

COLLAB

San Luis Obispo County



The Coalition of Labor Agriculture and Business

WEEKLY UPDATE
June 8-15, 2025

THIS WEEK

Keep County Cash in the Unincorporated Parts
Beds Cost Bucks
Just Another Pride Month
Hunger and Juneteenth Just Get a Day
Pot Gets Pity
Tourism Improvement
Meritless Time Consuming Appeal
ADUs, Lot Splits and Density Bonuses

The June 3, 2025 Board of Supervisors meeting turned out to be one of the longest in recent history, adjourning a few minutes after five in the afternoon. The agenda itself didn't seem too complicated, but a couple items ended up dragging on.

Keep County Cash in the Unincorporated Parts

Supervisor Paulding offered up a motion regarding the roughly \$2.5 million in SB 1090 funds that the county currently has available for low-income housing projects. His motion was to direct staff to focus on projects in the unincorporated parts of SLO County. He mentioned two projects currently seeking gap funding, one on Cayucos and one in Templeton. Supervisor Peshong agreed and seconded the motion. Supervisor Ortiz Legg cautioned that she believes the county should not be spending funds at this time - or at least it needs to be very cautious about doing so, due to the projected state funding shortfalls.

Beds Cost Bucks

Under Prop 1 funds, SLO County Behavioral Health was awarded a \$21.6 million grant from the state to build a 16 bed Psychiatric Health Facility, which would provide 12 beds for adults and 4 for minors. Currently, minors experiencing mental crisis are sent to facilities over 100 miles away. While the grant will provide desperately needed beds, it comes with a requirement for a \$2 million match from the County and will also require ongoing operating funds when in place.

Just another Pride Month

Much as expected, the Board passed a resolution declaring the Month of June as Pride Month by a 3-2 vote with Supervisors Peshong and Moreno voting no. Supervisors Gibson and Paulding, along with a spattering of audience speakers, each offered remarks, but nothing significantly new was addressed.

Hunger and Juneteenth just Get a Day

The Board also passed a resolution declaring June 6 as Hunger Awareness Day. The day corresponds with an open House at the SLO Food Bank. And it proclaimed the second Saturday in June 2025 as “Juneteenth Day”.

Pot gets Pity

The Board adopted the resolution to keep the Cannabis Tax at the current level of 6% as opposed to letting it incur an additional 2% that would otherwise be an automatic increase. The measure had a half dozen cannabis entrepreneurs testify in favor, citing challenging business conditions and expensive overhead.

The lone voice in opposition was from Mr. Murray Powell who said:

THESE CANNABIS TAX RATE REDUCTIONS ARE A FEEBLE ATTEMPT BY OUR COUNTY TO SUBSIDIZE THE FAILING CALIFORNIA POT INDUSTRY AND IGNORE THE WILL OF THE VOTERS AS USUAL. MAKES ONE WONDER WHEN THE COUNTY IS EXPERIENCING A \$40 MILLION BUDGET DEFICIT AND PLANNING TO ELIMINATE 170 STAFF POSITIONS WHILE WASTING COUNTY GENERAL TAX FUNDS ON A FAILED POT INDUSTRY. EVERY \$\$\$MILLION COUNTS!!!!

Supervisor Moreno pointed out the fact that this is one of only two taxes where the County Supervisors have discretion. The other is the Transit Occupancy Tax also known as the TOT or Bed Tax charged to guests staying in local hotels and motels.

Tourism Improvement

Since 2009, the County of San Luis Obispo has had a County Unincorporated Area Tourism Business Improvement District (better known as a CBID) which charges a tax of 2% to guests at the 1,481 hotels, motels and vacation rentals throughout the county. That tax remains in effect until at least a simple majority of those taxed register a vote of protest.

Balloting is now open for such a vote, but only just over 8% have objected. Supervisor Ortiz Legg requested that the hotels being taxed get a survey inquiring about their priorities for how the CBID funds should be spent. She pointed out that some hotels aren't getting the ballot and suggested the CBID needs more info from hotels regarding what sorts of projects would be most helpful to the tourism industry locally

Meritless Time Consuming Appeal

Item 29? Was a simple appeal of a permit to replace a single-story house with a two story home. The original permit was granted on Nov 1, 2024, but has been in limbo since, awaiting the deliberations at this meeting. The agenda item read as follows:

Hearing to consider appeals by Jeff Kwansy of North Coast Advisory Council (NCAC) (APPL2024-00031), Jeff Lentz (APPL2024-00032), and Christina Galloway (APPL2024-00033) of the Planning Department Hearing Officer's approval of a request by Peter and Beata Przybyslawski for a Minor Use Permit/Coastal Development Permit (C-DRC2023-00060) to allow the replacement of an existing, single-family residence with a new two-story, approximately 2,419 square foot, single-family residence with three bedrooms, three bathrooms, kitchen, dining and family room, a media room, and laundry room, exterior deck, a single car garage and one uncovered parking space. The project will result in the disturbance of approximately 5,929 square feet on a 0.10- acre parcel. The proposed project is

within the Residential Single-Family land use category and is located at 2675 Sherwood Drive in the community of Cambria. The site is in the North Coast Area Plan. Also to be considered is the determination that the project qualifies for a General Rule or Common-Sense exemption from environmental review under CEQA. (Planning and Building)

The appeal was based upon several claims that the permit was granted despite the project not following the required specifications. County planning addressed each of those complaints in about four minutes, making it clear that the project met all requirements.

The appellants then proceeded to list in detail each of their objections, almost all of which were subjective, including one lady who was upset because she had built a gingerbread copy of the original house and didn't want to see it demolished, and others worried about two trees that would be removed even though new healthier ones would be planted in their place.

