

September 4, 2001

Honorable Judge Rodney Melville, Presiding Judge  
Santa Barbara County Superior Court  
312-C East Cook Street  
Santa Maria, CA 93456-5369

**Board of Supervisor's Response to the 2000-01 Grand jury Report on"**

**"County Commissions"**

Dear Judge Melville,

During its regular meeting of September 4, 2001, the Board of Supervisors adopted the following responses as their responses to the findings and recommendations in the 2000-01 Grand Jury report entitled "County Commissions" to which the Board is required to respond.

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**ATTACHMENT 'A'**

**FINDING ONE**

"There is no person in County Government charged with the oversight of all County Commissions to assist with, and keep track of, each Commissions activities."

**AGREE**

It is true that there is not one individual in charge of oversight of all County commissions whose responsibility is to assist and keep track of, each commissions activities. It is also true, however, that each commission has support staff assigned to it by a County

department, under the direction of a department director. Generally, commission staff support is responsible for the following functions:

Provide orientation materials to new commission members including information on commission functions and by-laws; Provide procedural guidance to the commission members; schedule meeting rooms and set-up for commission meetings; responsible for clerking the commission meetings; responsible for publishing the agenda and minutes for the commission meetings; responsible for tracking commission activities and prompting mandated reports to the Board and the community; responsible for alerting the Clerk of the Board and the Board of Supervisors of vacancies which occur on the commission.

In addition to the above, County Counsel has legal staff assigned to assist each commission.

### **RECOMMENDATION 1**

“The Board of Supervisors should direct the Clerk of the Board office to assign or hire a staff member who would assist, support and keep track of each commission’s activities, membership, mandated reports and adherence to their mission statement (duties).”

### **RECOMMENDATION WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED BECAUSE IT IS NOT WARRANTED**

The Clerk of the Board Office is responsible for the maintenance of the Roster of County Boards, Commissions and Committees. These activities include the listing of the current membership of each commission, the terms of office and appointing Supervisor. In addition, also included in the Roster is contact information for each commission member, the departmental contact(s) as well as a fact sheet for each commission. The Fact Sheets include the basic duties of each commission, the legal authority and other general information. The Clerk of the Board office has allocated adequate resources for these responsibilities.

The Clerk of the Board is not responsible for monitoring the activities of County commissions or to track commissions as far as adherence to mission statements and/or by-laws. As mentioned previously (see response to Finding 1), commission support is provided by the appropriate County department assigned to work for and with the particular commission. For example, the Planning and Development Department provides all support – logistical, staffing and otherwise - for the Planning Commission.

At present, the Clerk of the Board office does not have staff available to monitor the activities of the 70+ commissions currently active in the County. Given the fact that County departments have already assigned staff to these tasks, it would not be an appropriate expenditure in light of limited County resources and other budget priorities.

## **FINDING 2**

“Some Commissions have ceased to function effectively.”

## **PARTIALLY DISAGREE**

Whether or not a particular commission is functioning effectively is in the “eye of the beholder”. While it is difficult to define and/or measure the effectiveness of any County commission, we agree that some commissions undoubtedly function with greater effectiveness than others. Factors such as interest and attendance (both by the public and commission members), meeting frequency, types of issues and the number of recommendations made to and/or ultimately acted upon by the Board could all contribute to what one might consider in evaluating the effectiveness of a particular commission. Conversely, the fact that a commission seldom meets, given the volunteer nature of the commissions and the fact that many of the issues would otherwise have to be considered by the Board, make all commissions a success. Citizen commissions provide members of the public with an opportunity to become involved in the community by assisting the Board in the development of policies designed to enhance the delivery of services in our County.

It is important to note that most of the 70+ County commissions operate on very limited funding. The vast majority of the cost associated with the operation of all County commissions (nearly 70%) is allocated to approximately 12 commissions that require large time and staffing commitments (the Planning Commission and Assessment Appeals Boards for example). The Board recognizes and appreciates the excellent service provided by all County commissions in a cost-effective manner.

## **RECOMMENDATION 2**

“The newly appointed staff member overseeing commissions should make a thorough assessment of how functional each commission is and if it should be continued.”

## **RECOMMENDATION WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED BECAUSE IT IS NOT WARRANTED**

See response to Recommendation 1.

### **FINDING 3**

“Although County Commissioners are charged with taking great responsibility for the functioning of County Government, they receive little oversight, even from the Supervisors who have appointed them”

### **DISAGREE**

Many of the individuals appointed to County commissions are in contact with the appointing Supervisor on a regular basis. Through regularly scheduled meetings, written correspondence and e-mail, Board members are routinely advised by commission members as to the general operation, pending issues and actions taken by the commissions. The advisory nature of these commissions means that many of the issues considered and acted upon at commission meetings are subsequently placed on the agenda of the Board of Supervisors. Given this relationship, it is implicit that the Board is actively engaged in the activities of the commissions and commission members.

