

The 2015 – 2016 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury

For Immediate Release

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News Release

In accordance with Penal Code Section 925, the 2015-2016 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury (Jury) investigated the process by which grading permits are granted or denied within the unincorporated areas of the County. Additionally, the Jury questioned whether the inspection process and final results are consistent with the original permits issued.

The Jury found that the Santa Barbara County Grading Code, Chapter 14, (Code) and the post approval procedures set forth in Chapter 35 include exemptions and practices that are ambiguous and subject to interpretation by local Field Grading Inspectors. In addition, the Code does not adequately define the criteria that the County Planning and Development Department must utilize to process Land Use Permit Applications that include grading. These discretionary interpretations have led to different standards being applied to similarly situated parcels. Permit revisions complicate the issue and lack the clarity needed for due process. The Jury recommends that the Code and permitting process be modified to eliminate the ambiguities for the benefit of both the inspectors and landowners.

The Jury issued a report entitled “Santa Barbara County Grading Code: Where the Dozer Meets the Dirt - Poorly Defined and Unevenly Enforced.” In this report, the Jury made seven recommendations for improving the grading approval process.

The Board of Supervisors has 90 days to respond to these recommendations.

The complete report may be found on the Grand Jury’s website at www.sbcgj.org.

The Santa Barbara County Grand Jury is a basic part of government within the judicial branch. The Grand Jury acts independently, yet is under the general control of the Superior Court Presiding Judge to assure that it acts in accordance with the Penal Code of the State of California.

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