



**2010 – 2011
Madera County Grand Jury
Final Report
City of Madera
Community Development Department**

2010 - 2011
Madera County Grand Jury
Final Report
City of Madera
Community Development Department

Introduction:

The City of Madera has a population of 58,243, covers a total area of 12.3 square miles, and is the county seat. It is an incorporated general law city governed by a five-member council. The mayor is elected by the council from among its membership. City operations include four major departments: Administration, Community Development, Police, and Fire.

The Grand Jury reviewed the operation and functions of the City's Community Development Department. Interviews were conducted with the Mayor, City Administrator, Community Development Director, City Engineer, Public Works Director, Planning Director, Building Director, and the Streets Operations Manager.

Findings:

The Grand Jury found that the City's Community Development Department includes four major divisions: Planning, Engineering, Building, and Public Works. The functions of the divisions are overseen and coordinated by the Community Development Director, who reports to the City Administrator. Each major division is managed by a director.

The Grand Jury found that the Planning Division is responsible for land use review, long range planning, zoning, and review of building and development plans and applications for compliance with the City's general plan and building codes. Building industry activity has slowed significantly due to the depressed economy, resulting in revenue losses and operational challenges for the Planning Division. Some staff member assignments have been shifted to in-house studies and projects which previously would have been contracted out. Customer service requests are taking longer to process, and public counter service is slower. One focus of the Planning Division is to provide assistance which will encourage job-creating businesses to locate in Madera.

The Grand Jury found that the Engineering Division reviews new development designs, oversees capital improvement projects, and is responsible for construction related activities including public utilities inspections and hook-up specifications. Staff assignments have shifted from projects supported by general fund money to capital improvement projects which have designated funding from other sources. The ability to address safety issues and to respond to public service requests in a timely manner are on-going concerns.

The Grand Jury found that the Building Division reviews building plans, issues permits, administers building codes in conjunction with the Code Enforcement Division, performs commercial and residential inspections, and oversees the fire prevention program. Most current

service requests are for small jobs which require a short processing time. Because of the decline in workload, four Building Division employees have been transferred to other departments and assigned to funded projects.

The Grand Jury found that the Public Works Division is responsible for street maintenance, lighting, signage, and street sweeping; traffic signals, sewer and water utilities; wastewater treatment plant operation; solid waste management; recycling; and facility maintenance. Staffing assigned to street maintenance has decreased, and the maintenance and resurfacing of city streets has fallen several years behind. General fund money is not available for rejuvenation, chip sealing, and oil restoration projects. Some Measure T funds are available for street maintenance. The staffing level in solid waste management has increased, with emphasis placed on recycling.

The Grand Jury found that the City's budget is approximately \$150,000,000: \$70,000,000 for operating expenses and \$80,000,000 for capital projects. Budget funding has declined due to a 30% reduction in sales taxes over 3 years and a 10% drop in property taxes. The City Council and administrators anticipated the economic downturn and prepared for it over the past several years by building a four-month operating reserve.

The Grand Jury found that the City has taken actions to reduce expenditures, such as contracting for the operation of the municipal golf course for a savings of \$1,200,000 over four years. Non-mandatory curb painting, e.g., red for fire hydrants, is no longer done to avoid the on-going maintenance costs. Vacancies which have occurred through attrition are not filled. Some staff members have been reassigned to projects with dedicated funding from grants and other sources to reduce general fund expenses. The City expects to reduce its solid waste management costs by seeking bids for waste hauling and landfill use when the current contracts expire in 2012.

The Grand Jury found that a substantial infusion of revenue to the City will result if the casino, planned for the area north of Avenue 17 and west of Highway 99, is built and operated. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the City and the North Fork Rancheria of Mono Indians (Tribe) provides that the Tribe will pay the City approximately \$10,000,000 before and during the first three years of casino operation. These funds are designated to be used for law enforcement, roads, transportation, road maintenance, and other public functions. The MOU further provides that the Tribe will pay the City about \$2,000,000 annually to mitigate community impacts created by the casino's operation.

The Grand Jury found that the City has not had to lay off or furlough employees and that critical public service levels have not been reduced. However, some delays occur in response to requests for non-emergency services, and some service delivery methods have been changed. For example, a report on a burglarized residence may be taken by a community service officer rather than a police officer, or crime reports may be filed online.

The Grand Jury found that the City's administrative staff and the management staff of the Community Development Department have maintained a positive approach in dealing with the effects of current economic conditions on City activities and services. They seek cost-effective, service-oriented solutions to the issues and problems with which they are confronted.

Conclusions:

The Grand Jury concludes that the City has been able to maintain critical public service levels in its Community Development Department through effective financial planning and preparation by its administrative and management staff.

The Grand Jury concludes that the director of the Community Development Department and the division directors are committed to providing the highest level of public services possible within the constraints of available funding, and to working together to achieve this goal.

The Grand Jury concludes that the Community Development Department has been frugal with general fund money, using available funding from grants and other sources wherever possible.

The Grand Jury concludes that the Community Development Department has been able to maintain an experienced workforce, without layoffs or furloughs, by leaving vacancies unfilled and by transferring staff to higher workload assignments and projects for which non-general fund money is available.

The Grand Jury concludes that the experienced workforce which has been retained will be an important asset in bringing public services back to the desired level as the economy improves. Additional staff will be needed for the catch up efforts.

The Grand Jury concludes that maintenance and repair of the City's streets have been neglected, and road conditions continue to deteriorate.

The Grand Jury concludes that, should the casino be built, it is unknown if the revenue increases will offset the impacts to the community.

Recommendations:

The Grand Jury recommends that street maintenance and repair be made a high priority when funding becomes available. If casino-related revenue is received, the funds designated for roads should be utilized expeditiously.

The Grand Jury recommends that the City administrative staff and the management staff of the Community Development Department be recognized for their commitment to Madera residents.

Respondent: Written response required pursuant to PC 933(c)

Madera City Council
205 West Fourth Street
Madera, CA 93637

Respondents: Response optional

City Administrator
205 West Fourth Street
Madera, CA 93637

Community Development Director
205 West Fourth Street
Madera, CA 93637