



September 14, 2020

Madera County Board of Supervisors  
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Submitted electronically to:

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Dear Chair Rogers and Madera County Supervisors,

Through our direct community work with your constituents in Madera, La Vina, and Fairmead, we regularly hear from residents regarding infrastructural, material, and service needs in Madera County. We frequently raise these priorities through public comment at the Board of Supervisors (Board), as well as in individual and group meetings with the members of this Board and with county staff. Today, we are writing to provide comments regarding the Proposed Madera County Budget for Fiscal Year 2020-2021, however these comments reiterate priorities that this Board and its staff have heard from community members and from our organization on an ongoing basis over several years. As such, we ask that the County's fiscal and governing priorities reflect them in this year's budget.

#### **I. Parks, Community Centers, and Green Spaces**

One of the most consistent budget priorities raised among partner communities in Madera County is creation of parks, community centers, and green spaces in neighborhoods that currently lack access to these spaces. Residents we work with have expressed interest in partnering with Madera County to **establish a Parks and Recreation Department, which could oversee the creation, operation and maintenance of these critical community spaces.** Such a Department could be formed by leveraging General Fund dollars and grant opportunities. Doing so would be a critical - and fundamental - step toward ensuring equitable access to green spaces, parks, and community centers, which are so sorely needed -- not only for thriving, healthy communities-- but also for crisis management and response (as we have seen during COVID-19).

## **II. Affordable Housing**

Low-income tenants in Madera County often experience tremendous hardship trying to access affordable housing. When low-income tenants face displacement, the limited supply of affordable housing in Madera County places families at risk of homelessness<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, limited supply of affordable housing makes lower income tenants vulnerable to poor housing conditions and abusive landlords. The prevalence of lower wage and seasonal jobs - including those in the agricultural field - make availability of affordable housing critical to household security and community stability.

To ensure adequate housing options for Madera County's residents, **(1) Madera County should direct \$500,000 from the General Fund into the severely underfunded "Low-Moderate-Income Housing Fund" to help non-profit, affordable housing developers fund the construction of affordable housing in Madera; (2) Madera County must set aside the needed funds for staff time (i.e. grant writing) to apply this coming cycle for the Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities Grant, relevant SB1 dollars, Transformative Climate Communities (TCC) planning and implementation grants, other HCD funding opportunities, and other state and federal programs that would assist in funding the planning and construction of affordable housing.**

We encourage the County to look to the City of Madera's success in securing AHSC dollars for the development of veteran housing and clean mobility upgrades downtown. While our organization will be the first to recognize the challenges of bringing State and Federal dollars to the San Joaquin Valley, this project is a prime example of what Madera County could do to transform the housing and transportation landscape of its communities.

## **III. Fund a New, Compliant SB244 Analysis to Guide Investments in Existing Communities**

Madera County must meet the infrastructure and service needs of existing communities before facilitating development in new communities through land use changes and approvals. Even when these new projects and their corresponding infrastructure projects are developer-funded, public subsidies support the short and long term allocation of funding and natural resources to

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<sup>1</sup> For example, this past November, our organization worked with tenants in the City of Madera and with Madera City Council to help keep approximately thirty families in their homes by preventing en masse, no fault evictions. Throughout this process, when these families were concerned about being evicted, I heard from several people who drove for hours several days around Madera County in search of affordable housing but were unable to find any. Were these evictions not stopped, many of these families expressed that they did not know where they were going to go.

sustain those projects. The County must address the needs of existing communities prior to taking on short and long-term investment obligations for infrastructure, services, and resource allocation in new development.

As a first step, **the County should allocate dollars to the Public Works Department to conduct a comprehensive and compliant SB244 analysis (Government Code Section 65302.10).** Upon our review of the County's existing SB244 analysis<sup>2</sup>, we noticed that it does not include the communities of La Vina or Ripperdan, and that it does not indicate any service deficiencies for the community of Fairmead, where there are currently several dry domestic wells, a community water system at stage 4, aging and leaking septic tanks, and lack of access to storm drainage to prevent roadways from flooding. A new SB244 analysis must be conducted so that the County may accurately assess service and infrastructure deficiencies in each community and how the County will address each of those deficiencies.