The single item on the agenda took an hour to resolve, and never did the appellant group have a relevant point. It tied up staff from the planning department as well as countless other staff who were in support roles. It cost the homeowner to have a representative appear and it cost the homeowner over seven months in delays. Due process can be a time-consuming effort.



The photo above shows the house as it currently stands. The photo below illustrates the proposed new structure:



ADUs, Lot Splits and Density Bonuses

The last item on the agenda also proved to be a lengthy discussion about aligning SLO County Additional Dwelling and lot split standards with state SB 9 standards with a goal of producing more low and very low income housing. This data rich presentation called for adoption of recommended ordinances amending the Inland and Coastal Zone Land Use Ordinances and Local Coastal Program to update regulations relating to the Density Bonus Program; and Adopt the recommended resolution amending the Williamson Act Rules of Procedure to update regulations relating to accessory dwellings. The Ordinances if adopted would call for density bonuses of 15% for very low-income targeted projects. The possibility of an amnesty program for unpermitted units meeting minimum standards was included. Limits of 1200 square feet or less on ADUs were also explored.

It's worth noting that the subject of parking did not come up. In practically every planning Department appeal in the Coastal Zone, parking is discussed in great detail. One recent project that met all criteria and was issued a permit got bogged down in the appeal process primarily because its off-street parking plan was deemed insufficient by some Board members. Front-yard setbacks did become a subject of concern and was addressed in proposed language.

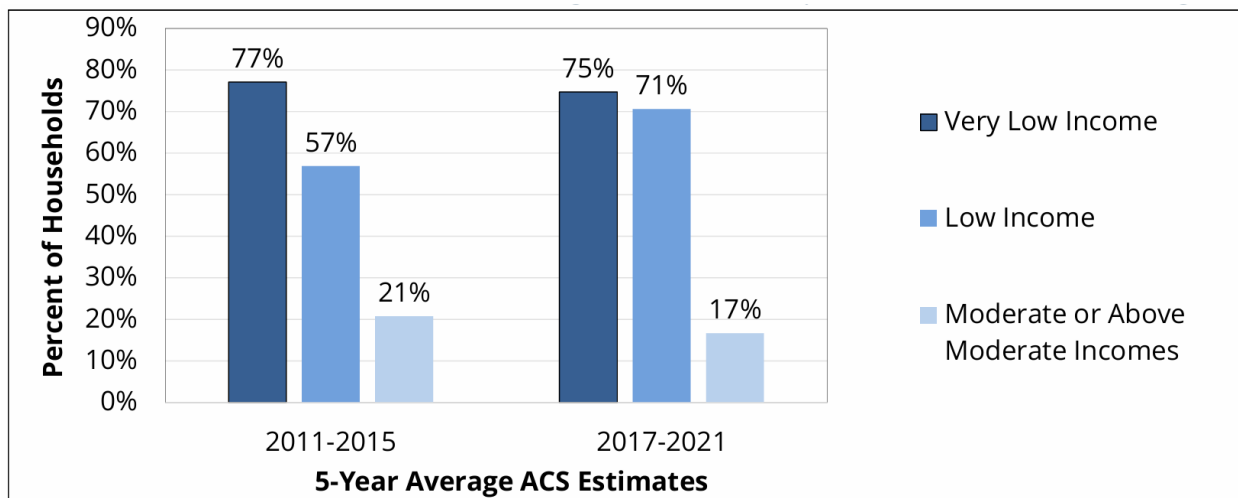
Discussion of how a homeowner could create a lot split, add additional structures, how many and how large those structures would be, became very technical. At a couple points, Supervisors seemed befuddled by the various equations and options but ended up adopting standards recommended by staff with some minor revisions that are hoped to allow for some flexibility.

Despite an admirable presentation by staff, and voluminous discussion, this subject seemed a bit too detailed to be heard and codified in a 40ish minute session. One got the impression that there were a lot of fingers crossed when the vote was finally taken.

As to specific details of the measure that was adopted, it is recommended that anyone thinking about lot splits, ADUs, seeking amnesty or wondering exactly what can and cannot be done in this regard, consult the planning department with very specific questions early on. It could be a complicated process.

The following illustrates key data points used in configuring ADU regulations:

American Community Survey for San Luis Obispo County

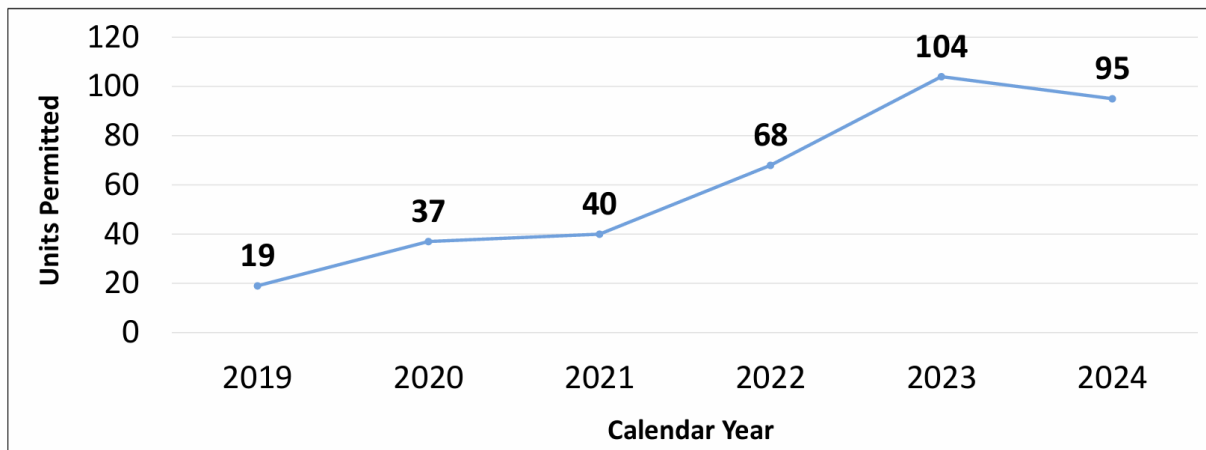


The following graph illustrates the anticipated number of homes needed in four different categories, and compares those needs to actual dwellings built in those specific categories. The measurement, called the RHNA, is a standardized formula used by all counties in California to gauge progress towards housing goals. Farther below is a chart illustrating the number of ADUs built in SLO County by year, and the last graph illustrates the number of ADUs allowed on a lot.

Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA)

Income Category	Number of Dwelling Units			Percent Completed
	Total Need	Permitted (2019-2024)	Remaining Need	
Very Low-Income	801	7	794	1%
Low-Income	505	226	279	45%
Moderate-Income	585	246	339	42%
Above Moderate-Income	1,365	1,132	233	83%
Total	3,256	1,611	1,645	49%

Accessory Dwelling Production



Allowable Number of Accessory Dwellings

Accessory Dwelling on...	Existing Regulations	State Law
Parcel with single-family dwelling	2 accessory dwellings (1 attached/detached and 1 junior accessory dwelling)	3 accessory dwellings
Parcel with multi-family dwellings	2 detached accessory dwellings	8 detached accessory dwellings, not to exceed the number of existing multi-family units
	AND conversions of existing non-living space, not to exceed 25% of the number of existing multi-family units	

LAST WEEK

Budget Creep

Dude... Give 'em a Break

No Nukes Nonsense

Paso Water Basin Skulduggery

By-by Bruce?

Budget Creep

Last week, we told you about the proposed \$949.5 million 2025-26 SLO County budget, which, despite the \$78 million increase from last year's budget, came out balanced. The "balanced" part of that statement meant that expenditures were matched to revenues.

This week, the Board hears a "request to receive and file the FY 2025-26 Supplemental Budget to the FY 2025-26 Recommended Budget, which publishes the FY 2025-26 Budget Hearing schedule and recommends adjustments to the FY 2025-26 Recommended Budget". What that gobbledygook statement translates to is an additional \$1,308,746 of supplemental requests to add on top of last week's balanced budget proposal.

This, along with Supervisor Gibson's suggestion that county reserves be tapped to provide "gap funding" to several local service providers impacted by cuts in the proposed budget. Discussion about gap funding ranged from \$1,000,000 to \$2,500,000, with at least one mention of \$7,000,000.

Simple math tells us that when the Board meets on June 3, they will need to figure out increases somewhere in the range of \$2,308,000 to \$3,808,700 in additional spending (and revenue) if they approve the supplemental budget requests and pursue the gap funding idea. Should they let the reserve funding just draw down the reserve balance, the revenue requirement will be less.

COLAB has been commending the Board and county staff for taking a new and much more accountable approach to budgeting. This new approach involves going through the budget of each department in search of obsolescence, duplications and inefficiencies.

However, we were frankly a bit surprised to see a nearly 9% increase, and we are concerned that after an extensive process, we hear about an extra \$1.3 million that shows up after everything was supposed to have been carefully “rebalanced”.

Those advocating for fiscal responsibility are going to have questions including:

If \$1.3 million extra shows up after just one week from the proposal, how much extra will be needed in the long run?

If we tap the reserves this year for a couple million, what happens next year?

We see the state is experiencing at least \$12 billion in budget shortfalls (possibly two or three times that according to some sources) – what will that mean for funding that traditionally flows to counties?

If we see significant state cuts to SLO County, how will that impact funding to our local programs? Who will decide what gets cut and by how much?

If trimming is needed, proportional cuts obviously would put a much more difficult load on some categories than on others. The administration of any cuts could be more impactful than the original budget process.

Under the 2025-26 Budget Proposal, 38 cents out of your county tax dollar is dedicated to Health and Human Services, 27 cents to public protection, 9 cents to reserves & contingencies, 7 cents to land based support, 6 cents to financing, 5 cents to support county departments, 4 cents to fiscal and administrative costs, 3 cents to community services and 1 cent to capital projects and maintenance.

Stay tuned to see how the budget proposal is addressed in the June 3 Board meeting and especially what happens during the budget hearings June 9-11.

Aside from the budget, a couple additional items on the June 3 Board of Supervisors agenda are worth noting.

Dude... Give ‘em a Break

The first is item 4: Request to 1) consider the annual Cannabis Business Tax Rate for Fiscal Year 2025-26; and 2) if necessary, adopt the proposed resolution related to the Cannabis Business Tax Rate to maintain the Cannabis Business Tax Rate at 6% of gross receipts for FY 2025-26. (ACTTCPA).

The Board needs to vote to keep the tax at 6% or it will automatically jump to 8%. The vote requires a 3/5ths affirmative to keep the tax from increasing. Below is a summary of the status of the tax:

Cannabis Business Tax (CBT) Overview

- Established June 5, 2018, by voter approval of Measure B-18.
- Governed by San Luis Obispo County Code, Chapter 3.05.
- Initial Rate of 4%; Automatic 2% annual increases on July 1 (starting 2020) up to a 10% maximum.

