



# County of Monterey Planning Commission

**Item No.4**

## Agenda Item No. 4

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

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### **REFERRAL 22.7 - PAJARO RIVER LEVEE IMPROVEMENTS AND PRIORITY COMMUNITY PLAN UPDATES**

- a. Consider receiving an update from the Pajaro River Flood Management Agency regarding repair and improvements to the Pajaro River Levee;
- b. Consider receiving an update from staff regarding the Pajaro Long-Term Recovery Planning and status update 2010 General Plan implementation related to Pajaro and Chualar Community Plans development.
- c. Provide direction to staff.

**Project Location:** North County Inland Area (Pajaro); Central Salinas Valley Area (Chualar)

**Proposed CEQA action:** Statutory Exemption pursuant to Section 15262 of the CEQA.

#### RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Planning Commission:

- a. Receive a status update from the Pajaro River Flood Management Agency regarding repair and improvements to the Pajaro River Levee;
- b. Receive a status update from staff regarding the Pajaro Long-Term Recovery Planning and status update 2010 General Plan implementation related to Pajaro and Chualar Community Plans development; and
- c. Provide direction to staff.

#### SUMMARY/DISCUSSION

On March 29, 2023, the Planning Commission accepted Referral No. 22.7 requesting a presentation on Pajaro River Levee improvement plans and a presentation on the proposed approach for community plans envisioned in the 2010 General Plan (Pajaro and Chualar as first priorities). The Planning Commission referral further requests for continual updates on how the Housing and Community Development Department is making progress toward developing those community plans, that are supposed to help address infrastructure problems in these communities and receive updates on the Pajaro River Levee improvement projects that are underway.

#### *Pajaro River Levee Repairs and Improvements*

Overnight on March 10, 2023, the Pajaro River levee breached and inundated the community of Pajaro and surrounding farmland in north Monterey County. Mark Strudley, PhD., Executive Director of the Pajaro Regional Flood Management Agency (PRFMA) provided the Planning Commission with an update regarding levee repairs and the Pajaro River Flood Risk Management Project to implement levee improvements necessary to provide 100-year flood protection to the community of Pajaro on August 30, 2023. Further progress has been made since this meeting. Updates from Pajaro Regional

Flood Management Agency are as follow:

Ongoing efforts persist to secure the essential federal funding required for the construction of the Pajaro River Flood Risk Management Project. Presently, \$149 million in federal funds has been allocated, yet an additional \$200 million of federal funds is imperative to meet the total \$600 million budget for the levee project. A significant milestone has been achieved through the State of California's execution of a Subventions Cost Sharing Agreement with the PRFMA, unlocking approximately \$200 million in state funding. This funding will be utilized to advance the non-federally cost-shared components of the project, with the unique aspect that it enables the advancement of funds to PRFMA for project implementation, as opposed to the standard reimbursement process typical of grant programs.

Furthermore, a crucial Project Partnership Agreement has been executed between the Pajaro Regional Flood Management Agency and the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), paving the way for the commencement of construction. Earth-moving and construction-related activities are scheduled to commence in the summer of 2024, marking a significant turning point in the project's history. This agreement also enables USACE to issue real estate take letters to PRFMA for the procurement of real estate and to move utilities required to implement the levee repair work.

The federal Pajaro River Flood Risk Management Project is nearing completion of its design phase, anticipating the finalization of the design for Reach 6, between Green Valley Road and East Lake Avenue on Corralitos Creek, by January 2024. The design of other project reaches will occur in the construction phase of the project, while Reach 6 (and then other reaches) are built.

Notably, relief from state regulatory administrative burdens has been realized with the enactment of AB 876 into law by Governor Newsom on October 13, 2023. This legislation, enacted upon signature under an urgency clause, grants state regulatory exemptions for the Pajaro River Project, including exemptions to CEQA and state permitting. Importantly, these exemptions encompass the original 1966 formulation of the project, spanning the federal Pajaro River Flood Risk Management Project implemented by PRFMA and USACE, as well as future components like the Pajaro River Bridge to Bay Project, enhancements to the Highway 1 bridge over Pajaro River, and other improvements to the flood risk reduction system on the Pajaro River and Salsipuedes/Corralitos Creeks.

