



COLAB
San Luis Obispo County

The Coalition of Labor Agriculture and Business

Weekly Update
May 11 - 18, 2026

New Homes for San Miguel

The May 5 San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors meeting included a few data dense items and a test of support for a builder/developer offering a housing tract that promises new homes in a community that desperately wants the project.

Item 36, the last but not the least item on the agenda was an appeal to the building permit granted for a project in the northeast part of San Miguel. The parcel borders the Salinas River and was at one time an airport. The project seeks to subdivide a 43.26 gross acre parcel into a Cluster Subdivision/Planned Unit Development consisting of 181 residential parcels of varying sizes, configurations, and housing types, approximately 3.8 acres of commercial development, 3 utility parcels, and approximately 12 acres of park and open space for a total of 190 parcels along with various onsite and offsite improvements. The project includes a request for 1 concession under California Density Bonus Law (California Government Code Sections 65915) in exchange for including moderate-income affordable housing.



An aerial photo showing the boundaries of the project.

The appeal was based on seven points of contention, none of which warranted an overturn. Some, such as issue number three expressing concern for the fate of fairy shrimp, were pure hogwash. There is no evidence that fairy shrimp ever lived on the property. Nor were there any manatees, water buffalo, elephants, giraffes or gray whales. No snail darters either.

The appeals process is an important part of the planning process. It protects against subjectivity and cronyism. So, why criticize appeals premised on baseless accusations? This appeal, like all other (non-coastal zone) appeals, cost SLO County taxpayers between \$8 – 13,000. The appellants were only charged \$2,000. It was a cheap gamble to try to stop a project to which very few objected. Yet, the rest of us pay the bulk of the unnecessary work done by county staff - that could be doing something more productive instead.

Here are each of the issues raised by the appellant, and the staff response:

Appeal Issue 1: Water Service

| Appellant States: | Staff Response: |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• On-site wells in PRGWB• Violates 2019 prescriptive water rights Court Order• Required Water conservation/offsetting• Insufficient SMCSO Wastewater Treatment Facility capacity | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• PRGWB Ordinance does not apply in San Miguel URL• Court Order is not applicable• Conservation/offsetting requirements do not apply• SMCSO authorization required for each phase |

Appeal Issue 2: Traffic/Circulation Impacts

| Appellant states: | Staff Response: |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Traffic study conclusions are highly questionable• Capacity concerns regarding N. River Road bridge | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Project's traffic study was conducted consistently with County policy• Third-party verified• Traffic will not exceed capacity thresholds, inclusive of bridge• Required to pay RIF for community roadway improvements |

Appeal Issue 3: Federally Threatened Species (Fairy Shrimp) Impacts

| Appellant States: | Staff Response: |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fairy Shrimp habitat (vernal pools) should have been surveyed for this project | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2016 EIR concluded no potential for occurrence of the species on-site• 2021 biological resources assessment concluded no observable or expected habitat on-site |

Appeal Issue 4: Fire Suppression

| Appellant States: | Staff Response: |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The project is in an area with limited fire suppression capability and extremely limited evacuation paths | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• SMCS-D-Fire reviewed the project and included conditions of approval• COA #31 requires SMCS-D-Fire clearance prior to the recordation of each phase |

Appeal Issue 5: Soil Contamination

| Appellant States: | Staff Response: |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Potential for soil and groundwater contamination due to previous on-site use (airfield) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Applicant submitted:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment and• Phase 2 Limited Subsurface Investigation• Studies concluded no known contaminants on-site and further investigation is not warranted |

Appeal Issue 6: Various Findings & Conditions Concerns

| Appellant states: | Staff Response: |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Multiple Findings and Conditions are questionable or raise concern | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inadequate evidence was presented to warrant revisions• Clarifying additions made to Finding F, COA #29, and COA #30 |

Appeal Issue 7: Project's Environmental Determination

| Appellant states: | Staff Response: |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• SMCPU certified EIR from 2016 is outdated• This project presents substantial new information not previously known | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The project was designed to conform with SMCPU• Staff analyzed project for consistency with SMCPU and adopted EIR, found consistent• No substantial new data indicating increased impacts were presented• Project received Conditional Will-Serve Letter from the SMCS-D• Applicable 2016 EIR mitigation measures have been carried forward as conditions of approval |

It wouldn't have taken much research or conversation to clarify the reality associated with each of the claims. If the appellant had bothered to understand how each of the concerns would be answered, perhaps this colossal waste of time and money wouldn't have been necessary.

In the end, staff recommendations were adopted with some fine tuning regarding memorializing details such as a dedicated fallowing of a vineyard for water offset and conditions with the Environmental Impact Report.

The staff recommendations are as follows:

Staff recommends that the Board:

- Find that the project does not require additional environmental review pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15183 because the project's development is consistent with the San Miguel Community Plan, for which an Environmental Impact Report was previously certified.
- Adopt the resolution to deny the appeal of Scott Raven and uphold the decision of the Planning Commission to approve the Phased Vesting Tentative Tract Map and Conditional Use Permit (N-SUB2022-00047) based on the Findings and the Conditions of Approval set forth in Attachment 2.

Final disposition of the appeal was continued until the June 2 BoS meeting, but it looks quite likely that the project will move forward.

Some political candidates are making a lot of silly fuss recently about how awful and downright horrible developers are. The inference is that they are so terrible that they shouldn't be trusted to participate in our political process.

Are Developers Bad People, or are Candidates Desperate?

Some candidates currently running for office are attempting to convince voters that support from developer/builders is a bad thing. They infer that support from builders/developers is somehow dirty politics. They suggest that there is something bad, awful, even horrible with developer/builders.

After all, who needs developers? All they do is build our homes, the schools our children attend, the stores where we buy our food and the hospitals we try to avoid but are happy to see when needed.

Developer/builders tend to be very active in the community, often contributing philanthropic support for a wide variety of local organizations. They incur great financial risk with so many of their projects and frequently don't see returns on their investments for several years. They employ all sorts of trades people. They buy materials from local suppliers. Most important, they have a vision of how to build needed projects, the patience and ability to navigate the many hurdles to completing those projects and the desire to provide a product that pleases the community.

When candidates and politicians criticize the involvement of developers' participation in local politics, they create the false image that developers must be bad. The natural next assumption is that if developer/builders are bad then development must also be bad. Yet, most of the very same politicians yammer on all day long about our local need for housing.

A favorite term used by some of our politicians is "non-profit builder". In their mind, such a builder is somehow exempt from the bad juju of a regular developer/builder.

To be clear, non-profit builders are great and provide a much-needed service to a particularly challenging very low-income housing market. But, they are developers, nonetheless.

There is another inference to the critical view of developers by some politicians. It suggests that elected officials are making land use decisions and if they receive support from developers, their judgment might be swayed. First, if that is the case, shame on the elected official. Second, if it's a problem with developers/builders, why isn't it a problem with labor unions, chambers of commerce or environmental groups?

Building something - anything in San Luis Obispo County involves overcoming a plethora of impediments. One of the biggest is the attitude that a builder/developer

is somehow doing something wrong. This plays out from the first visit to a planning commission counter to begin the process (as noted in the recent KPMG audit) all the way through hearings, inspections and final sign off. It's a wonder that builder/developers put up with it, and it's no surprise that so many have moved to other forms of building where they can focus on productivity rather than confrontation.

When the public is told that developer/builders are bad, their level of NIMBYism grows. Who would want one of those disgraceful builder/developers working nearby? When a project comes along in their community, it gets cast in that bad light and resistance kicks in.

With an enormous housing shortage in San Luis Obispo County, and lots of other challenges to meeting our housing needs, the last thing we should see is political driven resistance.

Singling out one legitimate profession and castigating the people in that profession as somehow being untrustworthy or inappropriate for participation in our elections process is unwise. It really says more about the accuser, but it also twists the truth and ignores so many important attributes.

The small mindedness of criticizing the free and lawful participation of developer/builders is harmful and unproductive. It is an undeserved insult to builder/developers and it is essentially an admission of guilt by the accuser that he or she is vulnerable to influence from certain segments of our society. Instead of making baseless accusations and insinuations, perhaps the accuser should spend more time understanding developer/builders – especially the challenges that they overcome to be successful and the contributions that they make to all of our daily lives.

Pointing fingers, making baseless insinuations and allowing one's personal biases justify discrimination against any lawful segment of our society is a simple display of desperation. Candidates should stand on their own merit. If they need to rely on empty insulations about their opponent, they do not deserve to serve.