Year	Tax Rate	Collected	Notes
FY 18-19	4%	\$ 82,317	Collections started in March, 2019
FY 19-20	4%	\$ 339,709	No change to rate
FY 20-21	6%	\$ 518,130	Automatic increase to 6% on July 1, 2020
FY 21-22	6%	\$ 348,840	BOS voted to maintain 6% CBT rate
FY 22-23	8%	\$ 597,748	Automatic increase to 8% on July 1, 2022
FY 23-24	6%	\$ 708,313	BOS voted to reduce CBT rate to 6%
FY 24-25*	6%	\$ 462,768	BOS voted to maintain 6% CBT rate
Program Total		\$ 3,057,825	

* Fiscal Year to date as of May 21, 2025

The above chart illustrates the annual tax revenue generated by legal cannabis sales in SLO County.

The legal cannabis industry is quite vocal about how taxes are driving up costs to the point that they can't compete with the illegal side of the business. We recognize the pickle that this creates for Supervisors; raise the tax rate and potentially put some out of business - which will likely result in a decline in revenue (along with increased illegal trade) or give the legal folks a break and hope their business flourishes. We only wish the same level of discretion could be afforded to other struggling businesses.

No Nukes Nonsense

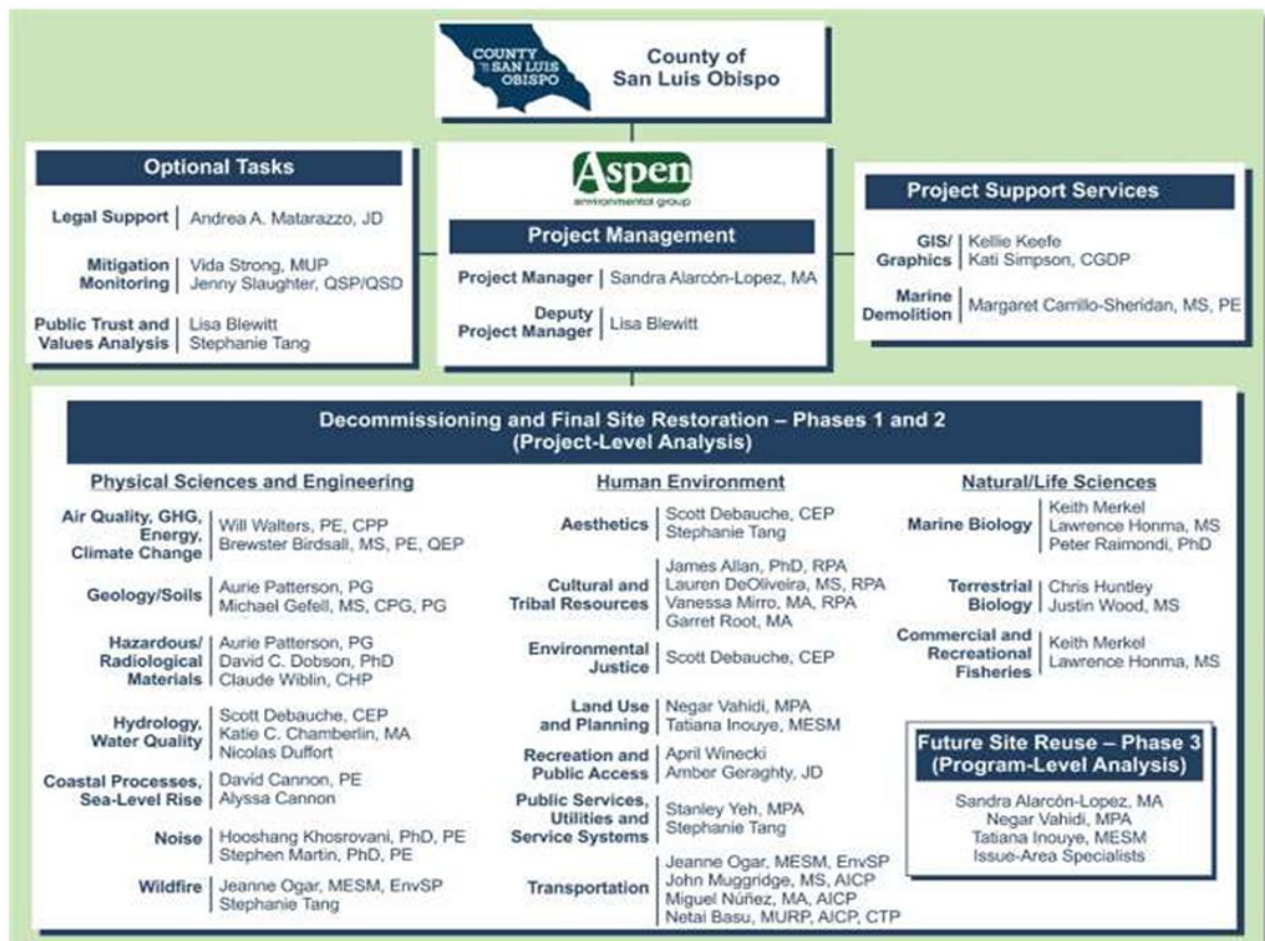
Item 10, while probably quite necessary, is especially irritating. It reads: a request to approve and execute Amendment No. 4 to the Special Services Consulting contract with Aspen Environmental Group, Inc., amending the term of the Contract from July 13, 2025 to July 13, 2027, to complete preparation of the Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and project hearing process for the PG&E Diablo Canyon Power Plant Decommissioning Project.

Obviously, it's irritating to have to go through any decommissioning when our statewide grid is already underserved and incapable of providing the reliable electricity that we need for our homes, businesses and industries.

It's also irritating that the decommissioning is costing our county in terms of lost tax revenue on top of the EIR preparation cost of \$2,054,557. The power plant provides a sizeable amount to the county tax base when possessing a reasonable 20 year license. Without the license and permits, its value is much less, thus it is taxed at a lower value. Currently, state regulators have extended operating permits by only 5 years, so PG&E is forced to prepare for a 2030 closure.