#### **IV. Prioritize Disadvantaged Communities for Road Repavement and Clean Mobility Infrastructure**

Our organization has been partnering with La Vina and Fairmead for years in advocating to this Board and staff regarding the transportation infrastructure priorities of both communities. In La Vina, road repavement of Road 24, Avenue 7, roads in the subdivision of Self Help Enterprises' single family homes, and other roads in the surrounding area remain in disrepair as do several roads in Fairmead that are in need of repaving and / or grading. Meanwhile, Madera County's Pavement Management System, which sets the priorities for road repairs and repavement across the County, has not prioritized rural unincorporated communities, including La Vina and Fairmead. Accordingly, **the County should adjust its Road Maintenance Plan to incorporate a scoring system that scores Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities more equitably by reducing the unfair weighting of population data in Pavement Management System scoring criteria. Additional funds from the General Fund must also be placed in both of these communities' Special District Road Budgets to fund additional road maintenance projects.**

In addition to road repavement, both communities want clean mobility projects like sidewalks, crosswalks, speed reduction infrastructure<sup>3</sup>, multi-use trails, and other active transportation infrastructure. Our organization partners with La Vina residents and Madera County regarding implementation of a complete Mobility Study that would achieve these priorities. While the County has applied for the Bikeway Incentives grant and plans to submit an application for Active Transportation Program funding, Madera County walked back on its commitment to apply for STEP funding despite our organization's advocacy to CARB to prioritize the

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.maderacounty.com/home/showdocument?id=10798>

<sup>3</sup> Speed reduction infrastructure along Ave 22 ¾ near Fairmead Elementary School

community for this funding source. **The County must allocate more funding towards Grant Services so that Staff can pursue funding wherever possible to implement projects that are a high priority for Madera County communities.**

**Additionally, the County must designate a portion of its transportation funding towards active transportation infrastructure for communities that have identified this as a priority.**

#### **V. Create a Community-Driven Climate Resilience & Preparedness Plan**

This wildfire season is devastating our state, many Madera County communities, and is producing bad public health outcomes as our air is more contaminated than ever. **As wildfire season grows worse and worse over time, our organization and our community partners in La Vina and Fairmead ask that the County allocate funding to develop a community-driven plan to deal with climate change and its impacts in our region.**

Such a plan should encompass both adaptation and mitigation components to increase the resilience of communities and reduce the long term severe impacts climate change has on the health and safety of residents, communities, forests and agricultural lands. Community residents in Madera County have long requested action to address the impacts of climate change and environmental injustice including worsening air quality, dust, walkability, groundwater depletion, excessive heat, wildfires and green space accessibility. Additionally, Senate Bill 379 requires local jurisdictions to adopt a climate adaptation plan or component in the safety element no later than January 1, 2022. The devastating effects of climate change are already being felt throughout Madera County in the form of extreme and prolonged heat<sup>4</sup>, droughts, and erratic weather patterns. These patterns will only worsen, further devastating the County's economy and putting its residents at even higher risks of serious illness, hospitalizations, and worse. As a result, Madera County cannot afford to continue putting this planning document off and it must be a top priority in the 2020-2021 budget.

#### **VI. Institute a Participatory Budgeting Process with Multiple Opportunities to Incorporating Community Feedback**

Lastly, given that the priorities outlined above relate to longstanding needs that have gone unaddressed by the County for decades, **Madera County needs a participatory budgeting process that offers multiple community workshops and includes a clear process for incorporating your constituents' feedback into the final proposed budget.** We would look forward to partnering with you in the coming budget cycle on participatory budgeting workshops, and strongly believe that participatory budgeting would be a more democratic

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<sup>4</sup> Madera County must also work with community leaders in Fairmead to set up a cooling center in the community. Given the amount of unhoused individuals and residents living in homes without access to air conditioning in this community, this is a top priority for Fairmead residents and funds must be allocated to make this possible in this year's budget as one component of a climate resilience strategy.

process for decision-making regarding taxpayer dollars. As always, please do not hesitate to reach out to us with questions regarding a participatory budgeting process for Madera County, or to discuss any of the priorities outlined in this letter. We look forward to continuing to work with you on each of them.

Respectfully,

Madeline Harris  
Policy Advocate