Hiring and Keeping County Employees

Our county currently employs 2,653 people, making it the largest local employer. We know this because a state law, AB 2561, requires counties to report annually on the status of their employee inventory. The bill is designed to empower workforce bargaining units as they negotiate salary and benefits for their members.

Here is an illustration of how the law works:

AB 2561 General Requirements



The May 5 report didn't mention the average salary, but we know that many employees make well north of \$150,000 per year – and that's before benefits. Certainly, a fair number make far less than that. If we assumed a median average of \$100,000 salary, that would equate to over \$265,000,000 in employee expenses, and that doesn't include health and pension packages. That, against a \$1 billion county budget.

Here are some interesting statistics about the workforce:



43.5% 56.4%



42
Median Age
(47 in 2015)



40.6% Non-White
Ethnic Origin
(38% in year 2024)



6.6 Years
Median Time in Service
(8.98 years in 2014)



73.1% Tier 3
Pension Status
(61.5% in 2023)

Because the cost of living in SLO county is so high, largely due to housing costs, recruiting qualified employees is a challenge. Interviewing quality perspective candidates often ends up with the ideal person declining because they can make their salary go much further in other parts of the state.

Retaining good employees is equally difficult for the same reason. Here are some of the steps towards employee retention:

 Competitive wages and benefits

 Improved job specifications

 Flexible/alternative work schedules

 Learning and development opportunities

 Family Friendly Workplace

 Career mobility

It is a confounding situation. On one hand, we want to interact with qualified and able people when county business is done. On the other hand, when county staff salaries exceed local median salaries, it makes people wonder who is working for whom? Many feel that the county workforce is overgrown and that some staff products are simply make-work justifications for their position.

Can You Hear Me?

Change is coming to the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors meeting format. A bill passed last year in the state legislature, AB 707 requires that members of the public wishing to participate and comment (at appropriate times) during a Board of Supervisors meeting have access via remote connection.

Here are the details of the legislation:

- Enacted into law in 2025
- Substantive amendments to the Brown Act effective July 1, 2026
- Mandates virtual access for Board meetings
- Requires people attending virtually to be provided “the same time allotment as persons attending in person.”

The following additional requirements also apply:

- Requires the Board prior to July 1, 2026, to adopt a policy establishing procedures for recessing and reconvening the meeting in the event of a disruption in internet service.
- If there is a disruption in internet service, cannot reconvene unless: (1) service is restored; or (2) at least one hour has elapsed and the Board makes a finding that good faith efforts have been made and the public interest in continuing the meeting outweighs the interest in remote public access.
- Also requires certain translation services which do not apply to the County of San Luis Obispo
- Requires online agenda information to:
 - Explain the public meeting process;
 - The process for virtual attendance; and
 - A calendar of meeting dates, times and location
- Must make reasonable efforts to invite non-English speaking groups
- Must make certain accommodations for translators

The logistics of including teleconferencing at board meetings are complicated. An expenditure of nearly a quarter of a million dollars was approved for technical equipment support. Item 17 on the agenda read:

Request to: 1) approve the creation of a project (WBS 360046) in Fund Center (FC) 266 - Countywide Automation Replacement to acquire and install updated audiovisual (AV) equipment in select conference rooms within the Katcho Achadjian Government Center to support efficient and effective meetings and 2) approve a corresponding budget adjustment to transfer \$209,807 in available funds from the Board Chambers Audiovisual Upgrade project (WBS 360032) and \$26,367 from FC 266 – Countywide Automation Reserve to the Conference Room AV project (WBS 360046), by 4/5 vote.

We wonder what such a huge chunk of Other People’s Money buys and whether it was completely necessary, but welcome the opportunity for greater participation from the public.

Concern was raised about the potential for inappropriate presentations. This is based on past problems where pornographic presentations, foul language and off topic ranting has occurred. The policy adopted by our BOS will allow for teleconferencing but not zoom. Commenters will have the same time limits and be expected to abide by the same rules as in-person speakers.

The complete formal rules can be found at the following address:

<https://agenda.slocounty.ca.gov/iip/sanluisobispo/file/getfile/177617>

Driving from the far corners of the county, paying to park and sitting through hours of meeting business just to make a three-minute remark is discouraging. This accommodation will make it much easier for people with disabilities and people who need to travel long distances to participate.

We will publish the details of how to engage via telephone as soon as they are available.

A Timely, Bold and Innovative Idea?

As the May 5 Board of Supervisors meeting was concluding, Supervisor Paulding made a request of staff to explore funding support for additional spending on transportation by the county.

We couldn't agree more that the county should be putting more resources into transportation. However, there are a few curious points about Paulding's request:

The first is that he was part of the board shift in priorities that reduced the focus on transportation. Is he willing to admit that was a mistake?

Second, he has recently claimed that the Board continues to prioritize transportation, citing the funding for storm damage repair and highlighting the whole six million dollars that the Board commits to transportation projects annually (without ever including cost of living increases).

Third, we will likely have a half-cent sales tax measure for transportation funding on the November ballot. Is he proposing additional funding on top of that, even if it passes?

Fourth, he didn't make it clear whether he proposes supplanting funding already within the budget for other things or whether he wants to see new revenue sources (taxes).

Fifth, he didn't say if transportation funds should go to bike paths and public transit projects or whether it should go for roads. Why not?

Sixth, why make such a request now? Does his re-election campaign have anything to do with it? Will we see campaign ads and flyers touting his deep-rooted support for transportation?

We hope that somehow Paulding has had an epiphany and now believes that more of our tax dollars should be spent on our roads. You be the judge.

The Never Ending Fee Increases

Fees, much like bridge tools and most taxes, always seem to increase over time. The cost of doing business with San Luis Obispo County is no different.

In November of 2025, the BoS reviewed and approved a wide variety of fee increases designed to recover the full cost of providing services. However, the Board requested that 16 of those fees be reviewed.

Two of those were for land conservation, and the original proposed fee was reduced as follows:

| Agricultural Preserve Fees | | | | |
|----------------------------|---|---------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| Fee Indicator No. | Fee Detail | FY 25/26 Fee Amount | FY 26-27 Previously Introduced Fee Amount | FY 26-27 Revised Proposed Fee Amount |
| 1003 | Agricultural Preserve - Application for Land Conservation Contract (New, Replacement, or Amendment) | \$2,336 | \$8,487 | \$5,539 |
| 1007 | Agricultural Preserve - Williamson Act Land Conservation Contract - Compliance Review with APRC Hearing/Referral Response | \$925 | \$5,017 | \$1,607 |

There was never an explanation about why land conservation permit proposals were so high, and even the lower amounts seem expensive. The following six land use fees were all increased from original proposals based on reviews of actual time involved for the production of the related work:

| Land Use Fees - Fixed Fees (Previously Categorized as a Deposit Fee) | | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Fee Indicator No. | Fee Detail | FY 25-26 Current Fee Amount | FY 26-27 Previously Introduced Deposit Amount | *Revised* FY 26-27 Proposed Fee Amount |
| 1204 | Substantial Conformance Determination | N/A - Consolidation (\$1,368 - \$2,656) | \$2,000 | \$2,733 |
| 1702 | Lot Line Adjustment - Minor | \$3,406 | \$4,000 | \$4,079 |
| 1708 | Urban Lot Split | \$1,953 | \$4,000 | \$5,809 |
| 1810 | Site Plan | \$3,174 | \$4,000 | \$4,431 |
| 2705 | Focused Initial Review | N/A - new fee | \$4,000 | \$5,471 |
| 2801 | Technical Study / Peer Review | N/A - Consolidation (\$562 - \$3,344) | \$2,000 | \$3,541 |

Land use deposit fees were also revised. The deposits are used against what is called Full Cost Recovery which involves staff logging the actual time put into a project and billing for that time. Most deposits were lowered and a vigorous discussion of how to keep staff time as productive and predictable as possible took place. Here is a list of those deposits:

| Land Use Fees – Deposit Based Billing | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Fee Indicator No. | Fee Detail | FY 25-26 Current Fee Schedule Amount | FY 26-27 Proposed Deposit Amount | FY 26-27 Average Fee at Cost |
| 1202 | Amendment to Approved Land Use Permit / Subdivision - RTB Deposit | \$7,898 | \$4,000 | \$9,943 |
| 1410 | Condition Compliance / Mitigation Monitoring - RTB Deposit | N/A – Consolidation (\$1,076 - \$1,801) | \$2,000 | \$3,933 |
| 1703 | Lot Line Adjustment - Major - RTB Deposit | \$5,387 | \$4,000 | \$10,503 |
| 1705 | Parcel Map - RTB Deposit | \$10,756 | \$8,000* | \$14,088 |
| 1707 | Tract Map - RTB Deposit | \$12,126 | \$8,000* | \$17,567 |
| 1802 | Conditional Use Permit / Development Permit - RTB Deposit | \$8,005 | \$8,000* | \$14,785 |
| 1808 | Minor Use Permit - RTB Deposit | \$4,933 | \$4,000 | \$9,602 |
| 812 | Variance - RTB Deposit | \$10,740 | \$8,000* | \$11,985 |

