



COUNTY CURRENTS

Santa Cruz County

www.santacruzcounty.us

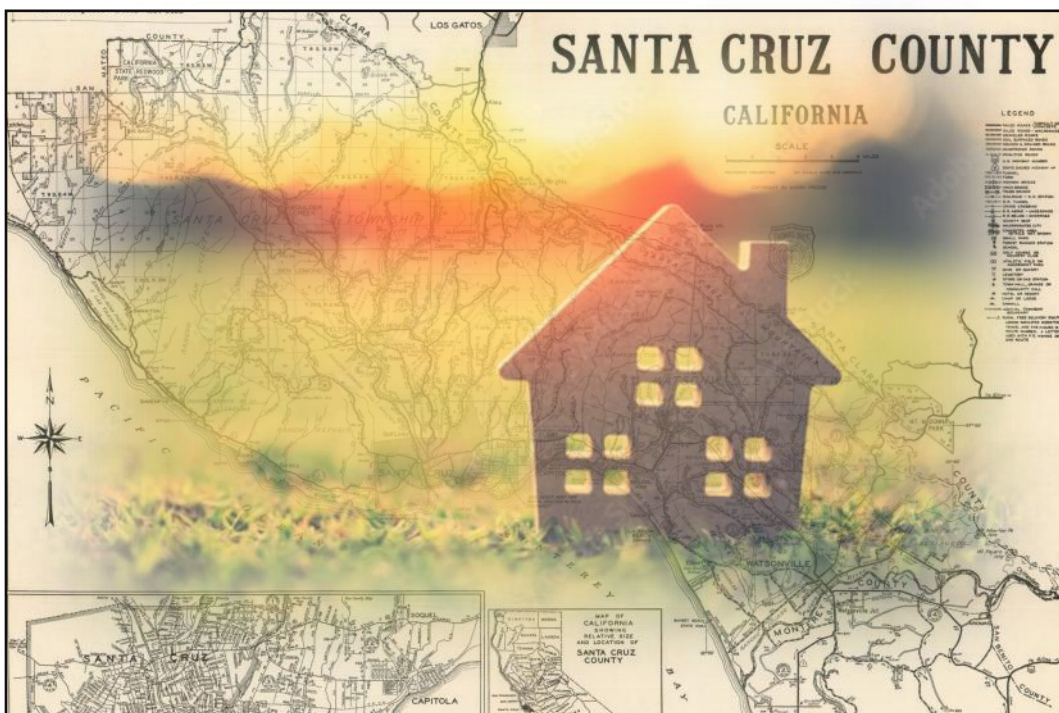
Fall 2023

A publication of the County Administrative Office Carlos J. Palacios, County Administrator



SPECIAL EDITION: HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Mapping the local housing crisis



The housing crisis in Santa Cruz County and across California is rooted in over 40 years of State and local **policies that have failed to produce enough housing** to meet the needs of our local families and individuals, resulting in **skyrocketing housing costs, scarce housing supplies and high levels of homelessness.**

Learn more by visiting our **Housing and Homelessness Dashboard**, available at santacruzcountyca.gov.

On **Veteran's Day**, the County Governmental Building was lit up in green to honor **Operation Greenlight**, which recognizes veterans struggling with reintegration after serving in the armed forces.



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From the CAO: Three-Year Framework Showing Results

By Carlos Palacios

As Santa Cruz County's Three-Year Strategic Framework to Reduce Homelessness nears its conclusion, I'd like to reflect how far our community has come in addressing homelessness, which is one of the most important issues facing us.

The cities and county share responsibility for providing housing and services to those suffering from homelessness. While cities are primarily responsible for providing housing within their jurisdictions, the county is responsible for providing social services, health and mental health services to vulnerable populations everywhere. The county also provides city-level services to the half of the county residing in the unincorporated area.

This makes us unusual among California counties. By providing municipal services to more than 136,000 residents we are, in effect, the largest "city" in our jurisdiction, while keeping our social, health and human service commitments to all.

Since we established the countywide Housing for Health division in 2020, the budget has increased more than threefold to \$23 million. The talented team has brought in tens of millions in state and federal dollars to address homelessness, while the county's contribution of local taxpayer dollars to programs to resolve homelessness has also grown by millions.

We are seeing results. Last fiscal year, 911 people found permanent housing through the assistance of county-supported programs and services.

We are also seeing emerging challenges, especially in South County, where the recent point-in-time count showed a significant increase in individuals and families experiencing homelessness in and near Watsonville.

We are working to build a system that better serves these people and all of our unhoused population. We have secured more than \$65 million in Project Homekey,

No Place Like Home, Encampment Resolution and Behavioral Health Bridge Housing grants that, once completed, will add 152 permanent supportive housing units throughout the county, along with 68 temporary beds. All of these projects are underway, with most in construction.

