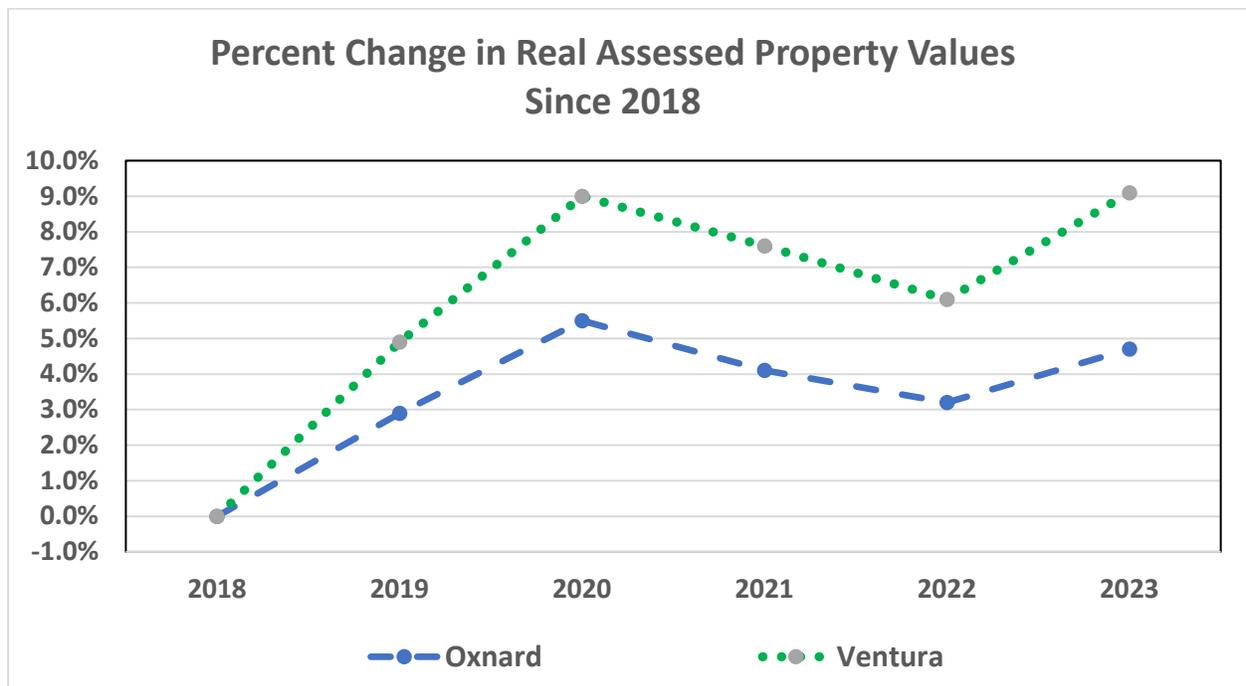
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Attachment-03



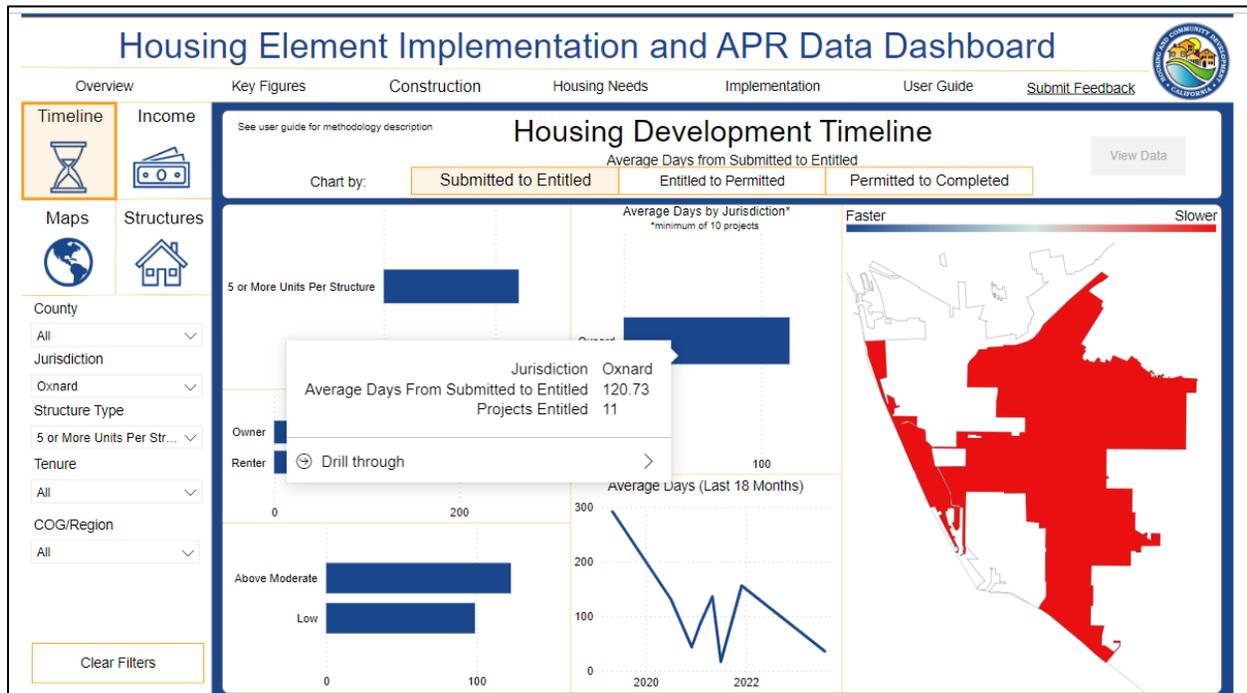
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Attachment-04



