



**Response to 2023-2024 Ventura County Grand Jury Report Form
(Please See California Penal Code Section 933.05)**

Report Title: ***Building Better Together: Suggestions for Smoother Permitting Processes***

Responding Entity: Mayor Joe Schroeder, City of Ventura

JUL 23 2024

FINDINGS

- I (we) agree with the Findings numbered: F-06, F-07, F-08, F-09, F-10, F-12, F-13, F-15, F-16, F-17
- I (we) disagree wholly or partially with the Findings numbered: F-11, F-14
(Attach a statement specifying any portions of the Findings that are disputed; include an explanation of the reasons.)

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendations numbered R-10 (Matrix 13, 32, 34) have been implemented.
(Attach a summary describing the implemented actions.)
- Recommendations numbered R-04, R-05, R-06, R-07, R-09 have not yet been implemented but will be implemented in the future. R-10 (Matrix 1, 17, 20, 31, 33), R-11
(Attach a summary indicating the timeframe for implementation.)
- Recommendations numbered R-08 require further analysis.
(Attach an explanation to include: scope and parameters of the analysis or study and timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion with the agency or department head. The timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the report.)
- Recommendations numbered R-10 (Matrix 41, 42) will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable.
(Attach an explanation.)

Date: July 09, 2024

Signed: 

Title: Mayor

Number of pages attached: 7

The Honorable Kevin G. DeNoce
Presiding Judge, Superior Court of California
County of Ventura
800 S. Victoria Avenue
Ventura, CA 93003

Re: Building Better Together: Suggestions for Smoother Permitting Processes

Honorable Kevin G. DeNoce:

The City of Ventura received the 2023-2024 Ventura County Grand Jury report titled: *Building Better Together: Suggestions for Smoother Permitting Processes*. In accordance with Penal Code Section 933.05, we submit this response to the Ventura County Grand Jury findings and recommendations.

The City Council agrees with the following findings:

- **Finding-06**
The City of Ventura is in compliance with California's Permit Streamlining Act for 30-day requirement to deem Complete or issue an Incomplete Letter, but not for the lead agency approving or disapproving a project with an exempt CEQA status within 60 days.
- **Finding-07**
The City of Ventura did not meet the regional housing-needs requirements from its 2014-2021 Housing Element, and little data was available from the annual progress report dashboard.
- **Finding-08**
There has been inadequate training for the EnerGov system from deployment to present.
- **Finding-09**
Inadequate staffing and leadership turnover have led to lengthy delays in project approvals.
- **Finding-10**
Departures of experienced individuals have caused a lack of continuity and institutional memory in several Community Development Divisions.
- **Finding-12**
The City of Ventura has not implemented several of the 2019 Matrix Consulting Group Report recommendations as highlighted in the Discussion Section of this report.

- **Finding-13**
Lengthy delays in project approvals and increased costs are causing dissatisfaction among the development community and discouraging development activities.
- **Finding-15**
The lack of training on the EnerGov software system is causing inefficiency and workplace stress for entire divisions of the Community Development Department.
- **Finding-16**
The staff of the Community Development Department and the Information Technology Department are attempting to fix implementation and configuration deficiencies in using EnerGov software, causing increased workloads.
- **Finding-17**
Utilizing the Historic Preservation Committee and the Design Review Committee in non-decision-making roles has delayed project approvals.

The City Council disagrees wholly or partially with the following findings:

- **Finding-11**
The City of Ventura's Community Development Department is unable to generate meaningful reports using EnerGov software.

Response to Finding-11

The City of Ventura wholly disagrees with Finding F-11. Since 2020, the City has worked diligently to improve the EnerGov process and meaningful reporting. EnerGov can produce various quality reports through automated reporting, system wide search features and system advanced search. These reporting options provide reporting metrics for information that has been input into the system. The key to successful reports is inputting the right data into the system, and staff has worked to improve the data fields in each permit type to help generate meaningful reports. Here are the reports we currently produce and distribute to the larger development advisory group:

- a) Citywide Items in Review
- b) Realtime Data Display
- c) Resubmitted applications
- d) Items in Review Coordinator
- e) Review Coordinator - Incomplete tasks
- f) Application Days Open
- g) Metrics Dashboard
- h) Permits Days to Issuance
- i) Year over Year Permits Report

These help to track key performance indicators such as review time and employee workload.

- **Finding-14**

Since 2020, assessed property values adjusted for inflation have not increased. This indicates that city services may be maintained but could be expanded by streamlining the approval process.