This will make a significant difference in our community.

The county is also focused on preventing homelessness. We provide \$1.9 million annually in direct rent support, which is available to

qualified tenants through the Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County. Near the end of the pandemic, we also allocated \$500,000 to provide legal and other eviction-prevention services to those affected by the end of the pandemic-era eviction moratorium.

Through our CORE (Collective of Results and Evidence-based) Investments program, we allocate \$314,000 annually for the South County Housing Collaborative to provide prevention and intervention services to families at risk of losing their housing, as well as another \$112,000 annually for eviction prevention and case management services for families and those with disabilities in North and Mid-County.

We are also in the process of establishing a contract with Tenant Sanctuary, a local tenants' rights advocacy group, to further our homelessness prevention efforts. Another \$72,000 goes to Senior Legal Services to help prevent homelessness among seniors, and we've added staff to work closely with Adult Protective Services in cases where vulnerable seniors are at risk of losing housing. And we invest another \$25,000 each year to reconnect homeless people with vital records, such

as a state identification card, an important step to getting them off the street.

While the county recognizes the need for short-term shelter services, it can be an expensive stopgap that drains funding for long-term solutions. On a per-capita basis, it costs less to provide permanent supportive housing services than it does a short-term shelter bed. During the pandemic, we used federal funding to provide temporary shelter for more than 2,000 people — the biggest and longest sheltering operation in county his-

tory. Yet, at the same time, the Benchlands encampment in Santa Cruz grew, as did encampments along the Pajaro River near Watsonville.

Short-term shelter is temporary; housing can lead to permanent progress.

The data tells us to focus our scarce dollars on housing, which is how we were able to move 911 people from homelessness to homes, resulting in the largest drop in the number of unhoused people on our streets since we began counting. This is a huge achievement — not just for our community, but for those 911 residents who now have a pathway to health and a better future.

We are also focused on building a robust network of housing and services resources that tracks outcomes and assists and moves people from the streets and shelters into homes. We are working to use data to improve our system to find the most cost-effective ways to help people secure and keep permanent homes. We partner and contract with the Central California Alliance for Health to better connect people with health care services.



Carlos Palacios

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Friend, Ratner receive statewide awards

At California State Association of Counties' (CSAC) 129th Annual Meeting in Alameda County, Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors Chair Zach Friend and Housing for Health (H4H) Director Robert Ratner were recognized for statewide leadership.

Friend and Ratner received CSAC's prestigious Circle of Service Award, presented to recognize county officials, employees, and other members whose service to the county family is substantially above and beyond the norm. The awards were two of just eight Circle of Service Awards awarded throughout California.

Friend chairs CSAC's Health and Human Services Policy Committee was recognized for advocating on behalf of CSAC for all 58 counties via public testimony during legislative hearings on the Mental Health Services Act and other mental health initiatives, advocating for counties through media and in meetings with legislative members. Friend also advocates on behalf of the County at the federal level, including serving on the National Association of Counties Board of Directors and with various local and regional agencies.

Ratner was recognized for his assistance in developing CSAC's statewide AT HOME plan, which advocates for a statewide and comprehensive plan to address homelessness effectively and equitably. Dr. Ratner was a leader on the Homelessness Policy Solutions Group, lending his expertise to peers throughout California. He was an indispensable resource in generating and refining policy ideas for consideration within the AT HOME plan.

MY SANTA CRUZ

County+



Our award-winning My Santa Cruz County app has been updated to include a secure digital wallet where you can store important information! Check it out today on iTunes and Google Play.

FRAMEWORK: progress seen

Continued from page 2

The county is establishing three navigation centers (low-barrier shelters with intensive supportive services) to intake, assess and help those living on the streets. One will be located at the Coral Street campus in Santa Cruz, another will be located in Watsonville as part of a campus of modular units being developed in partnership with the City of Watsonville and Monterey County. A third will be located in Mid-County at a 34-bed facility for those with severe behavioral health issues, including those enrolled in the state's upcoming CARE Court program. Housing-focused services linked with navigation centers help ensure those who utilize shelter services don't end up back on the streets.

So far, we've secured \$22 million in Project Homekey funding from the state for three permanent supportive housing developments — Veterans Village, Park Haven Plaza and Casa Azul — successes that drew a June 2022 visit from Lourdes Castro Ramírez, then-secretary of the California Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency, to learn more about our programs.

We've also steered "No Place Like Home" funds into four major projects — Harvey West Studios, Jessie Street, Bienestar Plaza and Tabasa Gardens. And we have pending applications for an additional \$42 million in Project Homekey awards, including converting the Rodeway Inn in Watsonville into 95 units of supportive housing, and Freedom House, a new transitional housing development in the unincorporated area of Watsonville focused on youth and young adults.