Additionally, the Pajaro Regional Flood Management Agency (PRFMA) is almost completely staffed and has officially taken responsibility for the maintenance of the levee and river system established in 1949. This responsibility extends to include the improvements made under the Pajaro River Flood Risk Management Project and other upcoming projects.

#### *Pajaro Long-Term Recover Planning*

The County working with the Department of Emergency Management (DEM) has launched a Pajaro Long-Term Recovery Planning effort to support the community's needs and vision for a resilient and sustainable recovery. HCD staff continues to participate on the recovery planning Pajaro Revitalization Committee. The Pajaro Revitalization Committee brings together a broad coalition of resident leaders, organizations, and agencies to take a collaborative approach critical to developing a comprehensive and effective recovery plan. The first and second meeting were hosted at the Our Lady of Assumption

Church on 8/30/2023 & 10/4/2023, and the community response has been outstanding and insightful. With a total of 70 projects collected from the first meeting and a total of 24 prioritized projects after the second meeting, the County hosted the third Pajaro Revitalization Committee meeting on Monday, October 30, 2023 where participants were directed to visit one of the itemized Project Tables in a World Café style assigning priority using sticker dots to mark projects that they feel meet community needs or have the biggest impact, adding another layer of prioritization to the itemized project list and respond to project development questions. This long-term recovery planning effort will continue through FY24, the fourth meeting is scheduled on November 30th from 5:30pm to 8pm at Our Lady of Assumption Church Hall at 100 Salinas Rd. Pajaro, CA.

#### *2010 County General Plan - Community Planning Priorities*

The 2010 Monterey County General Plan designates Community Areas to be actively supported as the County's primary planning priorities, with developing Community Plans for Pajaro and Chualar as the highest priorities (LU-2.23).

*Chualar Community Planning:* In spring 2023, with input from the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors, the Housing and Community Development Department (HCD) established its Five-Year Long-Range Planning Work Program (LRP Work Program) established planned priority activities Fiscal Years 2023-2024 to 2027-2028. The LRP Work Program anticipates HCD will commence the Chualar Community Plan effort in this current fiscal year (FY23-24) and the Board of Supervisors approved a budget augmentation of \$50,000 for this effort. Recently, staff received notice that the additional funding allocated to the County as part of Regional Early Action Planning (REAP 2.0) will be utilized to cover the remaining expense of various planning efforts such as the Castroville Community Plan. As a result, unused funds from the Local Early Action Planning (LEAP) grant will be allocated finance tasks required to begin preparation of the Chualar Community Plan. Staff is actively working on commence the Request for Proposal process to initiate the process for the Chualar Community Plan.

*Pajaro Community Planning:* As plans for levee improvements proceed and the community long-term recovery planning is completed in the coming year, the groundwork will be laid for infrastructure and community vision to guide land use policies to be developed as part of the Pajaro Community Plan. The LRP Work Program anticipates HCD will commence the Pajaro Community Plan effort in the next fiscal year (FY24-25). Staff anticipates work may get underway on the Pajaro Community Plan in 2025, pending completion of the Long-Term Recover Plan and community readiness.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This presentation is Statutorily Exempt pursuant to Section 15262 of the CEQA Guidelines as an early discussion of possible future actions that do not involve a commitment to a project. The Pajaro Long-Term Recovery Plan, Pajaro Community Plan, and Chualar Community Plan will require a CEQA determination prior to adoption.

#### OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

Multiple County departments are involved in the long-term recovery planning efforts in Pajaro: Department of Emergency Services is leading these efforts; Health Department's Environmental Health

Bureau and its Planning, Evaluation and Policy Unit; Civil Rights Office; County Administrative Office's Sustainability Program and Office of Community Engagement and Strategic Advocacy; and the Public Works, Facilities and Parks Department.

PRFMA is a joint powers authority which includes membership by the County of Monterey and the Monterey County Water Resources Agency. PRFMA was formed in 2021 to plan, finance and implement projects and programs to reduce flood risk from the lower Pajaro River and its tributaries in Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties.

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