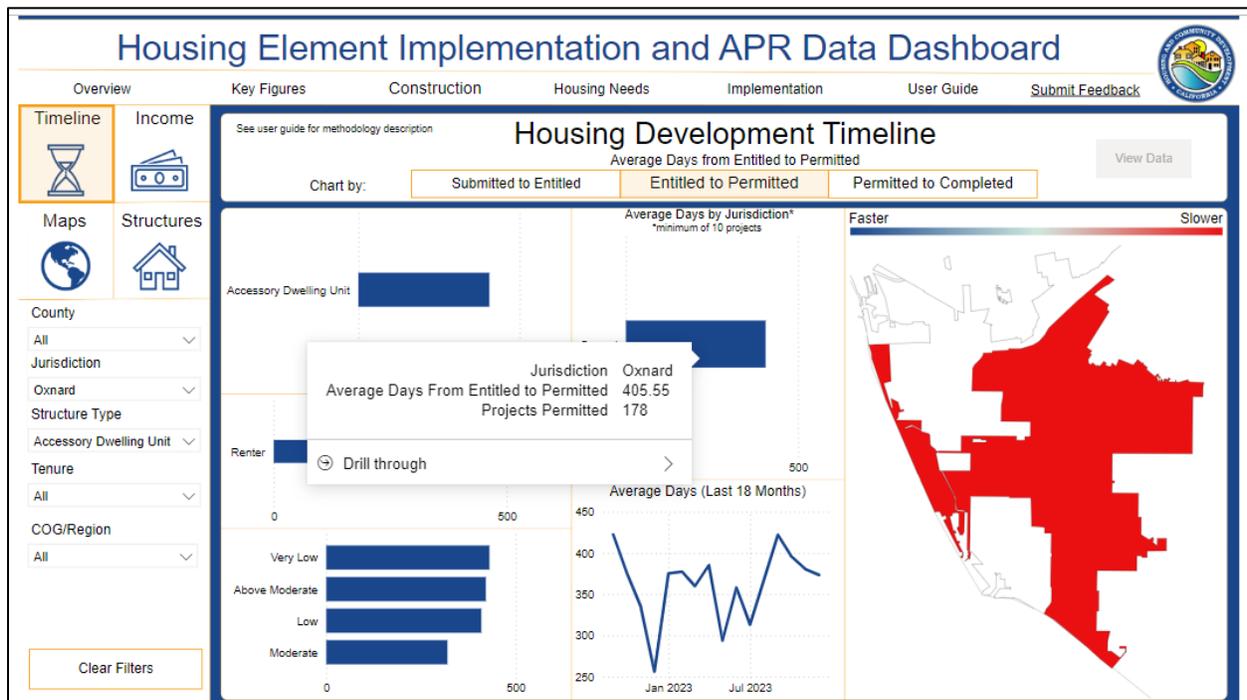
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Attachment-05



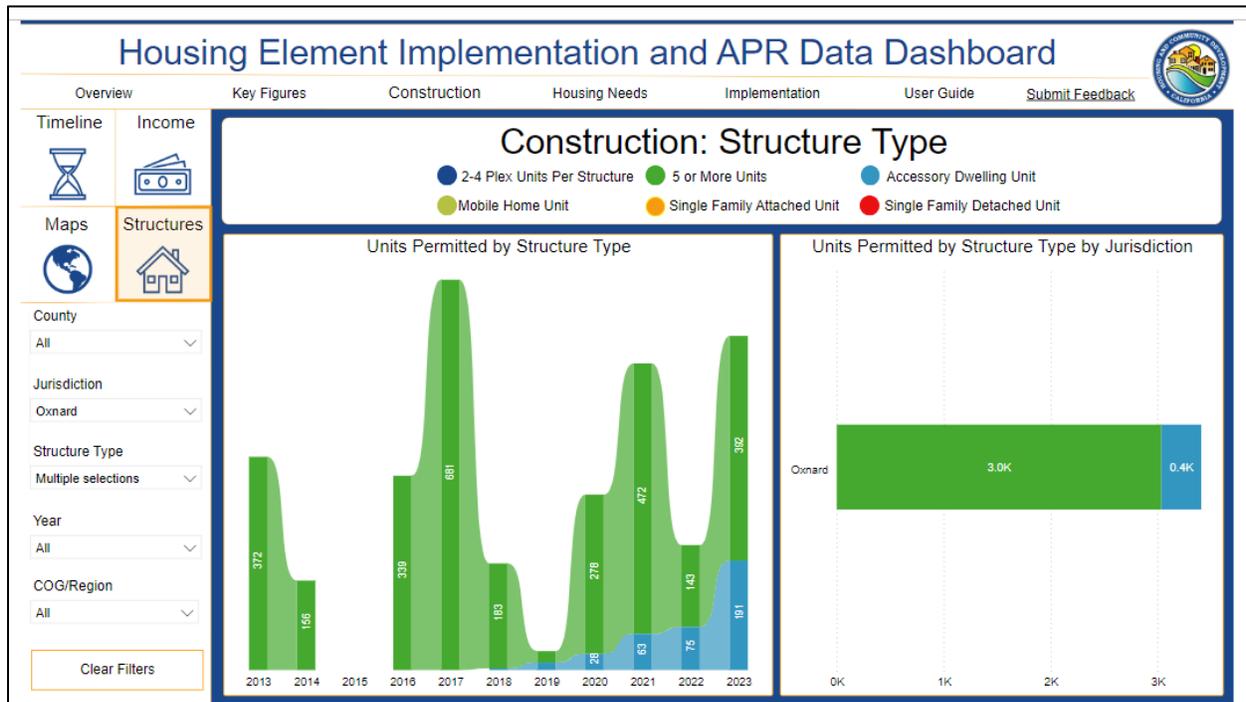
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Attachment-06