With respect to training and orientation - once a year the County Administrator and County Counsel conduct Public Service Training for County Board and Commission members (A.K.A. “The Owlets Guide to the Public’s Business”). This program is designed to orient and refresh members of County Boards and Commissions on the way in which the County conducts the public’s business. Topics include a review of open meeting law (The Brown Act), ethics and conflict of interest laws, public records, and the roles of commissions, commissioners, staff and the public. In addition to this class, a print version and a videotape of this training are also available to any interested party. Finally, departmental staff assigned to liaison with commissions provide additional administrative oversight on an ongoing basis. The Board will continue to provide the leadership and training necessary to ensure that County commissions operate efficiently and effectively.

### **RECOMMENDATION 3**

“Supervisors should exercise more oversight of the Commissioners they appoint, requiring regular meetings, commission meeting agendas, and periodic written reports.”

### **RECOMMENDATION HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED**

The relationship between the Board member and commissioner is one that varies from Supervisor to Supervisor. It is at the discretion of the individual member of the Board as to the frequency and type of interaction between the Board member and commission appointee and many factors, some quite subjective, play into that interaction. Many commission members, having served for some time or possessing expertise in the area for which they were appointed, do not require a lot of direction from the appointing supervisor. Some Supervisors, in fact, do not like to micro-manage appointees, preferring to let individuals exercise their own judgement as it pertains to commission

business. Conversely, some Board members are much more engaged in the ongoing activities of the commissions and their own commission appointments.

It is important to remember that all of the commission positions are volunteer in nature and, except in limited cases, do not include significant compensation. Many of the individuals who volunteer for these positions do so in addition to regular jobs, families and other commitments. To place additional time demands and reporting requirements on appointees could have a chilling effect on the ability of the Supervisors to recruit qualified individuals. The Board appreciates and supports the notion of oversight and will continue to diligently monitor the activities of the commissions and commission members.

#### **FINDING 4**

“There may be a need for one or more new Commissions, including one to oversee the facilities growth of the County”

#### **AGREE**

The Board of Supervisors will continue to create new commissions, as necessary, to assist the Board in developing the policy framework necessary to implement the strategic goals of the County as defined through the Board’s Strategic Planning process.

With respect to County facilities, the Board recognized this need and in May 1999 directed the County Administrator to create the County Workplace Task Force (WTF). This taskforce was established to “Assist in the development of a space planning process that would culminate in ongoing and comprehensive space planning and allocation of County-Owned facilities for use by departments”... and “to promote the effective operations of County Government through sound, practical and innovative working environments”. The task force has been meeting quarterly since September of 2000 and is composed of a representative from each County department. The County Space Planner is a permanent member and facilitator of the group. The meetings of the WTF are open to the public and additional information about the WTF can be found on their web site at [www.countyofsb.org/gs/space](http://www.countyofsb.org/gs/space).

#### **RECOMMENDATION 4**

“In addition to disbanding non-functional commissions, the Board of Supervisors should continue to create new commissions to help achieve County goals when warranted”

#### **RECOMMENDATION HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED**

As mentioned in the response to Finding 4 - The Board of Supervisors will continue to create new commissions, as necessary, to assist the Board in developing the policy framework necessary to implement the strategic goals of the County as defined through the Board's Strategic Planning process.

For example, in recent years the Board has established commissions intended to advise the Board on a variety of subjects. They include: The Children & Families Commission, the Tobacco Settlement Advisory Committee; the Economic Development Advisory Committee and the In Home Supportive Services Committee.

Additionally, as the need arises, the Board will act to disband non-functional commissions as it has done in the past

#### **FINDING 5**

“Some Commissions do not submit annual reports to the Board of Supervisors”

#### **AGREE**

It is true that not all commissions provide the Board of Supervisors with an annual report. Many commissions, however, submit either a report to the Board as a whole, such as the *Kids Network Annual Report* (which is placed on an agenda of the Board) or to the individual Board members in the form of oral or written reports summarizing the activities of the commission.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 5**

“All commissions should submit annual reports to the Board of Supervisors”

#### **RECOMMENDATION WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED BECAUSE IT IS NOT WARRANTED**

From an agenda management standpoint - it would not be logistically practical for all of the 70+ commissions to submit annual reports to the Board. For this to occur, the Board would have to consider between one and two reports from the various commissions each week. Moreover, there would be a considerable additional workload required by volunteer commissioners and County support staff to submit such annual reports.

**FINDING 6**

“Many Commissioners do not receive either mileage or per diem to cover expenses”

**AGREE**

Only specified commissions currently offer per-diem and mileage reimbursement to appointed members. The decision to provide mileage reimbursement and/or per-diem is made on a case by case basis by the Board based on a recommendation by the department providing staff support.

**RECOMMENDATION 6**

“All commissioners should receive mileage compensation”

**RECOMMENDATION REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS**

The Board of Supervisors will direct the County Administrator to provide an analysis within the next six months of the costs associated with providing mileage compensation for all commission members.

Sincerely,

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Joni Gray  
Chair, Board of Supervisors