We can't forget that Diablo Canyon is also the biggest employer in SLO County providing jobs that are critical to our economy.

So, with all of that irritation on the table, we see this contract to provide an Environmental Impact Report which is required to complete the decommissioning. The contract is a 249-page document. The following is an organizational chart showing who is in charge of various aspects of the first two thirds of the Environmental Impact Report:



The Org chart does not illustrate the wide range of personnel involved. Here is a half-page (of a three-page list) of job titles and fee rates for Aspen employees' hourly rates. We count at least 17 positions making over \$200 per hour, 6 making

over \$300 per hour, and one each at \$434 and \$565 per hour. Gotta wonder if the EIR will include the economic impact of actually preparing the report.

	Current Hourly Rate	2025-2027 Hourly Rate
Category or Name		
Principal Associate IV	\$320	\$320
Principal Associate III	\$270	\$270
Principal Associate II	\$240	\$240
Principal Associate I	\$235	\$235
Engineer IV	\$230	\$242
Engineer III	\$215	\$226
Engineer II	\$200	\$210
Engineer I	\$185	\$194
Cultural IV	\$175	\$184
Cultural III	\$150	\$158
Cultural II	\$135	\$142
Cultural I	\$125	\$131
Senior Associate IV	\$215	\$226
Senior Associate III	\$190	\$200
Senior Associate II	\$175	\$184
Senior Associate I	\$155	\$163
Associate IV	\$145	\$152
Associate III	\$130	\$137

The answer to the question that we should all be asking (how can we fix this ridiculous situation?) is to press Governor Newsom into directing his administration to extend all necessary permits to 20 years. If Diablo Canyon is fully permitted, this decommissioning stuff will stop for the foreseeable future.

Green energy, renewable energy, solar, wind... nothing available in the next decade (at least) will be able to supply the clean and reliable power that our state needs without having Diablo as a cornerstone source.

Paso Water Basin Skullduggery

The ongoing saga over the Paso Water Basin Joint Power Authority has a new chapter. In a shady move, the JPA gave notice of its public meeting on Friday

afternoon May 23 (just before the three-day Memorial Day weekend) for their May 28 meeting. At the meeting, they introduced a plan to have the de minimis users' fees paid by the Groundwater Sustainability Authority, thus relieving de minimis users not only from having to pay water rates on their own wells, but also restricting them from the right to vote on representation of the Paso Basin.

Anybody with a basic expectation of democratic principles being applied to our local government should be wondering:

Why is this new government agency needed – can existing data on basin levels be trusted to be accurate enough for this decision?

At every public hearing, there is a long list of people opposing the new JPA, but no advocates – who is asking for this and why?

When did the GSA decide to pay the rates for de minimis users, and where is the public record of that meeting?

How much will this GSA pay-off of de minimis rate payers (voters) cost, and where are the funds coming from?

Will the GSA pay the de minimis users' rates indefinitely, and if not, will de minimis users get a vote when they do have to pay?

Wouldn't it be in everybody's best interest to have an open 218 election to allow the ratepayers of the new agency to choose their representation, and if not why?

By-by Bruce?

Supervisor Bruce Gibson has announced that he is not running for re-election to the Second District seat that he has held for almost two decades. In his announcement, he hinted at “focusing on some specific public issues” in his future, but did not elaborate.

His presence on the Board has always brought a left-leaning point of view - often to the discouragement of the business and agriculture communities, but much to the delight of environmental and civil rights groups.

Naturally, the announcement kicked off the usual rounds of speculation regarding who will run to replace him. While the district is left leaning in voter registration,

we can only hope to see a reasonable voice that seeks balance while being open to the economic development that SLO County so desperately needs.

**NEXT WEEK
Board of Supervisor Budget Hearings
KPMG Audit**

SLO County budget hearings are scheduled for June 9-11 in Board chambers. It is possible that hearings could finish before June 11.

An audit being conducted by KPMG on county finances and efficiencies is due to be finished on June 17. Nothing is known of their findings to date, but the results could have an impact on budgetary priorities. Expect it to be a highly read document.

EMERGENT TRENDS - SEE PAGE 17

After half a century, California legislators on the verge of overhauling a landmark environmental law

California Gov. Newsom and Democrats Driving Gas Prices Through the Roof

**COLAB IN DEPTH
SEE PAGE 23**

California's Oligarchy

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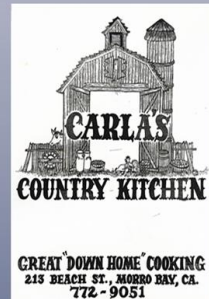
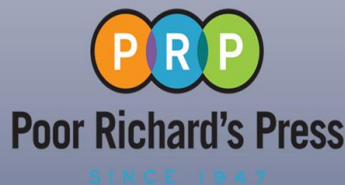
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After half a century, California legislators on the verge of overhauling a landmark environmental law

By Liam Dillon

Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

June 2, 2025

Long celebrated and derided, the California Environmental Quality Act is facing its strongest overhaul in generations.

Buoyed by national criticism that the state can no longer build sufficient housing and public infrastructure, Gov. Gavin Newsom and lawmakers said now is the time for major changes.

Negotiations could lead to new laws taking effect within weeks.

When a landmark state environmental law threatened to halt enrollment at UC Berkeley, legislators stepped in and wrote an exemption. When the Sacramento Kings were about to leave town, lawmakers brushed the environmental rules aside for the team's new arena. When the law stymied the renovation of the state Capitol, they acted once again.

Lawmakers' willingness to poke holes in the California Environmental Quality Act for specific projects without overhauling the law in general has led commentators to describe the changes as "Swiss cheese CEQA."