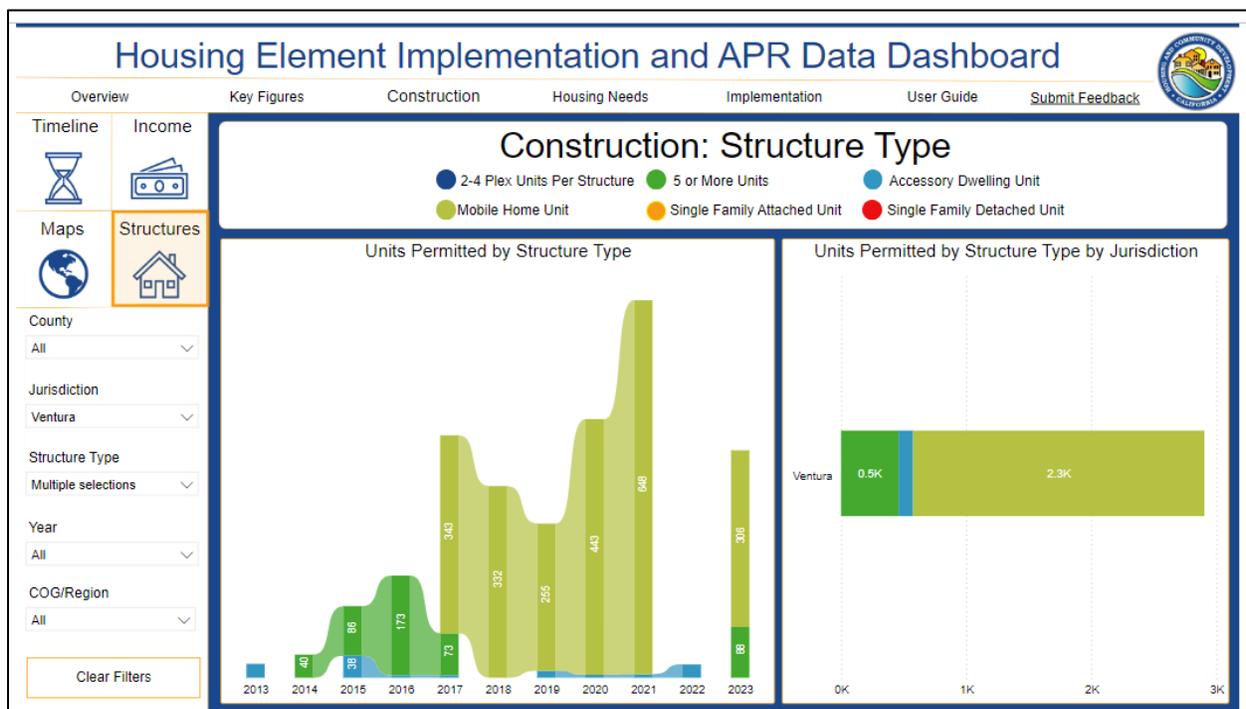
(Source: Ref-34)

Attachment-07



(Source: Ref-34)

Attachment-08



(Source: Ref-34)

## APPENDICES

### App-01.

Decision-making Matrix Example					
Application Type	Staff	Historic	Design Review	Planning Commission	Elected Body
Single Family(New Construction)	■		■ (Design Approval)		
Tenant Improvement	■	■ (Rec)			
Commercial Renovation(Exterior)			■ (Design Approval)		Appeal
Multi-family (New Construction)			■ (Design Approval)		Appeal
Sign (New)	■			■ (Rec)	

Table 01. Decision Making Matrix (From Matrix report (Ref-39), page 10)

### App-02.

Cities	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Oxnard	20.256	21.199	22.020	22.883	24.551	25.851
Ventura	16.074	17.149	18.053	18.766	20.039	21.370
Inflation Adjustment						
August	2.7%	1.7%	1.3%	5.3%	8.3%	3.7%
2023 dollars	1.2184	1.1980	1.1826	1.1231	1.0370	1
Assessed Property Values in 2023 Dollars						
Oxnard	24.680	25.396	26.041	25.700	25.459	25.851
Ventura	19.585	20.545	21.349	21.076	20.780	21.370
Real Percent change since 2018						
Oxnard	0	2.9%	5.5%	4.1%	3.2%	4.7%
Ventura	0	4.9%	9.0%	7.6%	6.1%	9.1%

Table 02. Unequalized Ventura County Assessment Roll (in billions) (Ref-24, Ref-60)

**App-03.**

City	Population (Thousand)	Budget (Million)	Planning Division	Planners per 1000	Design Review	Historical Preservation	Final Actions at design/historical boards?
Oxnard	209	\$427	13	0.06	Staff/DD RC [1]/ [2]	County CHB [3]	No
Thousand Oaks	127	\$214	13	0.09	Staff [1]	PC	NA
Simi Valley	126	\$196	11	0.09	Staff [1]	PC	NA
Ventura	109	\$301	12	0.11	DRC	HPC	Partial [4]
Santa Maria	107	\$222	6	0.06	Staff [1]	PC	NA
Santa Barbara	91	\$109	39	0.43	ABR [5], SFDB[6], SC[7]	HLC [8]	Partial [4]

Table 03. 2019 Comparison of Development Review Processes (Ref-39)

**App-04.**

City	Population (Thousand)	Budget (Million)	Planning Division	Planners per 1000	Design Review	Historical Preservation	Final Actions at design/historical boards?
Oxnard	217	\$606	8	0.04	Staff/DD RC [1]/ [2]	County CHB [3]	No
Thousand Oaks	123	\$270	13	0.11	Staff [1]	PC	NA
Simi Valley	126	\$253	12	0.09	Staff [1]	PC	NA
Ventura	109	\$428	7	0.06	DRC	HPC	Partial [4]
Santa Maria	110	\$258	6	0.05	Staff [1]	PC	NA
Santa Barbara	88	\$201	18	0	ABR[5], SFDB[6], SC[7]	HLC [8]	Partial [4]

Table 04. 2023 Comparison of Development Review Processes (Ref-39)

<b>Legend</b>	
1	Staff in these cities perform Design Review, not a Design Board
2	Downtown Design Review Committee (Oxnard) reviews downtown projects
3	Oxnard uses the Ventura County Cultural Heritage Board
4	Boards have a mix of final authority and recommendations. Major projects receive piecemeal decision making
5	Architectural Board of Review (Santa Barbara)
6	Single Family Design Board (Santa Barbara)
7	Sign Committee (Santa Barbara)
8	Historic Landmarks Commission (Santa Barbara)



**2023 - 2024  
Ventura County Grand Jury**



**Final Report**

**Linking First Responders  
Ventura County Regional Radio System**

**May 22, 2024**

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## Linking First Responders: Ventura County Regional Radio System

### SUMMARY

The ability of first responders to communicate on a common radio system is critical when coordinating a response to a major event. The lives of first responders and the people they serve may be at risk if first responders are unable to call for assistance.

The 2023-2024 Grand Jury researched the readiness, compatibility and use of the radio communication systems first responders employ in the event of emergencies affecting Ventura County. The investigation stemmed from the 2018 Borderline Bar and Grill Mass Shooting in Thousand Oaks, revealing the inadequacies of the communication systems in place at the time.

Since this incident, significant improvements have been made in the ability of first responders to communicate with each other. This report highlights those improvements as well as the remaining challenges.