*Several of the deposits above were reduced to \$8,000 vs. \$10,000. Those have the * above.*

In addition to revising current fees, a New Building Fee was added to the list:

| New Building Fee | | | |
|-------------------|--------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Fee Indicator No. | Fee Detail | FY 25-26 Current Fee Amount | FY 26-27 Proposed Fee Amount |
| 3758 | Reinspection | N/A – New Fee | \$160 |

We appreciate the review of the fees, and we support the idea of not charging all taxpayers for single use project costs, but it is a little confounding to know that we pay taxes to have a county government that includes a Planning and Building Department – yet when we use the services of that department we are charged for their time.

Now is Your Chance to Make a Difference

Now is the time to help the candidates of your choice get elected. You can make an important difference with just a little of your time. Below is a list of websites for the top races in the county. If you are inspired by other candidates, their contact information shouldn't be hard to find. Each of the political parties also have websites with information about how you can get involved and which candidates they have endorsed.

verinforsupervisor.com

<https://verinforsupervisor.com>

jimmypaulding.org

<https://jimmypaulding.org>

woodyforsupervisor.com

<https://www.woodyforsupervisor.com>

jimdantona.com

<https://jimdantona.com>

The two major parties also need help. Find them at:

rpsloc.org

<https://www.rpsloc.org>

slocdp.org

<https://www.slocdp.org>

Precinct walking is fun and valuable help. Assistance in headquarters is important. Financial contributions, even modest ones, are critical.

Help make Democracy great again by participating.

Last Week

Impractical Housing Policies Debated

Should we as a county subsidize very low-income housing? How could we do so, and who should pay?

These were key concepts at the April 21 San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors meeting as the last two agenda items were heard. The discussion started out with a yawn but ended with a somewhat spirited debate that beautifully framed up the philosophical differences between opposite ends of the Board's political spectrum.

The dichotomy became apparent during discussions about the last agenda item which read: Study session to consider the Study Scope options for Housing Element Implementation Phase 2 (Implementation Action 7 to streamline housing permitting and Implementation Action 8 to expand housing opportunity areas). (Planning and Building)

As the concept was studied and discussed between the Supervisors, a distinct difference of opinion arose between Supervisors Peschong and Gibson regarding setting priorities for the different categories of housing as outlined in the Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA).

Gibson wanted to instruct staff to put an emphasis on very low- and low-income housing as they proceeded in the development of a housing element that included incentives for new housing projects.

The most recent RHNA figures are illustrated in the following graph:

| Income Category | Number of Dwelling Units | | | Percent Completed |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| | Total Need | Permitted (2019-2025) | Remaining Need | |
| Very Low-Income | 801 | 7 | 794 | 1% |
| Low-Income | 505 | 279 | 226 | 55% |
| Moderate-Income | 585 | 301 | 284 | 51% |
| Above Moderate-Income | 1,365 | 1,228 | 137 | 90% |
| Total | 3,256 | 1,815 | 1,441 | 56% |

Supervisor Moreno pointed out that the RHNA report indicated we need housing on all levels and suggested that putting priority on one or two categories could come at a prohibitive cost to the other categories.

Peschong picked up the point and raised the issue of people in low and very low-income housing wanting to move up to higher level housing after a few years. They need choices, and when they make the move, their low-income abode opens up. He went on to note that very low and low-income housing is still quite expensive to build and not very attractive to investors. Gibson said that concept was Reaganesque, and he didn't appear to mean it in a positive manner. He clearly wants subsidized housing and even stated that he has no interest in million-dollar homes. He seemingly rejected market influences on housing in favor of policy regulated housing.

Supervisor Ortiz-Legg mentioned a creative concept of leveraging county owned land that is within some city limits as a means to finance housing in county territory. She also wondered why modular housing wasn't emphasized for better affordability.

In the nearly three hours of discussion about housing, with the central theme being affordability, the cost of county bureaucracy went almost entirely unmentioned. The expense, delays and subjectivity involved with our county building process certainly adds to the cost of housing.

However, the only efficiency ideas put forth was a system of incentives (aka subsidies) for new housing within a distance of a certain set of existing locations such as shopping or job centers. These areas were referred to as “key service areas” and at other times as “opportunity areas”.

While specific incentives were not detailed, mentions were made of density or height waivers and commercial infill in otherwise commercially zoned areas.

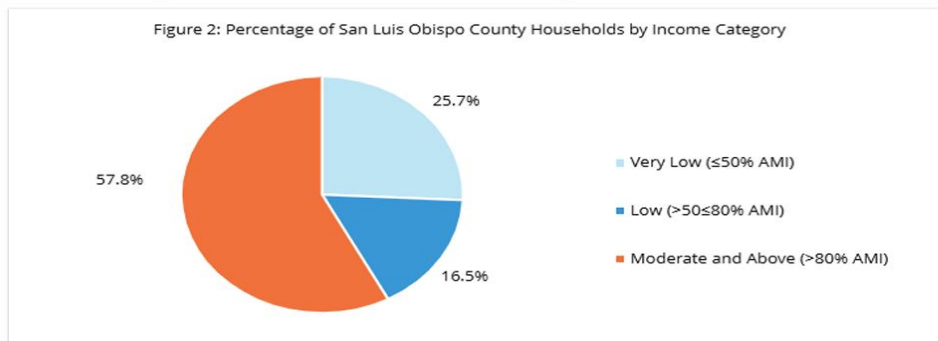
The following figures were used to illustrate the financial levels of home seekers in SLO County:

- Only 14% of households in the region can afford to purchase a median priced home
- Regional housing need of 3,256 dwelling units by 2028
 - Very low-income
 - Low-income
 - Moderate-income
 - Above moderate-income
- 58% of new dwelling units need to be affordable to households of moderate income or lower

| Income Category | Definition | Example Housing Types |
|-----------------|-------------|--|
| Very Low-Income | ≤ 50% AMI | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guaranteed Affordable Housing: Single-Family and Multi-Family Dwellings |
| Low-Income | 51-80% AMI | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guaranteed Affordable Housing: Single-Family and Multi-Family Dwellings • ADUs, Manufactured/Mobile Homes |
| Moderate-Income | 81-120% AMI | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guaranteed Affordable: Single-Family and Multi-Family Dwellings • ADUs, Manufactured/Mobile Homes |

Reference: Area Median Income (AMI) is \$125,600 for 4-person household

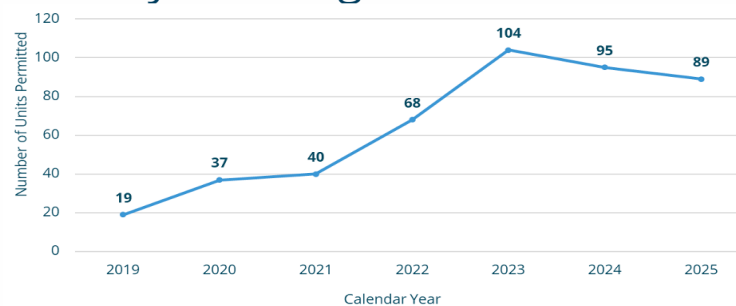
County Households by Income Category



Source: 2018-2022 5-Year Period ACS Estimates for San Luis Obispo County

The county has been counting additional Dwelling Unit (ADU) construction as progress towards very low and low-income housing but can no longer do so until a new market study is performed to better define the role of ADUs in local housing needs. The following graph illustrates ADU construction in county territory:

Accessory Dwelling Production



We have no problems with ADUs, but we note that ADUs might not be the panacea that some hope they are. How often are ADUs built as dance studios, remote offices or workshops? How often are they used for relatives, for guest houses or as vacation rentals? Isn't assuming that most ADUs are built to provide low income housing a bit naive? Plus, when an ADU is added, it usually results in higher values for the property.