As our strategic framework to address homelessness comes to the end of its three-year period, we are working to update it in partnership with all local jurisdictions to meet the requirements of the California Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention Program to maintain our eligibility for state funding. As we have shown, continued access to state and federal funds is critical for building the local infrastructure — including permanent supportive housing — that reduces homelessness and its negative personal and community impacts. We look forward to achieving the same unanimous support among local jurisdictions for the updated plan that we did for the current one.

We remain committed to measuring our results, and planning for the next point-in-time count is already underway. The county is supported by volunteers and provides an opportunity to develop important data through a direct survey of our local population of people experiencing homelessness.

If you would like to learn more or get involved, please visit our website to view our plan, learn more about our programs and partners and subscribe to our newsletter to stay up-to-date on developments.

We have much good news to share, and we expect we will have more in the upcoming weeks, months and years. Successes like these aren't possible without everyone working together. The county — and I personally — look forward to continuing to facilitate collective and shared efforts to prevent and end homelessness throughout the county.



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Unanimous Board adopts Housing Element

In November, the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the 2023 Housing Element, providing a pathway to greater housing access and affordability for those impacted by the ongoing housing crisis.

The 6th Cycle Housing Element identifies policies and programs to meet existing and projected housing needs through 2031, including recommended zoning and other changes in order to foster adequate housing at all income levels within the community.

The adopted Housing Element is the result of numerous public meetings, presentations and study sessions before the Board and Planning Commission, local advisory bodies and community groups.

“Housing and housing costs impact local government’s ability to provide



quality services, our business community’s ability to attract and retain a highly-qualified workforce, and most importantly the ability of our residents to provide a stable and secure environment for their families,” County Administrative Officer Carlos Palacios said. “Few things are more important than stable housing, and this plan provides an opportunity to improve housing access for all residents living

in unincorporated areas of the county.”

As required under State law, the Housing Element includes a review of potential environmental impacts. Of the more than 4,600 new units the County needs to accommodate, more than half are designated for those with low and very low incomes. Further, the Housing Element is designed to undo historic patterns of segregation and lift barriers that re-

strict access to housing in order to foster inclusive communities, achieve racial equity, and guarantee fair housing choice.

The Housing Element is subject to review and final certification by the California Department of Housing and community Development.

To learn more, visit <https://www.sccoplanning.com/2023HousingElement>.

Board votes to reestablish County’s Recovery Center

Closed during COVID pandemic, center would monitor intoxicated individuals, provide connections for treatment

The Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors has authorized the reestablishment of a Recovery Center to provide substance use interventions to residents while freeing up important public safety resources.

The Recovery Center played a crucial role in supporting both law enforcement and the community in previous years. Operating from 2015 until its closure in the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Recovery Center successfully redirected nearly 1,400 individuals away from jail during its last year of operation. This led to a 94 percent reduction in the time local

law enforcement officers spent on processing intoxicated individuals and facilitated access to treatment and valuable resources, aimed at lowering the likelihood of reoffending.

The Board unanimously authorized a contract with Janus of Santa Cruz for \$1.08 million. The Recovery Center is expected to open January 2, 2024 within a new modular building at 265 Water St. Construction on the new center is underway. The center will operate continuously and provide space for up to ten eligible adults who can be diverted for additional services. Janus-trained personnel will