### BACKGROUND

Ventura County Sheriff's Office provides law enforcement for the unincorporated areas of Ventura County and contracts for law enforcement with the cities of Camarillo, Fillmore, Moorpark, Ojai and Thousand Oaks. The cities of Oxnard, Port Hueneme, Santa Paula, Simi Valley and Ventura have their own police departments.

First responders to the Borderline incident included the following:

- **Ventura County Sheriff's Office (VCSO)** At the time of the Borderline incident, 11 uniformed deputies and two sergeants were assigned to patrol Thousand Oaks. Multiple deputies from other contract cities responded to the incident.
- **California Highway Patrol (CHP)** Four CHP personnel responded. In addition to scene and investigative assistance, they assumed administrative responsibility for the officer-involved shooting. (Note: CHP is a state agency primarily involved in traffic control. However, it does have the ability to communicate with local emergency responders if they patch through dispatch.)
- **Oxnard Police Department (OPD)** On-duty officers responded Code 3 (lights and siren) to the incident site approximately 20 miles away.
- **Simi Valley Police Department (SVPD)** Seventeen officers were dispatched, including K-9 and SWAT officers. Two SVPD dispatchers and a

dispatch supervisor assisted with transferring calls and sharing information about victims still hiding inside the Borderline Bar and Grill.

- **Ventura County Community College District Police Department (VCCCDPD)** One officer responded from the Moorpark College campus.
- **Ventura County Fire Department (VCFD)** Seven fire engines and three support companies totaling 53 personnel responded. All fire and medical-related calls were managed by the department's regional Fire Communications Center.
- **Ventura Police Department (VPD)** Eight on-duty officers and the on-duty watch commander responded. Five of those responding personnel were members of the SWAT team.
- **Ventura County Emergency Medical Services (VCEMS)** When responding to emergency medical services in the case of a disaster in the county, VCEMS is the lead agency. During this response, VCEMS personnel were assigned to the incident command post to coordinate medical and ambulance response, patient tracking and medical liaison. (Ref-01)

The Sheriff's After-Action Review of the Borderline Mass Shooting states: "When a multi-agency team is deployed in critical incidents, [the agencies must] provide for radio interoperability or sufficient team members who can communicate directly with the agency having primary jurisdiction for the incident." (Ref-02)

Radio communication is crucial in facilitating coordination among first responders during a crisis incident, especially when there are numerous responding agencies on the scene. Radios must have the capability to perform and must be operated appropriately by users. To avoid missing critical pieces of information, first responders must adopt a stringent, disciplined approach to communication. First responders must communicate in mutually understood terminology that is delivered clearly and succinctly. Situational updates must be provided in real-time to keep those on the scene and enroute informed of evolving conditions. (Ref-03)

The Office of Emergency Services (OES) is a division of the VCSO comprising emergency managers with experience from a variety of backgrounds, including law enforcement, fire, planning, finance and technology experts. OES is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the county's preparedness, mitigation response and recovery programs. OES is also responsible for the development and maintenance of the county's emergency operations plan, maintaining the county's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and coordinating EOC activities during a disaster. This team maintains readiness for emergencies. (Ref-04)

Prior to the Borderline incident, various departments within the County of Ventura, including Information Technology Services Department (ITSD) and OES, saw the

need for and began taking steps to implement a regional radio system, the Ventura County Regional Radio System (VCRRS). They planned to make this system available to emergency responders and other government agencies throughout Ventura County. Its development is briefly described below. (Ref-05)

- In 2012, Congress set aside the 700 MHz band for public safety radio use. (Ref-06)
- In 2015, the Board of Supervisors (BOS) expressed support for a plan to develop a countywide regional radio network to enhance multi-agency interoperability and provide greater channel capacity for the existing Very High Frequency (VHF) system. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) allocated 20 frequencies to the county. (Ref-06)
- In 2016, ITSD presented a five-year plan to expand the regional radio system by providing six additional transmission sites, bringing the total to 16 towers throughout the region. (Ref-06)
- From 2016 to 2022, five sites were outfitted with 700 MHz equipment. (Ref-06)
- In March 2020, COVID delayed the proposed new regional radio system. (Ref-06)
- In 2021, the county requested a five-year extension from the FCC for existing frequencies to ensure continued use of the system. (Ref-06)
- On June 20, 2023, the BOS approved \$32,239,081 to upgrade the existing county radio system, improving clarity, coverage, reliability and to provide additional channels and cellular service. The planned participants for this system include the Sheriff's Office and contract cities, the District Attorney's Office and the Probation Agency. The OPD, VPD, California State University Channel Islands Police Department and the Community College District Police Department will also be included. (Ref-05)
- On October 1, 2023, the BOS adopted a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the proposed Regional Radio System. (Ref-07)
- On March 23, 2024, the final appropriations bills in the federal budget for fiscal year 2024 were signed into law. (Ref-08)

This funding includes:

\$963,000 for the Ventura County Regional Public Safety Radio Project

\$963,000 for the City of San Buenaventura (Ventura) Public Safety Communications System Upgrade Project

\$67,000 for the City of Simi Valley 911 Live Implementation Project. (Ref-09)

When completed, the Ventura County Regional Radio System (VCRRS) will provide improved service to the unincorporated areas of Ventura County as well as to the VCISO contract cities. VCRRS can include "interoperability, virtually unlimited concurrent conversations, clearer reception, encryption, location services, prioritized radio traffic and cellular redundancy, which will also supply streaming video and over-the-air programming." (Ref-05)

The cities of Oxnard and Ventura have agreed to be part of the VCRRS and have purchased compatible radios. (Ref-10)

Port Hueneme and Santa Paula are in the process of developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to present to their city councils for consideration to join the VCRRS. (Ref-10)

The City of Simi Valley has decided to independently upgrade its communication system and will not participate in the VCRRS. (Ref-10)

## **METHODOLOGY**

The Grand Jury interviewed leadership and staff from numerous city and county agencies. Discussions, including e-mails, were held with management from OES, VCFD, first responders from various cities and dispatch personnel.