So, getting a little less vague about incentives, the following suggestions were made by staff:

Part III: Regional Housing Incentive Program (RHIP)

Dual Approach

- **General Supply-side:** a long-term approach to increase housing supply across all income levels
- **Guaranteed affordable housing:** a near-term approach to increase housing supply to moderate-and-below-income levels
 - Closing the funding gap for affordable housing projects
 - Local fund needed for 750 pipeline affordable housing units (~300 in unincorporated county)

Closing the gap sounds quaint until it ain't. Nobody stepped up with details about how to close what seems like an enormous (and expensive) gap. The only details offered were these:

Local Funding Option: RHIP & Regional Housing Fund

- Development incentives in exchange for voluntarily building very low-income housing or paying in-lieu fees
- \$1 of County contribution → over \$9 of additional contributions/ tax credits
- New funding source for affordable housing projects – bridge local funding gap for non-profit builders
- Active as of December 2025

The following housing policies (called elements) have been adopted so far:

Part IV: Housing Element Implementation

- Phase 1 – near term actions completed in 2025
 - Action 01 – Encourage Multi-Family Development
 - Action 02 – Establish Regional Housing Incentive Program
 - Action 04 – Encourage Accessory Dwellings
 - Action 05 – Expand Density Bonus Program
- **Phase 2 – long term actions in progress**
 - Action 07 – Streamline Housing Permitting
 - Action 08 – Expand Housing Opportunity Areas

The next round (or phase) of policies (or elements) are being done under the catchy sobriquet “Placemaking” which could seemingly mean almost anything to anybody. Here, it means housing under conditional and somewhat unconventional policies:

Phase 2 Target Outcome – Placemaking

*Identify areas in the unincorporated county that “**make sense**” for more housing to be built while facilitating **livability** and **affordability** through a straightforward permitting process and addressing State regulations*

*Where are the most **viable locations for increased housing opportunities** that would better support current and future residents and workers, resource stability, and economic possibilities?*



Geographical Study Areas

*How could the **design of housing projects reflect community** identity, history, and heritage?*



Level of Community Design Engagement

*What **scale of housing projects** could be eligible for straightforward permitting?*



Straightforward Permitting Pathways

Of the next step recommendations from staff, the BoS chose a complicated mish mash of ideas that modified option two:

“Next Steps” Options for Board Direction

- Option 1: Utilize community engagement process to narrow scope and return to Board with recommendation on scope
- **Option 2: Utilize Board-directed scope “guardrails” as guidance during community engagement process and return to Board with recommendation on scope**
- Option 3: Conduct additional study session(s) to determine Board-directed scope “guardrails”

We are left with many questions including:

-If you can “streamline the permit process” for some projects, why not all?

-If you can make things more attractive for housing in “Key Service and Opportunity Areas”, why can’t you do so for all?

-When you say “close the funding gap, why not be more transparent (truthful, accurate) and call it subsidies?

-Why not be upfront about where subsidies would come from and what that would do to the cost of housing that is not subsidized?

-Why is low-cost housing so much more expensive here than other parts of the state/country? What are the specific cost drivers?

-If new forms of subsidies aren’t highly likely, why is so much effort being put into plans that need them in order to work?

-How much money are these “funding gaps” that need to be filled? Where is the value to the taxpayer that provides the funding for such subsidies?

We are all paying the price for the shortage of housing in San Luis Obispo County. We pay it at retail, restaurants and services because employees need higher wages to be able to afford to live anywhere near where they work. We pay for it when making medical appointments for the same reason. We pay for it in our own housing costs because supply is short and demand is high.

That said, do we see a ground swell of support for new housing in our neighborhoods?

It is entirely possible that at the pace our BoS is going to address the issue, the problem may cure itself. Our resident population is heavily made up of retired seniors. That population may be impacted by attrition long before any real solutions are implemented.

A Healthy New Direction?

Dots have never been publicly connected, but the County Health Department is going through significant changes that follow the KPMG audit of a year ago.

Perhaps there are no dots to connect. We are unaware of any public suggestions of wrongdoing other than the findings of the KOMG audit that identified insufficiencies in billing management and some poor client service performances. Two big changes are underway, nonetheless.

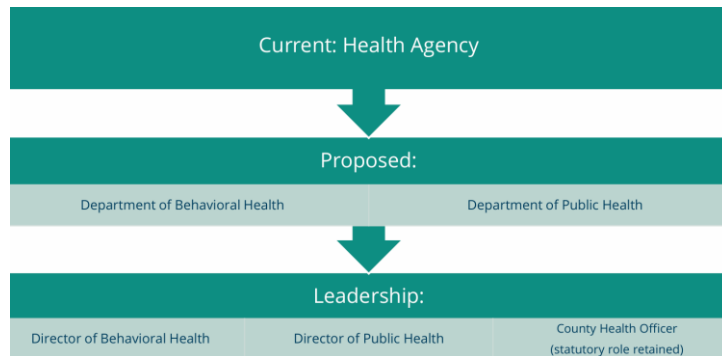
Dr. Penny Borenstein has announced that she will retire after 18 years of service as County Health Officer and Public Health Administrator, effective July 3, 2026, and the department will be split between Public Health and the new Behavioral Health.

The BoS is restructuring the functions to split out behavior health into its own department.

Item 35 on the agenda read: Introduction of ordinances to amend the County Code to restructure the Health Agency and establish the Department of Behavioral Health and the Department of Public Health, effective July 1, 2026; and create

department head positions for each new department. Hearing date is set for May 5, 2026. (Executive Office)

The following graphs illustrates the proposed changes and the steps required to implement such change:

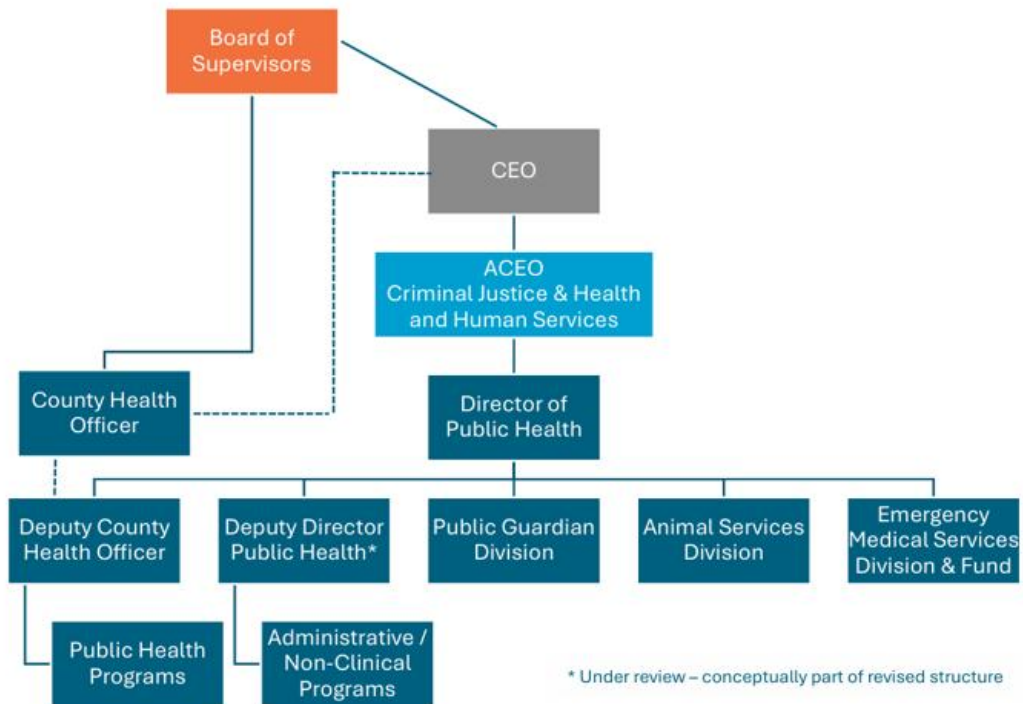


- ⊕ Eliminate Health Agency and related positions
- 🏥 Establish Department of Public Health
- 🧠 Convert Behavioral Health Division to Department
- 🏢 Update leadership titles and reporting structure
- 🐾 Reassign Animal Services and Public Guardian to Public Health
- ✓ Align all references in County Code

