



# County of Monterey

Item No.

## Board Report

Board of Supervisors  
Chambers  
168 W. Alisal St., 1st Floor  
Salinas, CA 93901

Legistar File Number: 25-085

February 11, 2025

**Introduced:** 1/29/2025

**Current Status:** Agenda Ready

**Version:** 1

**Matter Type:** General Agenda Item

Receive a presentation from the Housing and Community Development Department and conduct a workshop on its planning and construction permit process, staffing, and permit streamlining efforts.

### RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors:

- a. Find that the presentation and workshop is not a “project” under the California Environmental Quality Act;
- b. Receive a presentation from the Housing and Community Development Department and conduct a workshop on its planning and construction permit process, staffing, and permit streamlining efforts; and
- c. Provide direction, as appropriate.

### SUMMARY:

The Housing and Community Development Department (HCD) within the County of Monterey is tasked to oversee the development and implementation of policies and regulations concerning land use planning, building, code compliance, and housing. HCD includes but is not limited to divisions for planning services, development services, and permit center operations. HCD specifically provides the following services in connection with its programs and activities

1. Regional and local planning in coordination with the State, and local cities and special districts;
2. Stewardship of the County's natural resources to protect the health, welfare, and safety of the public; and
3. Streamlined delivery of land use services that provide a predictable permitting process that balances the public interest with private property rights.

HCD is grateful for the opportunity to present information to the Board of Supervisors and the public on activities and services provided by HCD. The presentation will include an overview of the planning and construction permit processes, HCD staffing and organization, and contemplated changes and streamlining efforts that are intended to improve services. This presentation provides an opportunity for the Board to provide direction on HCD services and activities. Although HCD has many other functions, this presentation and workshop are focused on the permitting topical areas.

### DISCUSSION:

#### **Overview:**

At the foundation of the services provided by HCD staff are state and local laws. For the purposes of this discussion, the four most significant state laws are:

- Planning & Zoning law within the Government Code;
- The Coastal Act;

- The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA); and
- The California Building Code.

Planning & Zoning law requires each county and city to adopt “a comprehensive, long-term general plan for the physical development of the county or city, and any land outside its boundaries which bears relation to its planning.” (Government Code section 65300). The general plan has been called the local land use “constitution.” The County has an adopted General Plan that is designed to govern the future physical development of Monterey County in the inland areas and it was adopted in 2010.

Monterey County has territory that falls within the Coastal Zone and that land is subject to the California Coastal Act (Public Resources Code section 3000 *et seq.*). The Coastal Act requirements are similar to the General Plan requirements, but include additional protections for coastal resources. The County has four adopted Land Use Plans governing uses and development in the North County, Del Monte Forest, Carmel, and Big Sur planning areas within the Coastal Zone. These Land Use Plans along with implementing regulations are collectively known as the Local Coastal Program (LCP) for Monterey County. The 1982 General Plan for Monterey County continues to apply in the coastal zone. The 82 General Plan covers certain required elements of a General Plan that are not addressed in the LCP including topics like noise.

CEQA (Public Resources Code section 21000 *et seq.*) requires each public agency in California to identify, analyze, and disclose the potential effects of projects on the environment and to identify and implement ways in which those effects can be avoided or minimized. All permits require some form of CEQA determination.

The General Plans, LCP, and CEQA, all contain standards by which the Planning Services division of HCD reviews development proposals and implements our mandated programs and activities. There are numerous other state laws and local regulations that add to or implement these as well. Over the years, these laws have changed, and new mandates have been added, making the permitting process more complex (e.g., ADU law, Housing Element Law, Climate Change and Adaptation, etc...). Planning is usually the first step in the development permitting process.

The California Building Code (Division II of Chapter 1 of Part 2 of Title 24 of the California Code of Regulations) establishes minimum requirements to safeguard the public health, safety, and general welfare through structural strength, means of egress facilities, stability, access to persons with disabilities, sanitation, adequate lighting and ventilation, and energy conservation; safety to life and property from fire and other hazards attributed to the built environment; and to provide safety to fire fighters and emergency responders during emergency operations (Section 1.1.2 - Purpose). The County has adopted the California Building Code with local amendments in Chapter 18 of the Monterey County Code). These are the standards against which architectural, plumbing, mechanical, and structural designs are reviewed. A building permit is required before construction begins, and actual construction is inspected by the Building Services division of HCD. Separate inspections are usually required by the appropriate fire agency, Health Department and others as well. Over the years, building codes have become more stringent and complex as well.

A flowchart showing the steps in the permitting process is attached as Attachment B.

### **Staffing and Workload**

HCD has 104 positions or full-time equivalents (FTEs) divided among five divisions: Development Services, Planning Services, Permit Center, Housing, and Administrative Support. As of January 2024, there was a 17% vacancy in the Department and as of January 2025 there is a 12% vacancy.

Within the Building Services division there are 34 FTEs including the Building Official (1), Building Plans Examiners (4), Building Inspectors (7), Code Compliance Inspectors (9), Roads and Engineering staff (4), Encroachment staff (2), and stormwater/floodplain management staff (4) and management (3). The Building Division received over 3,500 building permit applications in 2024. There are 2,724 open code compliance cases, with 665 cases opened and 700 cases closed in 2024. Building Services performed 23,517 building inspections, there were almost 500 encroachment permit applications, and over 150 special event permit applications reviewed in 2024.

Within the Planning Services Division there are 24 FTEs including the Chief of Planning (1), long-range planning team (9), and development review planning team, which includes condition compliance (14). The Planning Division has over 600 active planning development permits and over 300 new applications were initialized in 2024. Approximately 200 permits were brought to a public hearing in 2024. There were also over 100 long-range planning projects that are required for implementation of the 2010 General Plan, state law, and Board policy direction. Long-range planning completed 8 ordinances, plans, and projects on that list in 2024 and made substantial progress on many other projects and ordinances.