The documents reviewed included the following:

- 2018 Borderline Bar and Grill Mass Shooting Public Safety Response After Action Review (Ref-01, Ref-02)
- 2018 Hill and Woolsey Fires Emergency Response After Action Review (Ref-11)
- Critical Incident Review: Active Shooter Incident at Robb Elementary School, Uvalde, Texas (Ref-03)
- Standard Operating Procedure for VCISO, including the duties and responsibilities of the OES (Ref-04)
- Written communications from the County of Ventura Board of Supervisors (Ref-05, Ref-06, Ref-07)
- Grant funding sources to offset the cost of the radios (Ref-12)
- Radio frequency assignments from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) (Ref-06)
- Numerous online sources

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Ventura County**

The Borderline After Action Review Report recommended: "Training should include a focus on communication that ensures simple, plain broadcasts that accurately and completely relay relevant information." (Ref-13)

Incident Command System (ICS) is a standardized, on-scene, all-risk incident management concept. This allows its users to adopt an integrated organizational structure to match the complexities and demands of single or multiple incidents without being hindered by jurisdictional boundaries. ICS has been adopted by all first responders in Ventura County. (Ref-14)

Portions of the radio communications systems currently in use by some agencies within the county are more than 20 years old. These systems lack updated features and cannot penetrate some buildings. In addition, service does not extend to some geographic areas. The VCRRS will significantly reduce these shortcomings. (Ref-10)

As of May 2020, the Department of Justice requires encryption for communication of personally identifiable information. Encryption, which protects individuals' privacy, is not available with some existing systems. The VCRRS will allow for encryption when required. (Ref-15)

### **Unincorporated Areas and VCSO-Contracted Cities**

The OES has taken the lead in ensuring improved communication between first responders by coordinating the construction of communication towers at strategic locations. The unincorporated areas within Ventura County and all cities that contract with VCSO for law enforcement are included in this new system, the VCRRS. (Ref-10)

At the September 12, 2023, BOS Meeting, Agenda Item 53, the BOS approved an \$11,647,462.57 contract to purchase Motorola devices:

- 993 APX NEXT radios
- 501 APX 8500 radios
- 374 APX N30 radios for use in the jails (Ref-07)

The APX NEXT radio can switch automatically to Wi-Fi and cellular when necessary, while APX 8500 radios can switch to Wi-Fi. The APX series radio can provide encryption when necessary. (Ref-10, Ref-16)

OES has developed a suitcase-size interface for the VCRRS between the APX Next radio and a satellite system. This serves as a link from a command center to the VCRRS when the command center is out of range of either the radio system or cellular coverage. (Ref-10)

Multiple funding sources are available for the initial capital investment of the radios. The cost to each agency for participating in the system is a monthly subscription paid to OES, which includes tower maintenance. (Ref-10, Ref-12)

OES has created an advisory group from each VCRRS-participating public safety entity. Each member has only one vote, preventing dominance by any one organization.

The advisory group is presently composed of six members:

- California State University Channel Islands Police Department
- Ventura Community College Police Department
- Oxnard Police Department
- Ventura Police Department
- United Water Conservation District
- County of Ventura (Sheriff, District Attorney and Probation) (Ref-10)

### **City of Oxnard**

In July 2022, the City of Oxnard purchased 160 Motorola APX 8000 portable radios and 247 APX 8500 mobile radios to replace an aging system. The prior mobile radios were known to have both building penetration problems and reception issues in certain areas. These radios are compatible with the VCRRS equipment. The VCRRS will largely eliminate the current problems as well as provide clearer audio, built-in GPS and playback capability for last messages. (Ref-10, Ref-17)

The city's purchase of the new radios was aided by participating in a mutual agreement with Los Angeles County, reducing their cost. (Ref-17)

Multiple sources confirmed that the Oxnard City Council has agreed to join the VCRRS and will participate in the VCRRS advisory group. (Ref-05, Ref-10)

### **City of Port Hueneme**

Port Hueneme's current radio communication system is more than 10 years old. Existing mobile radios are known to have both building penetration problems and reception issues in certain areas. (Ref-10)

The biggest obstacle to the city's joining VCRRS is funding for the new radios. The city's current system is fully paid for. (Ref-10)

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is being developed and will be presented to the city council for consideration to join the VCRRS. (Ref-10)

**City of Santa Paula**

Santa Paula's radio communication system is aging; it provides communication within the city limits, but performance declines as personnel leave the geographical area. (Ref-10)

The biggest obstacle to the city's joining VCRRS is funding for the new radios. The city's current system is fully paid for. (Ref-10)

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is being developed and will be presented to the city council for consideration to join the VCRRS. (Ref-10)

**City of Ventura**

The city purchased 168 Motorola APX 8000 radios to replace an aging system. The prior mobile radios were known to have both building penetration problems and reception issues in certain areas. The transition to the new radios is expected to be completed in 2024. (Ref-10, Ref-18)

The purchase of the new radios was aided by grant funding and earmarks from congressional legislation. (Ref-10)

The city will use the March 2024 federal funding "to purchase equipment (dispatch consoles and car radio upgrades) VPD needs to go live on the regional radio system." (Ref-10)

Multiple sources confirmed that the City of Ventura has agreed to join the VCRRS and will participate in the VCRRS advisory group. (Ref-05, Ref-10)

**City of Simi Valley**

The City of Simi Valley declined to participate in the VCRRS. The city recently upgraded its outdated system with Comm-Line radios rather than Motorola, the radio used in the VCRRS. (Ref-10)

Simi Valley can communicate with other Ventura County agencies using a dispatch "patching" system, which is not as efficient as direct communication. (Ref-10)

The City of Simi Valley plans to install a new communication tower and rehabilitate an existing tower at the city's expense. (Ref-10)

Because of its geographical proximity, the city prefers Los Angeles County as its primary interface rather than Ventura County. (Ref-10)

**Ventura County Fire Department**

VCFD coordinates all fire and emergency medical services within Ventura County. All county fire stations and all city fire departments are linked by a common communications network. They can communicate with VCRRS as needed. (Ref-10)

VCFD is required to maintain interoperability with CalFire, a state agency. This requires VCFD to remain on the current VHF system. (Ref-10)

## **FINDINGS**

### **Ventura County Regional Radio System**

F-01. Portions of the current systems in use lack upgraded features, cannot penetrate some buildings and are not able to provide encryption as needed.

F-02. A lack of integrated training could cause inaccurate or incomplete information to be transmitted.

### **City of Oxnard**

F-03. Portions of the current system in the City of Oxnard have both building penetration problems and reception issues in certain areas.