Response to Finding-14

The City of Ventura partially disagrees with Finding F-14. To suggest that property values adjusted for inflation have not increased due to the permitting process is not substantiated with metrics. The City agrees that streamlining the process may produce more permits which would increase assessed property values. However, other factors such as COVID-19, cost of materials, time of year, and financial capabilities are also factors when it comes to individuals investing money into improving a property that is required to go through the permitting process.

GRAND JURY RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Council agrees that the following items have been implemented:

- **Recommendation-10 (Matrix 13, 32, 34)**

The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura implement recommendations #1, 13, 17, 20, 31, 32, 33, 34, 41 and 42, from the Matrix Consulting Group Report by January 1, 2025.

Response to Recommendation-10 (Matrix 13, 32, 34)

The City of Ventura has implemented these recommendations.

- **Matrix #13:** *Start the CEQA process as soon as the appropriate project scope and materials have been provided, even if the application has not been deemed complete.* The City of Ventura has begun to initiate the CEQA process prior to completeness for projects likely to have an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) or Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND).
- **Matrix #32:** *Utilize the features on the permit software system to calculate the appropriate plan check and permitting fees.* Information Technology has configured the appropriate fees to be associated with permit work classes configured. Information is pulled from custom fields on the application triggering the appropriate fee from the master fee schedule. Fees are updated in EnerGov by Information Technology annually upon approval of the City Council.
- **Matrix #34:** *Implement electronic application and plan submittals for all development application types.* All applications and plan submittals are electronically submitted through Ventura OPS by applicants.

The City Council agrees to implement the following recommendations in the future:

- **Recommendation-04**

The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura identify specific steps that will be taken to reduce turnaround times to comply with California's Permit Streamlining Act and include expected completion dates for those steps by January 1, 2025.

Response to Recommendation-04

This recommendation will be complete prior to January 1, 2025.

- **Recommendation-05**

The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura work with the California Department of Housing and Community Development to correct errors in annual progress reports by January 1, 2025.

Response to Recommendation-05

Reports and processes will be refined to ensure that accurate information is provided to the California Department of Housing and Community Development. Staff will review previous information provided to ensure accuracy. This recommendation will be complete prior to January 1, 2025.

- **Recommendation-06**

The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura identify and recruit potential hires having EnerGov experience in the Planning and Building Divisions of the Community Development Department by January 1, 2025.

Response to Recommendation-06

While EnerGov is not the predominate software for permit tracking, the City has begun to hire more employees with experience using this software, including the new planning manager. However, job descriptions do not call out EnerGov experience as recommended, which would help in recruiting EnerGov experienced staff. In lieu of solely relying on recruiting potential hires that specialize or have experience with EnerGov, the city will produce a quality training program that will address new hires, ongoing periodic training, identifying subject matter experts (SME) for each department and/or divisions, create a trainer the trainer's aspect, and identify key staff that will participate in ongoing trainings opportunities hosted by EnerGov. This recommendation will be complete prior to January 1, 2025.

- **Recommendation-07**

The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura create a standardized training protocol for new hires and existing employees for the EnerGov software system, including ongoing periodic training, by January 1, 2025.

Response to Recommendation-07

The city will produce a quality training program that will address new hires, ongoing periodic training, identifying subject matter experts (SME) for each department and/or divisions, create a trainer the trainer's aspect, produce training videos/manual, and identify key staff that will participate in ongoing trainings

opportunities hosted by EnerGov. This recommendation will be complete prior to January 1, 2025.

- **Recommendation-09**

The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura, in conjunction with the IT department and expert consultants, implement and properly configure meaningful reports regarding compliance, workload and timeliness within the EnerGov software system by January 1, 2025.

Response to Recommendation-09

A report is currently being produced that demonstrates each phase of the process with an associated amount of time. The report will also separate the total time the city was processing permits versus waiting for the applicant to provide additional information. This will allow the opportunity to observe shortfalls and shift resources to ensure that the process is as efficient and effective as possible. There will also be training/guidance on using system-wide reports and advanced search. This recommendation will be complete prior to January 1, 2025.

- **Recommendation-10**

The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura implement recommendations #1, 13, 17, 20, 31, 32, 33, 34, 41 and 42, from the Matrix Consulting Group Report by January 1, 2025.

Response to Recommendation-10 (Matrix #1, 17, 20, 31, 33)

See the below detailed information on each Matrix Recommendation. These recommendation will be complete prior to January 1, 2025.