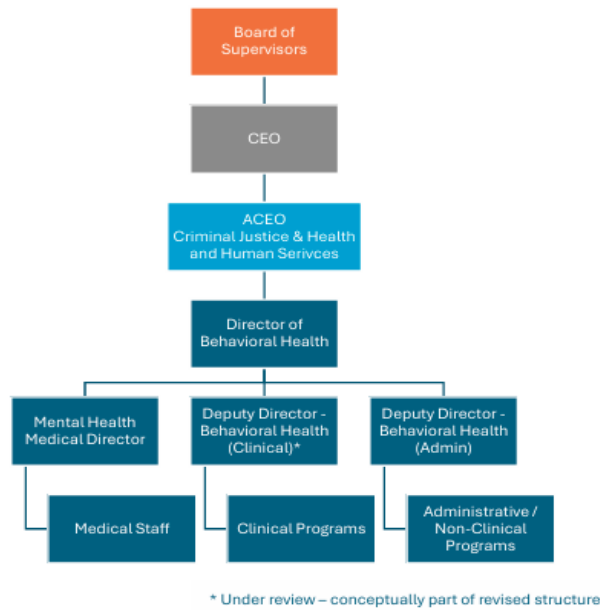
The shift to the new system is designed to occur without interruption to current services:

- ⊕ No disruption to services
- 🏥 No change to public access
- 🧠 Programs and staff continue operating as is
- 🏢 Changes are primarily structural and administrative

Here is the proposed organizational chart for the newly structured Department of Public Health:



And here is the new Department of Behavioral Health:



We trust that the changes set forth in this reorganization amount to more than just “rearranging the deck chairs”. The largest portion of our county budget is

dedicated to Health and Human Services. Finding ways to cut costs as well as providing more effective services will make a significant difference.

Cue the Trombone for one Transportation Sales Tax Measure

The effort to create a half cent sales tax measure for the November ballot has taken a dramatic turn. Earlier this year, with less than promising poll numbers, the San Luis Obispo Council of Governments (SLOCOG) effort got an additional bite at the apple with the independent creation of a “citizen” signature drive to put the same measure on the same ballot.

The difference was that since the SLOCOG measure was government driven; it would require a two-thirds vote to pass. The citizen measure would only need a simple majority.

At stake are potentially hundreds of millions of dollars in state grants that become available when a county establishes such a tax resulting in the county becoming a “self-help county”. Many state grants for transportation are available only to self-help counties.

With polling numbers in the mid to high 50% range for the SLOCOG effort, a group of local business leaders formed “Better Roads for All” and chose to pursue the signature gathering campaign necessary to qualify the measure via the citizen method. Funds were raised and the signature gathering began. Just about when the campaign was closing in on the final signatures needed (12,400), it was discovered that the petitions lacked a piece of required disclosure. This oversight created a legal liability that would have invited all kinds of challenges and would have put the measure in jeopardy.

The Better Roads for All Committee did the right thing and withdrew their campaign. This still leaves the question of whether the SLOCOG measure will proceed despite less than promising poll numbers.

Whether you support the sales tax or oppose it, this was a sad outcome in several ways. First, the funding was substantial. It could have been so very useful in

support of candidates who would put transportation back on the priority list for our county, or for candidates who would go to Sacramento to change the extortion like self-help program.

It's also sad that a professional consulting firm made such an oversight. Ballot measures have become big business in the political world. Qualifying this measure would have probably cost around \$400,000 – possibly more. We don't yet know how much was actually spent, and whether refunds are in order. After qualifying, the advocacy campaign would have begun, with a significant cost as well.

Most statewide measures are costing multiples of millions of dollars. Many are craftily written to obscure the actual outcome or contain hidden aspects that are never disclosed to voters. Who can forget the gas tax measure where if one opposed the tax, they voted yes when supporters were asked to vote no?

We expect more details will emerge in the coming weeks about what happened to the citizens measure, as well as whether the SLOCOG measure will be put on the November ballot. In the meantime, our roads are deteriorating while some County Supervisors brag about continuing to commit a whole \$6 million per year to transportation projects.

Building a Better Bridge

The Cecchetti crossing was never a bridge, but it is now. Prior to being washed out from the 2023 storms, it was a culvert crossing. Fish and Wildlife regulations require that it could only be replaced with a real bridge that facilitates improved survival of the creatures that live in the creek.

The bridge story gets complicated with FEMA funding and the necessary permitting – all leading to delays and frustration for the residents living nearby. The new bridge is hopefully going to be built in 2027 or 2028.

Supervisor Jimmy Paulding, trying to do the right thing for his constituents, was able to secure \$250,000 at the last minute in the budget process for this year's budget to fund a temporary crossing. This was a last-minute request after everything else within the budget had been vetted and balanced.

A few months later, when the Department of Public Works started scoping the project, it became a \$700,000 plus project. Just as startling, it was disclosed that the temporary crossing would need to be removed during the rainy season.



Despite these revelations, Paulding came back to the Board requesting the additional funding. When that failed to get enough votes, Paulding worked with Public Works to find funding left over from a different project. Even though those funds would have been designated for other bridge repair projects that had already been approved, he was successful in getting the funds diverted to the Cecchetti temporary crossing.

Concerned about the high cost to taxpayers for a seasonal temporary crossing, Adam Verdin (running to represent the district on the BoS) worked with a local engineering firm to secure a better temporary bridge that would not need to be seasonally removed, and could be reused in future crossing needs at other sites after the permanent bridge is built.

While Paulding is taking bows for getting the temporary crossing in place, much credit is due to Verdin for the smart and creative solution that produces much greater value for taxpayers and nearby residents.

Verdin's solution is safer, doesn't cost extra taxpayer dollars to remove and reinstall each season and can be used in the future.

While we appreciate the practical aspects of Verdin's solution, we especially applaud the concept of looking for better ways to spend taxpayer funds. It's Other Peoples hard earned Money and should be spent with respect and reverence.

More Free Rider Waste of Taxpayer Funds

Yet another County Building Permit was appealed by the same folks in Los Osos that seem to appeal every permit granted. In this case, a family had purchased the lot many years ago and worked through voluminous red tape to qualify to build their dream home. The permit was granted in December of 2025 but was immediately appealed.

The BoS voted against the appeal in a 5 – 0 vote (just like most appeals from this group). No basis for any of the points of appeal was found. The appeal relied on the accusation that there were no services available to the lot, which was absurd. The services needed were obviously reviewed in the initial permit process and any casual observer of the process would know that a permit would not be granted otherwise. It appears quite obvious that the appellant was simply harassing the applicant.

Here is a summary of the appeal:

Appeal Issue Raised

- Lack of Services, Unsustainable Development, & Basin Overdraft

Staff Response

- GSWC Continue-to-Serve Letter
- Title 19 Retrofit to Build
- Consistent with Expected Development
- Not Subject to GMO

It's worth noting that each of these appeals costs the county between \$8,000 to over \$13,000. It costs the landowner thousands as well in preparation to answer the points of the appeal, and it costs them precious and expensive time.

Supervisor Moreno has attempted on several occasions to get the BoS to at least apply the same \$2,000 charge for an appeal in the coastal zone as it does to appeals in the rest of the county, but Supervisor Gibson has steadfastly refused this approach and convinced two of his colleagues of his position.

Perhaps a slightly different approach could be taken mirroring our courts system. If the appellant prevails, there is no cost, but if they lose, they are required to pay costs.

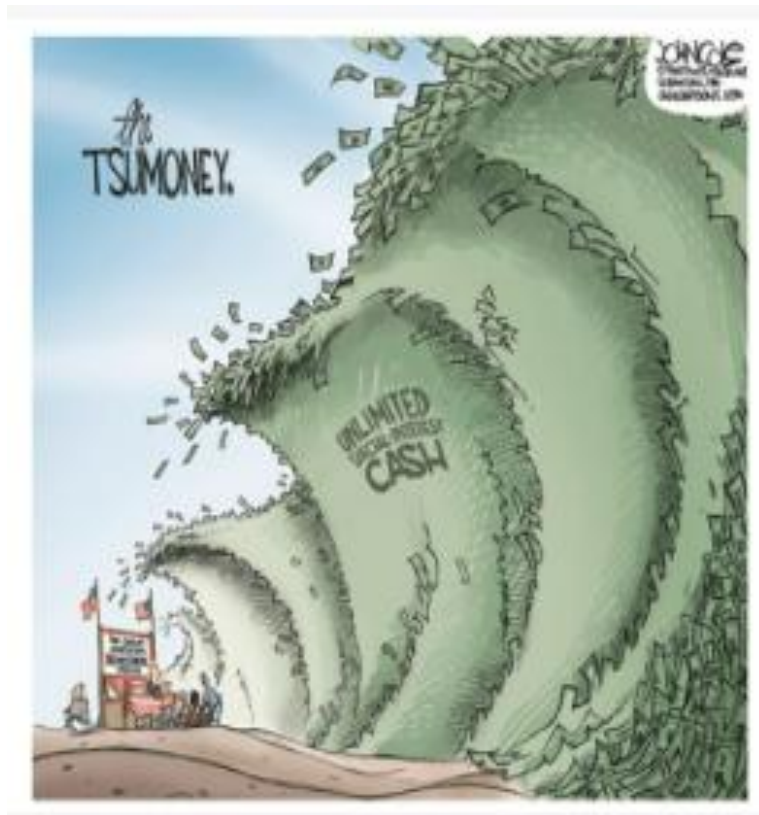
Uncovering Campaign Finance Coverups

Campaign season is shifting into high gear. With less than a month to go, and mail-in ballots already out, the pressure is on.