F-04. A lack of integrated training could cause inaccurate or incomplete information to be transmitted.

### **City of Port Hueneme**

F-05. Using the current system, first responders in multiple locations may lose communication.

F-06. An MOU for adoption of the VCRRS has not been completed for presentation to the city council.

### **City of Santa Paula**

F-07. Using the current system, first responders may lose communication outside of city limits and in certain geographical locations.

F-08. An MOU for adoption of the VCRRS has not been completed for presentation to the city council.

### **City of Ventura**

F-09. Portions of the current system in the City of Ventura have both building penetration problems and reception issues in certain areas.

F-10. A lack of integrated training could cause inaccurate or incomplete information to be transmitted.

**City of Simi Valley**

F-11. The system in use by the City of Simi Valley can only communicate with other Ventura County agencies' dispatch using a "patching" system, which is not as efficient as direct communication.

**Ventura County Fire Department**

F-12. All county and city fire departments, which dispatch emergency medical services, have adopted common technology, providing interoperability without regard to city boundaries. The VCRRS can communicate with all fire departments with no changes.

**RECOMMENDATIONS****Ventura County Regional Radio System**

R-01. The Grand Jury recommends that transition to the upgraded system be complete by July 2025 for improved communication throughout the county. (F-01)

R-02. The Grand Jury recommends that OES complete an integrated testing and training plan for all participants of VCRRS by July 2025. (F-02)

**City of Oxnard**

R-03. The Grand Jury recommends that transition to the VCRRS be complete by July 2025. (F-03)

R-04. The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Oxnard complete an integrated testing and training plan by July 2025. (F-04)

**City of Port Hueneme**

R-05. The Grand Jury recommends completing and presenting the VCRRS MOU for consideration by the city council by October 2024. (F-05, F-06)

**City of Santa Paula**

R-06. The Grand Jury recommends completing and presenting the VCRRS MOU for consideration by the city council by October 2024. (F-07, F-08)

**City of Ventura**

R-07. The Grand Jury recommends that transition to the VCRRS be complete by July 2025. (F-09)

R-08. The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura complete an integrated testing and training plan by July 2025. (F-10)

## City of Simi Valley

R-09. The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Simi Valley verify radio interoperability with Ventura County first responders who have adopted the VCRRS by July 2025. (F-11)

## COMMENDATIONS

The Ventura County Information Technology Services Department and the Office of Emergency Services are to be commended for their foresight and initiative in developing the Ventura County Regional Radio System and for the independent development of a satellite interface for VCRRS.

## RESPONSES

Responses required from:

### **The following elected officers within 60 days:**

Ventura County Sheriff's Office (F-01, F-02, R-01, R-02)

City of Oxnard City Council (F-03, F-04, R-03, R-04)

City of Port Hueneme City Council (F-05, F-06, R-05)

City of Santa Paula City Council (F-07, F-08, R-06)

City of Ventura City Council (F-09, F-10, R-07, R-08)

City of Simi Valley City Council (F-11, R-09)

### **The following governing body within 90 days:**

Ventura County Board of Supervisors (F-01 F-02, R-01, R-02)

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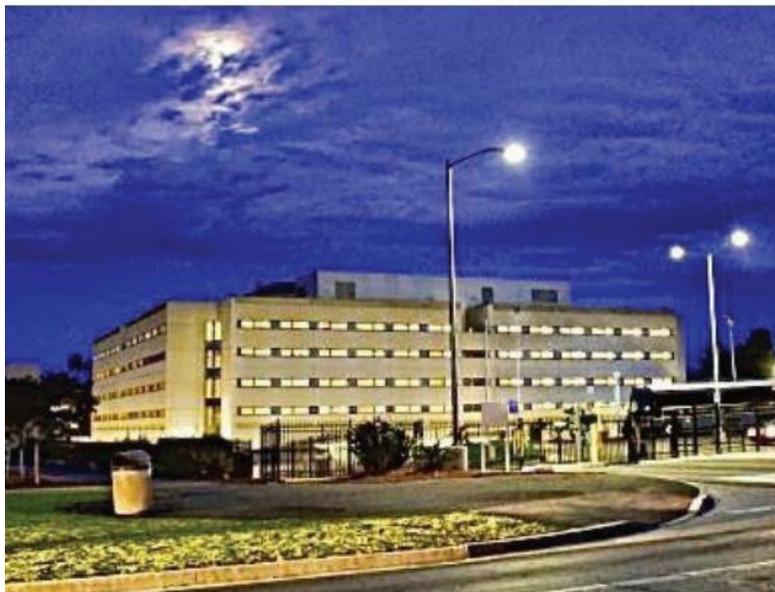
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**GLOSSARY**

<b><u>TERM</u></b>	<b><u>DEFINITION</u></b>
BOS	Board of Supervisors
CHP	California Highway Patrol
DOJ	United States Department of Justice
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
EOP	Emergency Operations Plan
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
ICS	Incident Command System
ITSD	Information Technology Services Department
MOA	Memorandum of Agreement
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
OES	Office of Emergency Services
OPD	Oxnard Police Department
SVPD	Simi Valley Police Department
VCCCDPD	Ventura County Community College District Police Department
VCEMS	Ventura County Emergency Medical Services
VCFD	Ventura County Fire Department
VCRRS	Ventura County Regional Radio System
VCSO	Ventura County Sheriff's Office
VHF	Very High Frequency
VPD	Ventura Police Department



## Annual Inspection of Detention Facilities



The Grand Jury's oversight responsibilities and powers are set forth in California Penal Code Section 919(b). It states, "The Grand Jury shall inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the county."

The 2023 – 2024 Ventura County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) conducted inquiries into the two detention facilities operated by the Ventura County Sheriff's Office (VCSO):

- Pre-Trial Detention Facility (PTDF) located in the City of Ventura, opened in 1980, capacity of 823
- Todd Road Jail (TRJ) located near the City of Santa Paula, opened in 1995, capacity of 796.