Now, after years of nibbling at it, Gov. Gavin Newsom and the Legislature are going in with the knives.

Two proposals have advanced rapidly through the Legislature: one to wipe away the law for most urban housing developments, the other to weaken the rules for most everything else. Legal experts say the efforts would be the most profound changes to CEQA in generations. Newsom not only endorsed the bills last month, but also put them on a fast track to approval by proposing their passage as part of the state budget, which bypasses normal committee hearings and means they could become law within weeks.

"This is the biggest opportunity to do something big and bold, and the only impediment is us," Newsom said when announcing his support for the legislation.

Nearly the entire 55-year history of the California Environmental Quality Act has featured dueling narratives about its effects. On its face the law is simple: It requires proponents to disclose and, if possible, lessen the environmental effects of a project. In practice, this has led to tomes of environmental impact reports, including volumes of soil testing and traffic modeling studies, and sometimes years of disputes in court. Many credit CEQA for helping preserve the state's scenic

vistas and waterways while others decry its ability to thwart housing and infrastructure projects, including the long-delayed and budget-busting high-speed rail.

On the latter point, evidence supports both sides of the argument. One study by UC Berkeley law professors found that fewer than 3% of housing projects in many big cities across the state over a three-year period faced any litigation. But some contend that the threat of a lawsuit is enough to chill development, and examples continue to pile up of CEQA stalling construction of homeless shelters, a food bank and child-care center.

What's clear is that CEQA has become embedded as a key point of leverage in California's development process. Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass once recalled that when she worked as a community organizer in the 1990s, Westside land-use attorneys who were successful in stopping development in their communities taught her how to use CEQA to block liquor stores in South L.A.

Organized labor learned to use the law to its advantage and became one of its most ardent supporters, alongside environmentalists — major constituencies within Democratic politics in the state. Besides carve-outs for individual projects in recent years, lawmakers have passed CEQA streamlining for certain kinds of housing and other developments. These fast-track measures can be used only if proponents agree to pay higher wages to construction workers or set aside a portion of the project for low-income housing on land considered the least environmentally sensitive.

Labor groups' argument is simple, said Pete Rodriguez, vice president-Western District of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners: CEQA exemptions save time and money for developers, so some benefit should go to workers.

“When you expedite the process and you let a developer get the TSA pass, for example, to get quicker through the line at the airport, there should be labor standards attached to that as well,” Rodriguez said at a Los Angeles Business Council panel in April.

The two bills now under debate — Assembly Bill 609 by Assemblymember Buffy Wicks (D-Oakland) and Senate Bill 607 by Sen. Scott Wiener (D-San Francisco) — break with that tradition. They propose broad CEQA changes without any labor or other requirements.

Wicks' bill would exempt most urban housing developments from CEQA. Wiener's legislation, among other provisions, would in effect lessen the number of projects, housing and otherwise, that would need to complete a full environmental review, narrowing the law's scope.

“Both are much, much more far-reaching than anything that has been proposed in living memory to deal with CEQA,” said Chris Elmendorf, a UC Davis law professor who tracks state environmental and housing legislation.

The legislation wouldn't have much of an effect on rebuilding after L.A.'s wildfires, as single-family home construction is exempt and Newsom already waived other parts of the law by executive order.

The environment inside and outside the Legislature has become friendlier to more aggressive proposals. "Abundance," a recent book co-written by New York Times opinion writer Ezra Klein, makes the case that CEQA and other laws supported by Democrats have hamstrung the ability to build housing and critical infrastructure projects, citing specifically California's affordability crisis and challenges with high-speed rail, in ways that have stifled the American Dream and the party's political fortunes.

The idea has become a cause celebre in certain circles. Newsom invited Klein onto his podcast. This spring, Klein met with Wicks and Wiener and other lawmakers, including Robert Rivas (D-Hollister) and Mike McGuire (D-Healdsburg), the leaders of the state Assembly and Senate, respectively.

Wicks and Wiener are veteran legislators and former chairs of legislative housing committees who have written much of the prior CEQA streamlining legislation. Even though it took bruising battles to pass previous bills, the resulting production hasn't come close to resolving the state's shortage, Wicks said.

"We need housing on a massive scale," Wicks said.

To opponents of the bills, including dozens of environmental and labor groups, the effort misplaces the source of building woes and instead would restrict one of the few ways community groups can shape development.

Asha Sharma, state policy manager for Leadership Counsel for Justice & Accountability, said her organization uses CEQA to reduce the polluting effects of projects in neighborhoods already overburdened by environmental problems.

The proposed changes would empower public agencies and developers at the expense of those who would be affected by their decisions, she said.

"What folks aren't realizing is that along with the environmental regulations comes a lot of public transparency and public engagement," said Sharma, whose group advocates for low-income Californians in rural areas. "When you're rolling back CEQA, you're rolling back that too."

Because of the hefty push behind the legislation, Sharma expects the bills will be approved in some form. But it remains uncertain how they might change. Newsom, the two lawmakers and legislative leaders are negotiating amendments.

Wicks said her bill will not require developers to reserve part of their projects for low-income housing to receive a CEQA exemption; cities can mandate that on their own, she said. Wicks indicated, however, that labor standards could be part of a final deal, saying she's "had some conversations in that regard."

Wiener's bill was gutted in a legislative fiscal committee last month, with lawmakers saying they wanted to meet infrastructure and affordability needs "without compromising environmental protections." Afterward, Wiener and McGuire, the Senate leader, released a joint statement declaring their intent to pass a version of the legislation as part of the budget, as the governor had proposed.

Wiener remained committed to the principles in his initial bill.