One tool that has become quite prevalent late in political campaigns is the independent expenditure committee (IE). This is a scheme for getting around campaign finance limits and accountability. It involves a small group of people who form a political action committee and raise funds independently from the candidates that they support.

There is a set of rules that IEs are supposed to follow, but they usually pop up late in the process and operate with little scrutiny. Theoretically, coordination - or any communication - with the candidate is forbidden. That said, it's an almost impossible rule to enforce. IEs commonly make outrageous claims with almost no accountability. They usually give themselves benevolent but vague names like "Good People for Good Government". IEs often put out negative hit pieces that either stretch the truth or outright lie. This gets the negative info out without making the benefiting candidate look bad.

When the spotlight is shone and the truth comes out (often too late), the benefiting candidate can simply shrug shoulders and claim to be completely unaware of who said what. IEs appear late and usually disappear the day after the election.



An individual donor is limited to a maximum amount that they can give directly to a candidates' campaign. However, that same donor can give a much greater or sometimes even an unlimited amount to benefit that same candidate through an IE.

Most campaign finance regulations are enforced by the California Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC), except for federal campaigns, which are regulated by the Federal Elections Commission (FEC).

One important thing that can be done to try to keep IEs in line is to enforce the rules when they are broken. Throw the book at those who try to get away with manipulating elections under the cover of semi-anonymity. When IEs break the rules, any honest candidate will call them out and ask that they cease their unlawful support while demanding that they play by the rules or not play at all. Honest candidates have nothing to fear from full disclosure of their supporters.

People who run IEs are supposed to know and follow the rules. When they don't abide by the rules, it is usually because they hope that nobody is watching close enough to notice.

If you see mailers or other materials from an IE, look closely. Question the intent and the veracity of the claims made and ask yourself why this isn't coming directly from the candidate's own campaign. Don't hesitate to file a complaint if you believe the rules are not being followed.



FPPC

<https://www.fppc.ca.gov>



FEC

<https://www.fec.gov>

Sweet Win for Musk

SpaceX is a constant source of amazement as they achieve new feats in the world of space exploration. Possibly more impressive, though, is their victory over the California Coastal Commission.

When the Commission weighed in on operations out of Vandenberg seeking to limit SpaceX launches due to the political views of CEO Elon Musk, they showed their true colors. Musk immediately filed suit and has achieved a settlement that includes a public apology and acknowledgement from commissioners that their political views interfered with their judgement.

Congratulations Mr. Musk. Shame on the commissioners for not doing the right thing and resigning. Shame on Governor Newsom for not immediately calling for resignations. Shame on mainstream media for not putting the spotlight on this situation.

This reflects very poorly on the Coastal Commission and puts all of their rulings in doubt.

As the Commission essentially admitted, they had no jurisdiction in the matter and had no evidence to indicate launches have an impact on our coast. Their focus was to inflict economic pain on Musk because of his support for Donald Trump.



Aside from the hundreds of other important impediments that would have resulted from the Coastal Commission's biased attempt to shut down SpaceX launches, our San Luis Obispo economy would have been harmed. We have a growing connection to the space industry and rely on the associated economic benefits.

The bias expressed by some of the commissioners went far beyond simple political opinion. It was arrogance. An abuse of power. A complete disregard for the process of fair regulation and the responsibilities of the position.

How many other politically biased rulings go unchecked because the victims lack the financial resources required to litigate? What is to prevent commissioners from continuing with their political attacks?

We are pleased to see SpaceX prevail, but the settlement fell short. It should have included the dismissal of those commissioners who were complacent in this outrageous action.

Emergent Trends
Page 36

**California Golden Fleece® Award 2026
Goes to California's Nuclear Power Ban
Ringside: Can Oil Industry Lawsuits
Compel Rational Energy Policy?**

COLAB in Depth
Page 43

**Sacramento Democrats Pass Bill to Shield
High-Speed Rail Failures From The Public**

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California Golden Fleece® Award 2026 Goes to California's Nuclear Power Ban

Lawmakers' unreasonable prohibition on the development of new nuclear power plants in California

By Katy Grimes, May 8, 2026

In California, the land of clean, green recycling, wind and solar, bicyclists, public transit, electric cars and banned plastic bags, every economic energy source should be used.

Instead, the largest hydroelectric dam removal project in U.S. history was completed last year in Northern California as four hydroelectric dams were removed from the 236-mile Klamath River.

Following the closure of San Onofre Nuclear power plant in 2013, PG&E placed Diablo Canyon on the chopping block. I asked how this helps *sustainability*? Or is it all about *activism* and *eco-markets* and *cronyism*? Nuclear and hydroelectric power are two of the cleanest forms of energy.

The California Golden Fleece® Award 2026 addresses nuclear power in California.

The envelope please... And the 17th California Golden Fleece® Award goes to... But first, some context and history from the **Independent Institute**.

“An unreasonable prohibition on the development of new nuclear power plants in California has led the Independent Institute to award the California Energy Commission and the Warren–Alquist Act with its twentieth California Golden Fleece® Award. California legislators should remove the nuclear moratorium for the good of the state’s residents,” the Independent Institute **reports**.

“Nuclear power has contributed to the reliability of the American power grid for more than six decades. The industry has an impressive safety record, and reactors have only gotten safer since the industry’s inception. At the same time, nuclear power has fallen victim to fearmongering.”

In 2016, as California was facing the closure of the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant, the **announcement** from PG&E rudely came on the same day there were

rolling blackouts in Los Angeles amidst sweltering temperatures. “With the likelihood of more blackouts all summer in California, why is the state facing the closure of a clean energy nuclear power plant? How can PG&E say with a straight face they will replace it with renewable energy?” Tom Tanton and I asked.

“In 2015, all wind energy in California only produced 12 billion kWhs,” scientist James Conca said in an interview. “The two Diablo Canyon nuclear reactors produce 17 billion kWhs every year, and will for the next 20 years if not prematurely closed for political reasons.”

Because not only would closure of Diablo Canyon drive direct increases in natural gas use in natural gas fired generation, it will be further increased due to the need for backup and balancing the volatile wind and solar output.

At the same time, Democrats and the environmental lobby were pushing then-Governor Jerry Brown to sign a bill to ban hydraulic fracturing for natural gas. But Brown wasn't having it, perhaps realizing the mess he was facing and responsible for?

On Meet the Press in March 2015, Gov. Brown told Chuck Todd to *pound sand* when Todd said that environmentalists weren't happy with him because of fracking:

“First, fracking in California has been going on for more than 50 years and uses a fraction of the water of fracking on the east coast for gas particularly. This is vertical fracking for the most part. It is different. California imports 70 percent of our petroleum products; our cars drive over 330 billion miles mostly on petroleum. If we reduce our oil drilling on California, which a ban on fracking would do, we'll import more oil by train or by boat, that doesn't make a lot of sense. What we need to do is to move to electric cars, more efficient buildings and more renewable energy and in that respect, California is leading the country and some would say even the world and we're going to continue moving down that path.”

California cannot rely on renewable energy without natural gas and oil.

How did California become the “No-Nukes” capitol?

The Independent Institute explains:

California's nuclear power moratorium has persisted for nearly fifty years and serves as a de facto ban on new nuclear power in the state. The ban was enacted as

part of a 1976 amendment to the 1974 Warren–Alquist Act, which established the state’s Energy Commission.[16] That first-in-the-nation body served to direct the demand side of the power generation market and established building and appliance standards that have influenced subsequent federal intervention in both areas.[17] In 1976, then-Gov. Jerry Brown, whose goal was to reduce reliance on fossil fuels, created a monster that 41 years later he was forced to address. Under his first administration (1975-1983), he signed legislation bolstering wind, solar, geothermal, and biomass technologies, spurring early development of renewable capacity in California.