As part of the inquiry, the Grand Jury made a document request to both facilities. Documents requested and received for review prior to the inspection tour included:

- The Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) Inspection Report
- Ventura County Health Inspection Report
- Nutritional Inspection Report
- Fire Inspection Report
- Inmate Grievance Logs
- Suicide Prevention/Suicide Attempts Procedures

Prior to the physical inspection and throughout the tour of the detention facilities, the Grand Jury was able to meet with select members of the VCSO and Wellpath, LLC dba California Forensic Medical Group Incorporated including:

- 
- Facility Commander
- Medical Captain
- Facility Manager
- Administration Sergeants for both PTDF and TRJ
- Classification Sergeant
- Medical Sergeant
- Classification Deputies
- Services Manager
- Kitchen Manager
- Maintenance Manager
- Medical Coordinator
- Mental Health Coordinator

The Grand Jury toured the newly opened Health and Programming Unit. This is an additional 64-bed facility opened in 2023 located at the Todd Road Jail. The design of this is geared toward improving the standards of practice for medical and mental health care of detainees.

With a sheriff's deputy in the interview area for security, two Grand Jurors conducted individual interviews at each facility with two detainees, per Penal Code Section 919(a). One male and one female volunteered to be interviewed in a room which was isolated from other detainees.



## **Grand Jury Overview**

The Ventura County Grand Jury is a civil investigatory panel of 19 citizens selected by the Ventura County Superior Court who examine local governmental entities in Ventura County, including the County, cities within the County, and special districts. The Grand Jury reviews and evaluates procedures and practices of local government entities to determine their efficiency and effectiveness of operations pursuant to California State law and regulations.

The primary function of a Grand Jury is civil oversight. The civil oversight functions are accomplished through on-site or protocol visits, interviews, briefings, investigations and research. The Grand Jury publishes reports on its conclusions from these investigations and makes recommendations. In all cases, the Grand Jury reports serve to inform the public.

To perform its investigative functions, the Grand Jury establishes several investigative committees. Investigations may be the result of citizen complaints that are sent to the Grand Jury or other areas of interest proposed by Grand Jury members.

Administrative committees are formed to handle other Grand Jury activities, such as presenting information about the Grand Jury to the public, organizing internal and external special events, and producing the Consolidated Final Report.

Following general guidelines, each Grand Jury determines its organization and functions for the year. The 2023-2024 Grand Jury formed five general investigative committees and five administrative committees. The Grand Jurors participated in these committees to complete the work of ensuring effective and efficient practices and operations of local government.

## **Grand Jury Structure**

### **Committee Organization and Administrative Functions**

#### **Investigative Committees**

- Audit, Finance and County Administration
- Cities and Joint Powers
- County Services and Special Districts
- Health, Education and Welfare
- Law, Justice and Public Safety

#### **Administrative Committees**

- Community Relations
- Editorial Review
- Executive
- Social

#### **Officers**

- Complaint Review Coordinator
- Correspondence Recorder
- Foreperson
- Foreperson Pro Tem
- Grand Jury Recorder
- Librarian/Archivist
- Parliamentarian
- Protocol Officer
- Response Review Coordinator
- Sergeant at Arms
- Technology Specialist
- Treasurer

## **Investigative Committees**

### **Audit, Finance and County Administration**

The Audit, Finance and County Administration Committee investigates administrative and financial practices of County agencies (e.g., the offices of the County Assessor, Auditor-Controller, Treasurer-Tax Collector and the County Executive Officer), cities, special districts and agencies arising from joint powers agreements. The committee may recommend audit firms to the Grand Jury if such expertise is required to complete an investigation.

### **Cities and Joint Powers**

The scope of inquiry of the Cities and Joint Powers Committee includes the government offices and services of all cities located within Ventura County, as well as local entities operating under Joint Powers Agreements.

### **County Services and Special Districts**

The scope of inquiry of the County Services and Special Districts Committee extends to Ventura County government offices and services, as well as to special districts that operate within the County. Examples of Special Districts include but are not limited to: Water Districts, Sanitation Districts, Harbor Districts, Municipal Improvement Districts and Transportation Districts.

### **Health, Education and Welfare**

The scope of inquiry of the Health, Education and Welfare Committee extends to all aspects of health care, education and social services operations in the County, cities, and special districts. This includes but is not limited to: Ventura County Health Care Agency, Library Services Agency, Human Services Agency, Ventura County Animal Services, Ventura County Community College District, County Superintendent of Schools and all school districts.

### **Law, Justice and Public Safety**

The Law, Justice and Public Safety Committee is responsible for investigating and monitoring the operational procedures of all agencies involved in the administration of criminal justice, law enforcement and public safety. This includes required inquiries into the condition and management of all adult and juvenile prison facilities in Ventura County.

## **Administrative Committees**

### **Community Relations**

The Community Relations Committee informs the public about the history, purpose, and operation of the Grand Jury by making presentations and distributing information to community organizations, colleges, city councils, and prospective jurors in the Jury Assembly Room. The Community Relations Committee also writes and distributes media releases on significant events in the Grand Jury's term, from publishing a report to holding an open house encouraging people to apply for service.

### **Editorial Review**

The Editorial Review Committee reviews and edits all publications of Grand Jury documents made available to the public. It establishes guidelines for the basic structure of final reports. Reports are reviewed for completeness, accuracy, clarity, uniformity of style and format.

### **Executive**

The Executive Committee consists of the Investigative Committee chairs, the Foreperson (ex officio), and the Foreperson Pro Tem as the chair.

The committee assesses the direction and ongoing productivity of the Investigative Committees. It serves as a forum for Investigative Committee chairs to discuss issues and provide for their resolution.

### **Social**

The Social and Community Relations Committees share responsibility for the annual Open House, which is open to the public and prospective jurors. The Social Committee also organizes internal self-funded events.

## **Officers**

All officers are elected by the Grand Jury with the exception of the Foreperson, who is appointed by the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court of Ventura County.

### **Correspondence Recorder**

The Correspondence Recorder opens all incoming mail, stamps each piece of mail received as of the current date, and records it in the incoming correspondence log. The recorder maintains copies of outgoing correspondence written on Grand Jury letterhead and distributes incoming correspondence to the appropriate juror. An outgoing correspondence file is kept for all letters sent out by the Grand Jury.