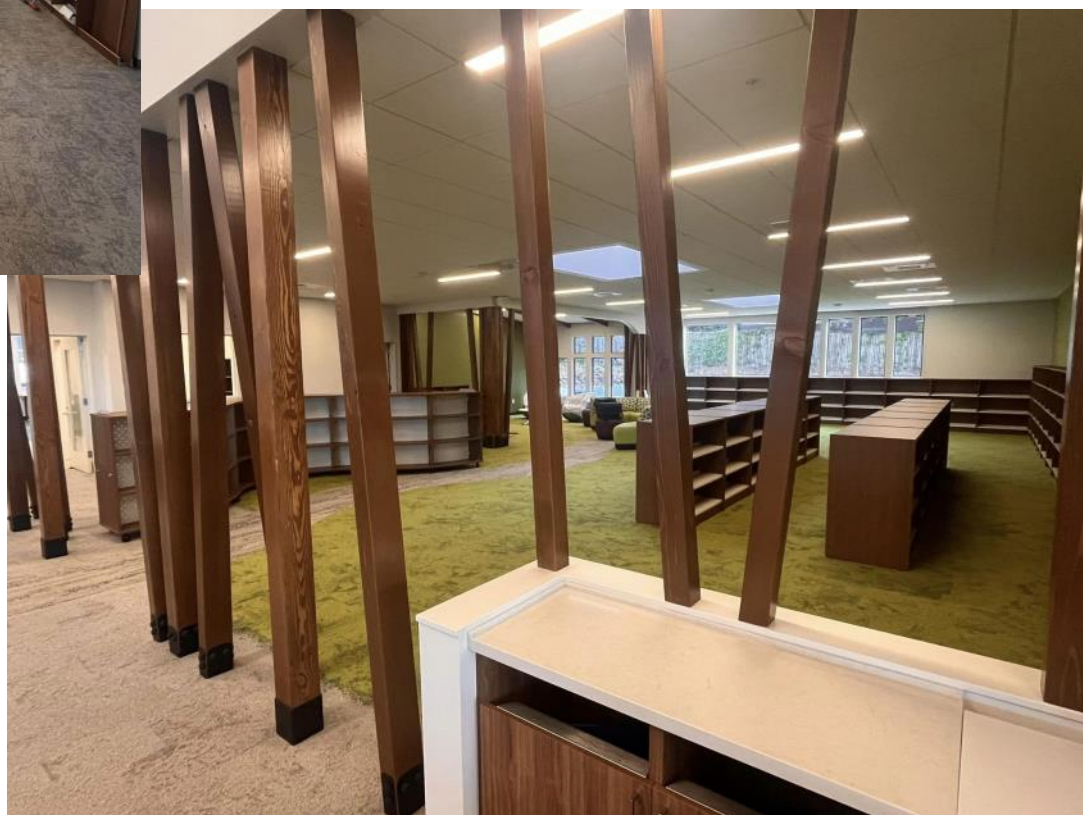


triage and monitor intoxicated individuals, including screening for medical and behavioral health issues. Staff members will have expertise in substance use disorder (SUD) treatment, trauma-informed care, harm reduction and drug/alcohol symptomology assessments.

A library takes shape in Aptos



A [new 12,400 square foot branch library](#) is nearing completion in Aptos. Set to open early in 2024, the \$14 million, net-zero energy facility is designed to reflect Aptos's place between to the forest and the sea, and will provide the community a place to gather and learn for generations to come.



In 2016, Santa Cruz County voters overwhelmingly approved Measure S to fund new library projects. For more, visit Santa Cruz Public Libraries' [Measure S informational page](#).

Meet Your Supervisor

[Manu Koenig](#)

District 1 includes Live Oak, Summit Road Soquel and parts of Capitola and Santa Cruz.



[Zach Friend](#)

District 2 includes Aptos, Corralitos, part of Capitola and the South County coast.



[Justin Cummings](#)

District 3 includes much of Santa Cruz and the North Coast.



[Felipe Hernandez](#)

District 4 includes most of Watsonville and the Pajaro Valley.



[Bruce McPherson](#)

District 5 includes the San Lorenzo Valley, Scotts Valley and parts of Santa Cruz.



Click on each supervisor to learn more about them and their responsibilities, including how to reach them during constituent office hours.

Quick Guide

Citizens rely on county government for many needed services. Use this handy guide to find who to call, or come find us on the web at: www.santacruzcounty.us.

Main Number
(831) 454-2000

Board of Supervisors
(831) 454-2200

Agricultural Commissioner
(831) 763-8080

Animal Services
(831) 454-7303

Assessor's Office
(831) 454-2002

Benefits
(888) 421-8080

County Clerk/Elections
(831) 454-2060

Economic Development
(831) 454-2728

Environmental Health
(831) 454-2022

Health Services Agency
(831) 454-4800

Parks and Recreation
(831) 454-7900

Planning Department
(831) 454-2580

Public Works
(831) 454-2160

Recycling Information
(831) 454-2333

Sheriff/Coroner
(831) 471-1121
(call 911 if emergency)

Superior Court
(831) 763-8060

Tax Collections
(831) 454-2510

Pajaro River levee replacement project moves forward (finally!)



The Pajaro Regional Flood Management Agency (PRFMA) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have signed a project partnership agreement formally kicking off the replacement of the aging Pajaro River levee system.

Following decades of inaction, the County played a leading role in seeking and securing State and federal funding for the project, along with the County's legislative delegation. The project is expected to get underway in 2024.

Pictured standing (R to L) are U.S. Congressman Jimmy Panetta, California Department of Water Resources Director Karla Nemeth, U.S. Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren, State Sen. John Laird, Assembly Speaker Robert Rivas, Supervisor Felipe Hernandez, and Monterey County Supervisors Glenn Church and Luis Alejo.

Santa Cruz County and PRFMA Board Chair Zach Friend and Major Shantel Glass are signing the formal partnership agreement.