"What I can say is that I'm highly optimistic that we will pass strong changes to CEQA that will make it easier and faster to deliver all of the good things that make Californians' lives better and more affordable," Wiener said.

Should the language in the final deal be anything like what's been discussed, the changes to CEQA would be substantial, said Ethan Elkind, director of the climate program at UC Berkeley's Center for Law, Energy & the Environment. Still, he said the law's effects on housing development were overblown. Many other issues, such as local zoning restrictions, lack of funding and misaligned tax incentives, play a much larger role in limiting construction long before projects can even get to the point where CEQA becomes a concern, he said.

"CEQA is the last resort of a NIMBY," said Elkind, referring to residents who try to block housing near them. "It's almost like we're working backwards here."

Wicks agreed that the Legislature would have to do more to strip away regulations that make it harder to build housing. But she argued that the CEQA changes would take away a major barrier: the uncertainty developers face from legal threats.

Passing major CEQA reforms would demonstrate lawmakers' willingness to tackle some of the state's toughest challenges, she said.

"It sends a signal to the world that we're ready to build," Wicks said.

California Gov. Newsom and Democrats Driving Gas Prices Through the Roof

California refiners have not engaged in widespread price gouging, profiteering, price manipulation

By Katy Grimes, June 4, 2025 12:18 pm

California Democrats killed bills this week which would have suspended the Low Carbon Fuel Standard gas tax increase of 65 cents a gallon from going into effect July 1st.

Assembly Republicans tried to suspend constitution (which is frequently done by Democrats) to bring AB 12 to the floor, which would halt the state's updated Low Carbon Fuel Standard from going into effect. That failed 18-39. The rule is expected to raise gas prices and could go into effect July 1.

As KCRA reported Wednesday morning, "Days after telling lawmakers the California Air Resources Board she oversees does not analyze how its clean air rules could impact costs to drivers and consumers, CARB Chairwoman Liane Randolph is now facing calls to resign."

"That bill- to stop updated Low Carbon Fuel Standards- failed in committee earlier this year. Sen. Brian Jones today pointed to bipartisan calls for CARB chairwoman to resign, after she admitted they don't analyze how rules impact gas prices" KCRA's Ashley Zavala posted to X.

As the Globe reported in November:

The California Air Resources Board voted to approve new gas regulations which will result in as much as a .65 cent per gallon increase in California's gas prices.

The California Governor, Legislature and State Air Resources Board are working hand in glove to restrict the availability of oil and gas and increase the cost of gas at the pump so severely, middle class and working class drivers will be making choices between groceries and fuel for the car.

Remember that Gov. Newsom recently claimed Californians would save money at the pump with the CARB vote.

The vote made significant updates to the low carbon fuel standard (LCFS), which requires the state to reduce the environmental impact of gas and other transportation fuels by incentivizing producers to cut emissions.

This is Gov. Newsom's plan to decrease the state's gas supply, as well as the California Air Resources Board mandating an additional .50 cents per gallon be added to the price of gas in California in January, we reported.

Here is how bad gas prices already are, ahead of the July 1 increase.

AAA reports today that the national average price for a gallon of regular gas is \$3.144; mid-grade is \$3.629; premium is \$3.984 and diesel is \$3.516.

AAA gas prices June 4, 2025. (Photo: AAA.com)

California's average price for a gallon of regular gas is \$4.747; mid-grade is \$4.969; premium is \$5.141 and diesel is \$5.073. The highest gas prices in California are in Humboldt and Mono Counties at \$5.507 and \$5.922.

AAA CA gas prices June 4, 2025. (Photo: AAA.com)

Even the average gas price in California is higher than Hawaii, which has to tanker ship in all gas.

Mississippi's average gas price per gallon is \$2.648.

Kansas's average gas price per gallon is \$2.880.

South Carolina's average gas price per gallon is \$2.778.

Texas's average gas price per gallon is \$2.747.

Florida's average gas price per gallon is \$3.020.

Virginia's average gas price per gallon is \$2.937.

Ohio's average gas price per gallon is \$3.057.

Gov. Newsom, the Legislature and State Air Resources Board have been working hand in glove to restrict the availability of oil and gas and increase the cost of gas at the pump so severely, middle class and working class drivers will be making choices between groceries and fuel for the car.

California's cap and trade program will expire in 2030. The CARB devised the cap-and-trade system whereby it holds a quarterly auction program requiring selected California employers to bid significant amounts of money for the privilege of continuing to operate in the state and "pollute" — or be faced with closing their doors.

California's cap-and-trade program places a "cap" on aggregate greenhouse gas emissions from businesses and utilities deemed "polluters" by the California Air Resources Board, which the CARB says are responsible for most of the state's greenhouse gas emissions.

California's Progressive political elite hate fossil fuels so much they are willing to impoverish their citizens to punish "Big Oil" and speed up a transition to an even more expensive green energy future.

A recent study by Michael A. Mische at the University of Southern California highlights the looming affordability crisis, finding that the closure of Phillips 66 and Valero refineries will slash California's refining capacity by 21 percent by 2026, potentially driving prices to \$7.35 – \$8.44 per gallon, the Globe reported recently.

Newsom and the other green energy devotees in the legislature are always quick to blame the oil industry for price gouging or financial trickery every time gas prices go up, and every few years they announce another commission to study what the greedy corporations are doing to make our gas so expensive.

But California's gas prices, the highest in the nation at \$4.747 as of June 4, 2025, are a direct result of the state's own policies, not corporate greed.

California's Oligarchy

California politics is a family business.

June 5, 2025 by Daniel Greenfield

“It is an American oligarchy,” Gov. Gavin Newsom accused the Trump administration.