### **Foreperson**

The Foreperson ensures that the Grand Jury operates effectively and efficiently in carrying out its oversight responsibilities and powers. The Foreperson serves as the official spokesperson for decisions or statements of the Grand Jury. The Foreperson signs all written communications from the Grand Jury, including letters, reports and press releases and approves all reports before submission to the County Counsel. Other duties assigned to this position include:

- Consults with the Presiding Judge, County Counsel and the District Attorney on legal issues raised by the Grand Jury
- Prepares agendas for and presides at meetings of the full Grand Jury panel, a.k.a. General Meetings
- Oversees election of Grand Jury officers, formalizes committee structure with Grand Jury approval, and oversees election of committee chairs
- Serves as an ex-officio voting member of all committees
- Ensures that jurors receive training relevant to their statutory functions, including interviewing and report writing
- Works with Jury Services when it is necessary to replace jurors and is responsible for orientation of incoming jurors

### **Foreperson Pro Tem**

The Foreperson Pro Tem is appointed by the Foreperson and is confirmed by the entire Grand Jury. The Pro Tem assumes the Foreperson's responsibilities in the absence of, or at the request of, the Foreperson. The Pro Tem accepts assignments from and assists and advises the Foreperson as needed. In the event of a vacancy in the office of Foreperson, the Pro Tem acts as the Foreperson until the Presiding Judge officially selects a replacement. The Pro Tem serves as the Chair of the Executive Committee.

**Grand Jury Recorder**

The Grand Jury Recorder keeps minutes of Grand Jury general meetings and distributes copies of the minutes to all jurors. The Recorder also maintains a file of signed original minutes of all general meetings.

**Complaint Review Coordinator**

The Complaint Review Coordinator receives complaints from the public alleging government inefficiencies, suspicions of misconduct, mistreatment by officials or other matters of general community concern.

The Complaint Review Coordinator along with their pro tem, reviews each complaint received to ensure that the complainant has provided all necessary information. The Coordinator also determines whether the subject matter of the complaint has been addressed by current or previous Grand Juries.

If a complaint appears valid and complete, and if the subject matter falls within the jurisdiction of the Grand Jury, the Complaint Review Coordinator refers the complaint to the Grand Jury for committee investigation.

**Librarian/Archivist**

The Librarian/Archivist maintains an archive of the current and past Grand Jury final reports, background materials and responses. The Librarian/Archivist updates and assigns space for materials accumulated by the various committees. The Librarian/Archivist maintains and updates reference materials when received, and organizes and maintains records and documents for the past five years.

**Parliamentarian**

The Parliamentarian observes the interaction among panel members during general and other meetings and offers guidance to the Foreperson or committee chairperson so that the members follow Robert's Rules of Order during discussions and voting. The Parliamentarian also advises the Foreperson or chairperson regarding procedure and the order of business.

**Protocol Officer**

The Protocol Officer coordinates site visits to various facilities and agencies as well as arranging for agency briefings held in the Grand Jury chambers. The Protocol Officer may also schedule coordinated activities with such agencies as law enforcement, fire departments and the county clerk-recorder.

**Response Review Coordinator**

The Response Review Coordinator receives and maintains responses to Grand Jury reports. The Response Review Coordinator maintains an accurate log of the Grand Jury's reports, responses required by law and requested responses. The Coordinator

sends reminder letters to entities that have not provided responses within the required time frame.

As each response is received, the Response Review Coordinator provides a copy to the chair of the appropriate investigative committee. The investigative committee recommends acceptance of the response if it is deemed to be complete and accurate. The response is then filed in the archived folder for the related report. A copy of each response is also given to the Technology Specialist for posting on the Grand Jury's website.

**Sergeant at Arms**

The Sergeant at Arms is responsible for ensuring the Grand Jury chambers are secure and a safe working environment. The Sergeant at Arms makes recommendations to the Foreperson concerning security matters and ensures that no unauthorized person is present in the Grand Jury chambers. The Sergeant at Arms serves as the Grand Jury Emergency Evacuation Coordinator.

**Technology Specialist**

The Technology Specialist identifies hardware and software needs and coordinates all service requests with the county's Information Technology Department. The Technology Specialist arranges computer access for incoming jurors and terminates accounts of departing jurors. The Technology Specialist holds computer training sessions and is available to assist jurors with computer questions or issues. The Technology Specialist coordinates the posting of investigative reports and responses on the Grand Jury website.

**Treasurer**

The Treasurer is responsible for the administration of the Grand Jury budget. The Treasurer aids jurors in completing monthly claim forms and is responsible for processing all bills presented to the Grand Jury for payment. The Treasurer receives and reviews expenditure statements from the county's fiscal office and presents relevant information to the Grand Jury. The Treasurer orders all required office supplies and administers social dues money contributed by Grand Jurors.



### Protocol Visits and Agency Briefings

The purpose of protocol visits and agency briefings is to inform the Grand Jury about governmental functions of Ventura County, cities, and special districts. These visits and briefings assist the jurors in meaningfully performing their statutory oversight functions.

Through briefings, jurors become acquainted with the officials and managers of agencies they may examine and are better able to evaluate these agencies. The Grand Jury was pleased to receive 19 agency briefings in its 2023-2024 term.

The 2023-2024 Grand Jury wishes to thank the following officials and agencies for their flexibility, patience, and willingness to participate in this process.

Ventura County County Counsel
Ventura County District Attorney’s Office
Ventura County Harbor Department
Ventura County Executive Office
Ventura County Area Agency on Aging
Ventura County District Attorney’s Office Active Shooter Training
Ventura County Public Defender’s Office
Ventura County Human Services Agency
Ventura County Board of Supervisors, District 1
Ventura County Probation Agency
Ventura County Family Justice Center
Ventura County Auditor/Controller’s Office
Ventura County Board of Supervisors, District 5
Ventura County Fire Department
Ventura County Board of Supervisors, District 4
Ventura County Board of Supervisors, District 3
Ventura County Human Services Farmworkers Resource Program
Ventura County Sheriff’s Canine Unit
Ventura County Medical Examiner’s Office



## **Grand Jury Community Relations**

The Community Relations Committee informs the public about the history, purpose, and operations of the Grand Jury by making presentations, answering questions and distributing information to the community. The Community Relations Committee also disseminates information via press releases about relevant events during the Grand Jury's term including open house, information sessions for prospective grand jurors and the investigative report summaries.

### **2023-2024 Grand Jury Presentations**

- League of Women Voters of Ventura County
- Ventura Senior Men's Group
- County of Ventura Superior Court, Jury Assembly Room (Weekly)
- Public Open House
- Two in-house information sessions