Matrix #1: Upon updating the adopted codes, create a decision-making authority matrix that summarizes the respective roles of staff, boards, and commission in the development review process. This authority table should be posted on the City's website. Staff is working on developing a decision-making matrix to explain the entitlement process to be posted on our website and to be used for training staff. This recommendation will be complete prior to January 1, 2025.

Matrix #17: Develop consolidated list of review timelines for all building application types. General timeframes will be posted on the city website along with automated emails provided to applicants through Ventura OPS. Timeframes will be evaluated frequently to ensure that they are as up to date as possible. This recommendation will be complete prior to January 1, 2025.

Matrix #20: Create a development review webpage that acts as a central hub and provides an overview of permitting requirements and links to departments for more information. The focus is to have a user-friendly webpage that contains accurate links, up to date information, easy to understand development process, and resources to assist in the development process, including up to date

timeframes for processing applications and permit issuance. This recommendation will be complete prior to January 1, 2025, and will be maintained in perpetuity.

Matrix #31: Provide permitting software user training to all plan review staff, including a formalized training program for new hires, involved in the development review process. The city will produce a quality training program that will address new hires, ongoing periodic training, identifying subject matter experts (SME) for each department and/or divisions, create a trainer the trainer's aspect, produce training videos/manual, and identify key staff that will participate in ongoing trainings opportunities hosted by EnerGov. This recommendation will be complete prior to January 1, 2025.

Matrix #33: Utilize EnerGov for all development related activities (plan review and inspections) across all departments. There are configurations and training for other departments such as Park and Recreation, Public Works, Fire and Water to facilitate the development process workflow including review and inspections conducted. This will continually be addressed through the Matrix Report process improvement with support from the development departments. This recommendation will be completed by January 1, 2025.

- **Recommendation-11**

The Grand Jury recommends that the City Council re-examine the roles of the HPC and DRC, taking into consideration the goals outlined in the Matrix Consulting Group Report to streamline the entitlement approval process by January 1, 2025.

Response to Recommendation-11

The Community Development Department will again re-examine the roles of the HPC and DRC with the City Council and receive direction on a desired path moving forward.

The City Council agrees the following recommendation requires further analysis:

- **Recommendation-08**

The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura properly configure and put into practice all originally purchased EnerGov modules by January 1, 2025.

Response to Recommendation-08

Prior to the Grand Jury report being released, the Planning module was partially configured. This included configuring a workflow and digital application. There are additional configurations that will be designed and implemented over the next six months. There are workflow configurations and training for other departments such as Park and Recreation, Public Works, Fire and Water to facilitate the development process workflow for both plan review and inspections. Additional analysis needs to be completed with Information Technology to identify development modules available that are not being utilized to the fullest capacity. This recommendation will be analyzed prior to January 1, 2025.

The City Council agrees the following recommendations are not warranted or reasonable:

- **Recommendation-10**

The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Ventura implement recommendations #1, 13, 17, 20, 31, 32, 33, 34, 41 and 42, from the Matrix Consulting Group Report by January 1, 2025.

Response to Recommendation-10 (Matrix #41, 42)

See the below detailed information on each Matrix Recommendation.

Matrix #41: Utilize features in EnerGov to track time spent on all stages of the development projects (e.g. inspection, plan check, etc.). This is not warranted or is not reasonable. The Planning Division will track time spent on processes that a deposit fee is collected. However, time tracking for each individual task will take more staff time than the city would benefit from the metrics captured.

Matrix #42: Utilize features in EnerGov to generate comprehensive reports on time spent on development activity. This is not warranted or is not reasonable. The Planning Division will track time spent and will be able to generate a report on time spent for processes that a deposit fee is collected. With Matrix #41 being deemed as not warranted or not reasonable, there is no need for Matrix #42 as there will be no data to capture through reports.

The City of Ventura is committed to improving the development review process. Streamlining the Development Review Process has been a priority for several years. In 2019, the Ventura City Council contracted with Matrix Consulting Group to improve the process of reviewing land use applications. The consulting group conducted a multiphase analysis, examining the organizational and operational aspects of development services across all relevant divisions. As commented in the Ventura County Grand Jury report, “the Grand Jury also found that Oxnard and Ventura are striving to improve their processes, hire staff and comply with state laws that combine stricter timelines with more flexible land use.”

The City of Ventura will continue to strive to improve processes through addressing the recommendations of the Ventura County Grand Jury, completing recommendations from the Matrix Consulting Group and enhancing services to the community.

Respectfully,



Joe Schroeder
Mayor

Cc: Ventura County Grand Jury, 800 S. Victoria Avenue, Ventura, CA 93009