The Independent Institute continues:

As a result of the legislation, no nuclear power development has occurred in California in two generations.

Economic factors as well as the anti-nuclear movement made new reactors far less common, but the ban has precluded even the possibility of a new nuclear power plant. The moratorium ignores the benefits that nuclear power can deliver and has closed the state off from the largest source of carbon-free power generation in the United States.[21] A Breakthrough Institute report from 2022 found that California’s nuclear moratorium would cost the state \$12 billion in capital investment between 2020 and 2040.[22]

Following San Onofre’s closure in 2013:

In 2016, Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) and environmental and labor groups reached an agreement to prematurely close the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant. Diablo Canyon’s two reactors were set to be closed in 2024 and 2025, respectively.[28] Following statewide power outages in 2020, and amid increasing demand projections, California Governor Gavin Newsom signed Senate Bill 846, which required the California Public Utilities Commission to vote on five-year license extensions for the plant. Extensions were granted by the commission in 2023, and Unit 1’s license was extended until October 31, 2029, while Unit 2 was extended to October 31, 2030.[29] PG&E has also filed for a twenty-year license renewal from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), which would allow it to operate until 2045.[30] While those processes are ongoing, climate groups are continuing to sue for the immediate closure of the plant.[31] Flash forward to 2026, and we are now in need of data centers for artificial intelligence, which will drive significant demand for electricity in the coming years.

The Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory report projects that AI data centers could account for 6.7 to 12 percent of overall demand by 2028, the Independent Institute reports.

They explain the conundrum:

Yet, while electricity consumption is ballooning, many power plants are retiring. The types of power plants that are not weather-dependent—such as nuclear, natural gas, and coal plants—have faced significant closures in recent years; 104 GW of reliable power is projected to retire in the US by 2030.[41] Rising demand from AI and electrification, coupled with the retirement of existing reliable plants, is a red flag that significant new power generation will be needed in the near future to satisfy demand.

Rather than removing nuclear, hydroelectric, natural gas, and coal plants as Democrats have done, we could have just added renewable energy sources to complement energy production. Instead, the left demonized nuclear, hydroelectric, natural gas, and coal, leaving the country, and California, vulnerable at the very moment we need massive amounts of electricity.

The Independent Institute continues:

One of the clearest indications that nuclear power may be economically viable to build in the near future is the long line of technology companies that are signing deals to procure power from both advanced reactors and previously retired nuclear facilities that can be brought back online.

California has the most battery storage of any grid in the country, with nearly 17,000 MW on the grid, but despite that capacity, the vast majority of the state's power must still be generated at the moment that it is needed.

The Independent Institute report is terrific, and a perfect treatise on energy and energy production. Their history, facts and data put to rest the energy deceit the left has perpetrated on the public for more than 50 years.

Ensuring Power Reliability in California: Why the Nuclear Ban Must Go
Meanwhile, enjoy this brief moment of Gov. Jerry Brown embracing the need for natural gas...



Katy Grimes

Katy Grimes, the Editor in Chief of the California Globe, is a long-time Investigative Journalist covering the California State Capitol, the co-author of *California's War Against Donald Trump: Who Wins? Who Loses?* and a contributor to "Taxifornia 2016."

A California native and Navy mom, Katy lives in Sacramento, CA.

Ringside: Can Oil Industry Lawsuits Compel Rational Energy Policy?

Layer upon layer of legislation and regulations have reduced California's oil industry to a quarter of its former production

By Edward Ring, May 7, 2026

When asked in a **recent interview** why California has the highest gasoline prices in the nation, Jodie Muller, the President of the Western States Petroleum Association, began by stating the following:

“You can’t point a finger at one particular person, because, unfortunately, it is decades of policies layered on top of one another. You have local air districts, you have our State of California Air Resources Board, you have legislative action that has taken place, you also have taxes; a lot of regulatory programs that have led us to this point.”

Muller went on to describe in more detail why California went from producing over 400 million barrels of crude oil per year in the 1980s to barely more than 100 million barrels per year in 2025. It wasn’t because of declining reserves, because according to **multiple reports**, California is sitting on over 30 billion barrels of recoverable crude. It’s also not due to declining demand. California’s appetite for crude oil in 2025 was **484 million barrels**, and 77 percent of that had to be imported.

Layer upon layer of legislation and regulations have reduced California's oil industry to a quarter of its former production. But litigation has also been a factor. In September 2023, California Attorney General Rob Bonta filed a lawsuit against Exxon Mobil, Shell, Chevron, and ConocoPhillips for allegedly "engaging in a decades-long campaign of deception and creating statewide climate change-related harms in California." As Bonta said, "California taxpayers shouldn't have to foot the bill for billions of dollars in damages — wildfires wiping out entire communities, toxic smoke clogging our air, deadly heat waves, record-breaking droughts parching our wells."

There is irony in the fact that despite Bonta's litigious grandstanding, it is regulatory mismanagement of California's forests and water supplies that has played a far more decisive role in causing wildfire damage and water scarcity. And it is preposterous to claim oil companies knowingly deceived the public, when even now the consequences of CO2 emissions remain a topic of serious scientific debate. Or, that even if they had believed CO2 emissions were harmful, anyone back then possessed alternative energy technologies that still today are not affordable, scalable, or sustainable.

Litigation, however, can cut both ways. And the oil industry, driven to the brink of elimination in California, has tough choices. They can fight defensively against legislation, never logging more than incremental gains against an unrelenting trend. They can also defend against a barrage of offensive litigation – not only Bonta's *People of the State of California v. ExxonMobil* (2023), but *City of Oakland v. BP et al*, *Center for Biological Diversity et al v. Chevron USA Inc. et al*, and many others – or they can themselves go on offense. Of these three options, oil companies have turned to offensive litigation as not only a last resort, but one that may hold the highest probability for justice.

The most consequential of the cases filed by oil industry interests are those that challenge Senate Bill 1137, which requires oil wells to be located at least 3,200 feet from any human occupied structure, what they deem to be a "sensitive receptor." Within these "health protection zones," no new wells may be drilled, and only minimal work may be done to maintain existing wells. This effectively kills oil production in all but the most remote and uninhabited areas of the state. It is also an exercise in absurdity, since California's oil wells are strictly regulated and emit negligible quantities of methane and volatile organic compounds, whereas upwelling reserves of underground gas and oil leak naturally to the surface in prodigious quantities thanks to California's seismically active geology.

The *only* way to stop this leakage is to deplete the reservoirs with drilling and extraction.

Four active lawsuits challenge SB 1137. They are *NOPEC v. California*, *Monte Beard Sr. et al. v. State of California*, *Morgan v. Ito*, and *United States v. California*. These lawsuits seek to overturn SB 1137 on various grounds. They challenge the claim that methane and VOCs cause health harm, especially at a distance of 3,200 feet. They assert the economic harm caused by prohibiting wells within the setback radius is an unconstitutional taking without compensation. And the U.S. lawsuit seeks to invalidate SB 1137 because it is preempted by federal law and, where applicable, is an unconstitutional interference with leases of federal land. In another set of lawsuits the oil industry is challenging the ongoing state ban on well stimulation, or fracking. The ban is enforced despite the fact that California's geology often requires fracking to extract oil and is structured so the underground impacts of fracking are tightly contained in close proximity to the well. These lawsuits include *Chevron U.S.A. Inc. v. Governor Gavin Newsom*, *TRC Cypress Group v. DOC and CalGEM*, and others.

Also consequential are the lawsuits attempting to reverse the City of Los Angeles's new Oil and Gas Drilling Ordinance that prohibits new oil and gas extraction and makes existing activities a "nonconforming use" in all zones. Los Angeles County, with an estimated 5 billion barrels of recoverable crude still underground, has the highest density of oil per square mile in the world. And as previously noted, the only way to prevent natural seeps of methane and VOCs is to drill for that oil and deplete those reservoirs. In what ought to be a public service in the interests of improving air quality in the Los Angeles Basin, the following lawsuits are active: *Warren E&P Inc, et al v. City of Los Angeles*, and *Termo Company, Matrix Oil, NOPEC v. LA County*.

There's much more active litigation, both for and against California's oil industry, but these are some of the most significant cases. It may be in the courtroom, instead of the legislature, where the possibility of California returning to a rational energy policy may find its greatest potential.