But it's California's Democrat elite who much more closely resemble an oligarchy. Take Gov. Newsom, the son of Judge William Alfred Newsom III a friend and lawyer of the Getty clan, whose father Newsom II had been a crooked political machine man who financed and ran future Gov. Pat Brown's campaign. Gov. Pat Brown held down two terms in office. His son, Gov. Jerry Brown also held two terms and his daughter, Kathleen Brown became the State Treasurer.

Newsom II's daughter, Barbara Newsom-Pelosi, married Ron Pelosi, the brother of former Speaker Nancy Pelosi's husband, a member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors for twelve years. Newsom III, Gavin's dad, and Ron Pelosi both ran for state senate. And Rep. Nancy Pelosi is the daughter of Thomas D'Alesandro Jr, a congressman and the 41st mayor of Baltimore and the sister of Thomas D'Alesandro III, the 44th mayor of Baltimore.

The Newsom-Pelosi families made a good deal of their money from a crooked arrangement with Gov. Pat Brown's administration in which Newsom II and John Pelosi, Nancy's father-in-law, partnered together on a former 1960 Winter Olympics site that was summed up as California “paying for everything and getting nothing.” Pat's son Jerry then appointed Gavin's father to a judgeship and Gavin later replaced Brown as governor of California.

Democracy might be the formal identity of the state's political system and the party that dominates it, but it's as inappropriate a term when applied to California politics as it is when applied to North Korea. California isn't a democracy: it's much more aptly an oligarchy.

The convoluted relationship of the Newsom and Pelosi families is all too typical in California and is filled with enough drama to make up a dozen seasons of a Mexican soap opera.

Take the Calderon family. Assemblyman Tom Calderon passed the seat on to his brother Ron. Sen. Ron Calderon later joined his brother Sen. Charles Calderon, a former assemblyman who became a state senator, in the state senate. Ron and Tom were busted by the FBI on various bribery charges. Former Sen. Charles Calderon's son Ian then served in the State Assembly. He was in turn replaced by Charles' wife, Lisa Calderon, and Ian's stepmother, who had formerly worked for Willie Brown.

Sen. Ron Calderon, who had formerly chaired the Senate Insurance Commission, was replaced by Sen. Susan Rubio, a former illegal alien also reportedly also under federal investigation. Susan used to be married to former Assemblyman Roger Hernandez. Then Susan accused Roger of domestic abuse and while his political career collapsed, in a move worthy of the Borgias, her sister, Blanca, stepped coolly and neatly into Roger's old seat.

Former State Sen. Mark Ridley Thomas, a Mayor Karen Bass crony, was found guilty in a bribery and fraud scheme on behalf of his son, former Assemblyman Sebastian Ridley-Thomas who had been forced to resign after sexual harassment complaints.

"Yes, having a parent can help significantly open doors, but you have to be able to walk through those doors," Sebastian Ridley-Thomas had claimed.

By some estimates, 10% of California's legislators are family members of other legislators so it seems as if quite a few sons, daughters and spouses (Assemblywoman Mia Bonta is the wife of Attorney General Rob Bonta who was a former member of the Assembly), not to mention sisters and brothers, nephews and nieces, along with sons-in-law keep walking through that open door.

Take State Sen. Dave Cortese who is the son of Assemblyman Dominic Cortese.

Or take the Papan and Mullin families in San Francisco. After the district was held by Assemblyman Lou Papan 'the Dean of the Assembly' and Assemblyman Gene Mullin, the district went to Kevin Mullin, Gene's son, who was then succeeded by Diane Papan, Lou's daughter. This is a level of political incest that the Hapsburgs might have been ashamed of.

Then head on over to Fresno where Assemblyman Joaquin Arambula, the son of Assemblyman Juan Arambula who held the same district, survived a trial on charges of wilful cruelty to a child. Arambula II had replaced Assemblyman Henry Perea whose father Henry R. Perea was a member of Fresno's Board of Supervisors.

Last year, a local news outlet celebrated the fact that three members of Assemblywoman Esmeralda Soria's family were running for various offices. "Four Valley Siblings Running for Office. Are the Sorias a California Political Dynasty in the Making?" the headline cheered, claiming that the Sorias are "living the American Dream." This seems less like the American Dream and more like the California of the old Dons dominated by powerful clans.

California Democrats don't have a democracy, from the top on down, they have an oligarchy run by clans with longstanding relationships where family members rise to political power. Or as the Los Angeles Times summed up the transition from Gov. Jerry Brown to Gov. Gavin Newsom, "Brown and Newsom are members of a political fraternity that dominated their shared hometown of San Francisco for much of the 20th century."

And as the Pelosi and Newsom clans remind us, California's oligarchy doesn't stay in California.

Some may remember the pre-9/11 scandal that engulfed Congressman Gary Condit over the disappearance of an intern he had been having an affair with. While Rep. Gary Condit's career ended, his son Chad ran unsuccessfully for office, a number of his grandsons have gone into politics, and his son-in-law Rep. Adam Gray is now in Congress. Sometimes having a different last name helps.

No amount of scandals or sleaze stops California's political clans. They may skip a generation, but they always rebound because their power comes from powerful families, not the people.

What does California's future hold? Almost certainly more incestuous political oligarchy.

And the ultimate pureblooded dynastic heir of California oligarchy may be California Speaker Pro Tempore Josh Lowenthal. Josh's father, Alan Lowenthal was the former assembly member, state senator and Congressman Alan Lowenthal, while his mother was Assemblywoman Bonnie Lowenthal. With that kind of pedigree, whoever his children are, they will inherit California.

Unless a Newsom or a Pelosi gets in there first.

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**Representative Salud Carbal
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