Within the Permit Center there are 28 FTEs including the Permit Center manager, office assistants (Call Center, planning and development services support, and records), Permit Technicians (point of contact at our front counter, file creation, minor permit reviews), and website and permit system support. The Permit Technicians assisted over 7,000 customers at our front counter and responded to nearly 7,000 phone calls and emails, the call center handled several thousand phone calls and scheduled thousands of building inspections, and the records team completed over 1,900 public records requests in 2024.

Within the Administrative Support Section there are 17 FTEs including 4 Housing program staff (Inclusionary Housing Program, CDBG program, Local Housing Trust Fund and grants), 6 finance and special projects staff (budget and accounting, timecards, mining operations, and contracts), and 6 Secretaries (coordinating and overseeing 25 Boards, Committees, and Commissions). The Housing group manages over 100 outstanding loans with a balance of over \$19 million, monitors 235 owner-occupied inclusionary homes annually, and oversees the Monterey County Local Housing Trust Fund with over \$7 million in assets to support affordable housing projects. The Secretary team noticed, distributed reports for, and helped staff over 350 public hearings of boards, committees, and commissions in 2024 in addition to supporting the administrative staff within the Department.

### **Accomplishments in 2024**

In 2024, HCD completed several large projects including: 2 agricultural employee housing projects, the Riverview at Las Palmas project, 7 projects appealed to the Board of Supervisors, a draft

Housing Element update was submitted to state HCD, the CRFREE project, Vacation Rental Ordinances, Farmland Mitigation Ordinance, East Garrison Specific Plan Amendment for the final phase, Nosie Ordinance updates, the Eucalyptus fire fuel mitigation pilot program, Restrictive Covenants removal project, the Salinas Valley Groundwater Basin Study, proposals for Chuluar Community Plan development, the Carmel Lagoon and Scenic Road Protective Structure EIR, closure of the Carmel Stone Mine, and more. Substantial progress was made on several other larger projects that will be coming to the Board in the near future including updates to the Accessory Dwelling Unit regulations in the Coastal Zone, updates to the Castroville Community Plan, Affordable Housing project at the East Laurel campus, the Big Sur Land Use Plan update, the Moss Landing Community Plan update, and completion of the Sixth Cycle update to the Housing Element.

These projects are in addition to the large amount of work we did to process permits, clear code compliance cases, carry out inspections, review special events, staff and support 25 boards, committees, and commissions, implement grants, manage Kents Court affordable housing complex (including flood response), staff the Planning Commission, staff the Airport Land Use Commission, provide annual reporting to the Board and state, provide oversight of the Redevelopment Successor Agency, permit and inspect mining operations, balance our budget, update our website to be more accessible, process Mills Act and Williamson Act contracts, and more.

### **Plans for 2025**

HCD has struggled to address the backlog of code compliance cases, to provide timely processing in review of building and planning permits, to respond to complaints, and to manage unanticipated leaves and absences. We have several plans to implement staffing changes and permit streamlining efforts to increase productivity and improve services in 2025.

Staffing: HCD hopes to continue to reduce vacancy rates to provide staffing resources needed to improve levels of service. HCD has recruitments open for planning managers, a secretary, assistant planners, an ombudsperson, and HCD has hired two temporary retired annuitants to assist the Planning Division until recruitments can be completed. HCD has also requested to reallocate two vacant positions within the Department, and is requesting additional positions to implement the vacation rental regulations. The requested reallocation is intended to address areas in HCD's permitting process that have a backlog and points of failure due to staff turnover or absences. The proposed reallocation would create a second planning manager position (principal planner) to oversee current planning services and create a fifth building plans examiner position to reduce reliance of outside consultants and reduce wait-times for building permit reviews. Two code compliance inspectors, a new associate planner position, and a new permit technician position is requested to implement new vacation rental regulations. Additional staffing changes will be considered through the next fiscal year budget process.

Streamlining Efforts: Working with the Permit Streamlining Taskforce (architects, contractors, and attorneys), HCD has identified a number of efforts that will reduce permitting times and improve services (**Attachment B**). Streamlining efforts include things such as eliminating the "application request" process which will remove an unnecessary step in the planning review process and reduce time for permitting by months and updating Titles 20 and 21 (coastal and inland zoning) of the Monterey County Code to remove unnecessary or duplicative efforts and clarify standards for review

of development. The Long-range planning team will be bringing forward the list of long-range planning projects with a recommended prioritization to the Board for review and comment.

**Recommendation**

HCD staff will provide more detail on the information presented in this report at the workshop. The Board is asked to receive the presentation and provide feedback to staff as appropriate.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

The report has been prepared by HCD staff. Input from customers, the public, internal staff, and the Permit Streamlining Taskforce have been considered and helped inform this report.

FINANCING:

Funding for staff time associated with this report is included in the FY24-25 Adopted Budget for HCD. Costs for the staffing changes are addressed separately in the reports prepared for the reallocation of positions and the request for vacation rental staff positions.

Prepared and approved by: Craig Spencer, Director of HCD, x5233

The following attachments are on file with the Clerk of the Board:

Attachment A - HCD Org Chart

Attachment B - Streamlining Efforts

cc: Front Counter Copy, Craig Spencer (Director of HCD); The Open Monterey Project (Molly Erickson); LandWatch (Executive Director); John H. Farrow; Permit Streamlining Task Force (Ethan Hare); Maureen Wruck Consulting (Joel Panzer); Anthony Lombardo and Associates (Anthony Lombardo); Taluban Engineering (Belinda Taluban); BLS Permit Facilitation (Brittney Scholss)