Edward Ring

Edward Ring is the director of water and energy policy for the California Policy Center, which he co-founded in 2013 and served as its first president. The California Policy Center is an educational non-profit focused on public policies that aim to improve California's democracy and economy. He is also a senior fellow of the Center for American Greatness. Ring is the author of two books: "Fixing California - Abundance, Pragmatism, Optimism" (2021), and "The Abundance Choice - Our Fight for More Water in California" (2022).

Sacramento Democrats Pass Bill to Shield High-Speed Rail Failures From The Public

AB 1608 would rename and expand the powers of the High-Speed Rail Authority's Inspector General while creating broad exemptions to withhold records

By Megan Barth, May 5, 2026

California's **high-speed rail project**, originally pitched to voters as a \$33.5 billion endeavor under Proposition 1A in 2008, has spiraled into a staggering taxpayer nightmare with estimates now exploding as high as \$231 billion — a more than 700% increase. Against this backdrop of relentless cost overruns, Assembly Democrats are advancing legislation critics say is explicitly designed to conceal the extent of the waste and shield the failing project from public accountability.

AB 1608, authored by Assemblywoman Lori Wilson (D-Suisun City), would rename and expand the powers of the High-Speed Rail Authority's Inspector General while creating broad exemptions to withhold audit records, internal documents, and any information that could "reveal weaknesses" in the project. Opponents argue the measure severely limits taxpayer access, reserving fuller disclosure primarily for select Democratic lawmakers.

The **staggering cost overruns** have become the defining feature of the project. Originally sold to voters as a \$33.5 billion system connecting San Francisco to Los Angeles by 2028, the price tag has ballooned repeatedly — surpassing \$100 billion, then \$128 billion, \$135 billion, and now estimates pushing toward \$231 billion for the full system. Even the scaled-back Merced-to-Bakersfield segment faces massive

shortfalls, with funding gaps of \$10–14 billion or more and completion timelines slipping deep into the 2030s.

Assemblywoman Alexandra Macedo (R-Modesto) blasted the bill as a cover-up. “Sacramento Democrats just voted to cover up high-speed rail’s failures,” she stated, labeling AB 1608 a “political shield” for secret audits hidden from the public.

State Sen. Tony Strickland (R-Huntington Beach), Vice Chair of the Senate Transportation Committee, has been a consistent voice against the fiscal disaster. “The skyrocketing costs and lack of transparency surrounding this mismanaged high-speed rail project further erode the public’s trust,” Strickland said. “California does not have a revenue problem — we have a wasteful spending problem. This project stands out as one of the most significant examples of budgetary waste in the state. We are well beyond the original completion date of 2020, and the high-speed rail project today is not the same project that voters passed in 2008.”

Strickland has **repeatedly called** for defunding the rail project and redirecting resources to priorities like gas tax relief, noting that billions have already been spent with little to show beyond scattered concrete viaducts, columns, and eminent domain battles that have threatened and confiscated Central Valley farmland.

California Globe has tracked the project’s **endless cost escalations** for years: from early warnings of \$100 billion+ figures, to the 2025 reports of the “slush fund” climbing back toward \$130 billion, repeated funding gaps requiring billions more just for a partial segment, and the latest projections highlighting a project that has delivered virtually no operational service despite the massive taxpayer investment. Supporters of AB 1608 claim the changes improve oversight while protecting sensitive data. Critics view it as the latest effort to insulate a chronically over-budget, behind-schedule failure from the very Californians paying the ever-rising bill — especially now that costs have ballooned dramatically and **federal funding** has largely vanished.

After the project swelled from \$33.5 billion to over \$130 billion (with higher estimates looming), Democrats now appear determined to hide the spending. Taxpayers are left wondering when — or if — Sacramento will finally hit the brakes on this runaway train.



Megan Barth

Megan Barth is the Executive Editor of The California Globe and former, founding editor of the Nevada Globe. Specializing in investigative reporting, her work has appeared in national and local news. The highlights of her career include interviewing President Donald Trump, Vice President J.D. Vance, and FBI Director Kash Patel. When she isn't editing, writing, or talking, you can find her hiking and relaxing in Northern Nevada.



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SYNDICATED COMMENTATOR/RADIO
HOST BEN SHAPIRO
APPEARED AT A COLAB ANNUAL
DINNER**



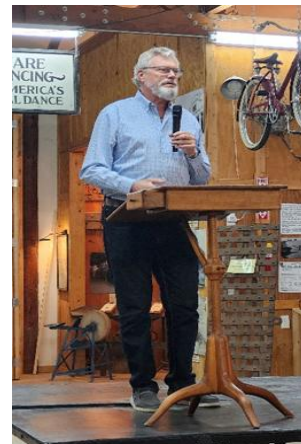
**NATIONAL RADIO AND TV
COMMENTATOR HUGH HEWITT AT
COLAB DINNER**



**EXPERTS DISCUSS ENERGY
ISSUES AT THE
FALL FORUM**



**BOARD MEMBER BEN HIGGINS
WITH SUPERVISORS ARNOLD
AND PESCHONG AT THE
ANNUAL DINNER**



**COLAB EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR GREG
HASKIN**

KEEP HANDY * CONTACT YOUR ELECTEDS

**ON ISSUES OF CONCERN!
THEY NEED TO HEAR FROM YOU!**

Elected Officials Representing San Luis Obispo County

**Governor Gavin Newsom
916-445-2841 Sacramento**

<https://www.gov.ca.gov/contact/>

**Senator Alex Padilla
202-224-3553 DC**

<https://www.padilla.senate.gov/contact/>

**Senator Adam Schiff
202-224-3841 DC**

<https://www.schiff.senate.gov/contact/>

**Representative Salud Carbal
202-225-3601 DC**

805-546-6348 District

carbajal.house.gov/contact

Representative Jimmy Panetta

202-225-2861 DC

831-424-2229 District

panetta.house.gov/contact

State Senator John Laird

916-651-4017 Sacramento

805-549-3784 District

senator.laird@senate.ca.gov

State Assembly Member Dawn Addis

916-319-2030 Sacramento

805-549-3001 District

assemblymember.addis@assembly.ca.gov

SLO County Supervisor Bruce Gibson

805-781-4338 District

bgibson@co.slo.ca.us

SLO County Supervisor Heather Moreno

805-781-4339 District

hmoreno@co.slo.ca.us

SLO County Supervisor Dawn Ortiz-Legg

805-781-5450 District

dortizlegg@co.slo.ca.us

SLO County Supervisor Jimmy Paulding

805-781-4337 District

district4@co.slo.ca.us

SLO County Supervisor John Peschong

805-781-4491 District

jpeschong@co.slo.ca.us

JOIN OR CONTRIBUTE TO COLAB ON THE NEXT PAGE
Join COLAB or contribute by control clicking at:
[COLAB San Luis Obispo County \(colabslo.org\)](http://COLAB San Luis Obispo County (colabslo.org)) or use the form below:

Coalition of Labor, Agriculture and Business
San Luis Obispo County
"Your Property - Your Taxes - Our Future"
PO Box 13601 - San Luis Obispo, CA 93406 / Phone: 805.548-0340
Email: colabslo@gmail.com / Website: colabslo.org

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

MEMBERSHIP OPTIONS:

General Member: \$100 - \$249 \$ _____ Voting Member: \$250 - \$5,000 \$ _____

Sustaining Member: \$5,000 + \$ _____

(Sustaining Membership includes a table of 10 at the Annual Fundraiser Dinner)

General members will receive all COLAB updates and newsletters. Voting privileges are limited to Voting Members and Sustainable Members with one vote per membership.

MEMBER INFORMATION:

Name: _____

Company: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____ Email: _____

How Did You Hear About COLAB?

Radio Internet Public Hearing Friend

COLAB Member(s) /Sponsor(s): _____

NON MEMBER DONATION/CONTRIBUTION OPTION:

For those who choose not to join as a member but would like to support COLAB via a contribution/donation.
I would like to contribute \$ _____ to COLAB and my check or credit card information is enclosed/provided.

Donations/Contributions do not require membership though it is encouraged in order to provide updates and information.
Memberships and donation will be kept confidential if that is your preference.
Confidential Donation/Contribution/Membership

PAYMENT METHOD:

Check Visa MasterCard Discover Amex NOT accepted.

Cardholder Name: _____ Signature: _____

Card Number: _____ Exp Date: ___/___ Billing Zip Code: _____ CVV: _____

TODAY'S DATE: _____