

Point Arena City Government

A review of Point Arena (City) city government and related issues found that the City is well governed for the most part with a few areas of concern to be addressed.

Method of Investigation

The Grand Jury interviewed elected officials and employees of City government, private citizens, former City employees, former elected officials, citizens involved in private business, employees of the local school district, employees and volunteers of the Redwood Coast Fire District, and local law enforcement. The Grand Jury attended City Council meetings and reviewed the minutes of 2000-2001 City Council and Planning Commission meetings. The Grand Jury inspected the wastewater treatment facilities, the Point Arena Pier facilities, the emergency services facilities, the petroleum recycling facilities and city yard facilities, city schools, fire protection facilities, and the private water company facilities. The Grand Jury reviewed the latest draft of the City's General Plan, City zoning ordinances, the most recent outside financial audit of City government, employee policies, procedures, and job descriptions, the City's revolving loan fund policies and procedures, and emergency services procedures.

Background Information

Point Arena is an incorporated city. City government consists of an elected five-member City Council that meets monthly. The City Council acts as the Planning Commission as well. The City Council elects one of its members as Mayor. Registered voters number somewhat less than 300. There are eight salaried employees: three part time Pier Facilities Managers, a Maintenance Supervisor concerned with street and infrastructure maintenance, a city clerk/administrator who acts as planning director, a Waste Water Treatment Plant Supervisor, a combination Street Maintenance Person/Used Oil Grant Director and a Grant Administrator. The Grant Administrator also acts as an Emergency Services Director. Legal services to the City are provided by a contracted "city attorney." The City contracts with the County Sheriff to provide three full-time officers. The City contracts for engineering services with a private firm. The City contracts for fire inspection and related plan checks with the Fort Bragg Fire Marshal. The City has established a system of commissions dealing with various areas of concern of City government. These commissions consist of one City Council member and one or more salaried employees, for example, the Pier Commission. The City manages two revolving loan funds that are offered to citizens to promote real estate and business development including affordable/low income housing. The city obtained oil pollution cleanup grant money for "Arena Rescue," which consists of a dedicated rescue boat to be used in emergencies and assists the Coast Guard in emergency services.

City revenue is generated from secured taxes, transient occupancy tax, and pier facility services and product tax. Pier revenue is generated by boat launching, product cranes, parking fees, and product tax from private fish product companies. A privately owned water company supplies water to the City for domestic use and fire protection. The Redwood Coast Fire District headquartered in Manchester provides fire and emergency services. The City has developed a disaster plan in coordination with the Emergency Services Authority in Ukiah. The City is involved in Safe Passages, an externally funded program to provide infrastructure for safe transit of children to and from school.

Findings

1. The City is operating fiscally in the black, but City administration has expressed concern that the current recession and reduction in State revenue may present problems. The product tax from private fish companies has dwindled in recent years primarily from the reduction in the urchin fishery.
2. The City manages revolving loan funds in accordance with published guidelines. The City uses the self-sustaining funds for private enterprise and affordable housing.
3. City ordinances are not codified in a meaningful way. The City has established a goal to codify ordinances, but has not had the time or manpower to accomplish this goal.
4. The City is not in compliance with the affordable housing element of its General Plan. According to the General Plan, affordable housing development in the City is hampered by price and availability of real estate, land use controls, building codes, local permit processing, various special fees, environmental/site condition studies, and limitations on density.
5. The Grand Jury heard testimony that water pressure and capacity for fire protection to the southern end of the City in the cove area are not adequate.
6. The Grand Jury heard testimony that emergency equipment access to the Wharf Master's Inn and Coast Guard House bed and breakfast is not adequate.
7. The City has recently adopted a policy for fire safety plan checks. The policy does not include systematic fire safety checks of existing buildings and businesses accessed by the public.
8. Policies and procedures for City elected officials, employees, commissions, and citizen's advisory groups are not complete or organized for easy reference.

9. City Council and Planning Commission meetings reviewed and attended were in accordance with Brown Act requirements. However, citizens wishing to express concerns on various issues are allowed only five minutes.
10. Emergency services procedures have been implemented, but the City lacks a dedicated shelter. The City is in continuous collaboration with the Emergency Services Authority to improve the effectiveness of the emergency services program.
11. The rescue boat for Arena Rescue is inoperative because it needs new engines. The City is exploring the possibility of grants for new engines. At present the rescue boat is a depreciating asset because of lack of maintenance and damage from exposure to the elements.
12. Recently a member of the City Council resigned his position and immediately took a salaried position with the City. Although this did not violate the present policies and procedures of the City, it gave the appearance of conflict of interest.
13. The City General Plan lists a goal to establish a capital improvement plan.
14. Areas within the City limits are not totally in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act Comprehensive Access Plan. Violations include lack of handicap or wheelchair access, parking, and signs.

Recommendations

- A. The City continue to direct revolving loan funds toward fulfilling the affordable housing element of the General Plan and supporting business enterprise that will provide revenue to the City. (Findings 1, 4)
- B. The City codify and organize ordinances for easy reference. The City consider hiring an outside contractor to accomplish this task. (Finding 3)
- C. The City and the Redwood Coast Fire District contract with an external investigator or State Fire Marshal to investigate and report on adequate fire protection water in the southern part of the City and fire equipment access to the cove area. (Findings 5, 6)
- D. The City in conjunction with the Redwood Coast Fire District consider adoption of periodic fire safety inspection of buildings and businesses frequented by the public. (Finding 7)
- E. The City consider ISO (International Organization of Standardization) certification of the fire safety of the City in that it would point out any discrepancies and possibly allow a lowering of fire insurance rates. (Findings 5, 6, 7)

- F. The City complete and gather into one compendium policies and procedures for City elected officials, employees, commissions and citizen advisory groups. (Finding 8)
- G. The City Council allow more flexible time for public comment during meetings. To allow more time for public comment, the City consider a separate Planning Commission meeting on a different day than the City Council meeting. (Finding 9)
- H. The City continue its efforts to enhance the emergency services program by dialog with the Emergency Services Authority in Ukiah. The City address issue of establishing and equipping an emergency shelter. (Finding 10)
- I. The City decide either to continue its efforts to reinstate the Arena Rescue boat to operational status or discontinue the program and sell the boat. The Grand Jury encourages the City to give protection of coastal resources from oil spills a high priority in making its decision. (Finding 11)
- J. The City adopt a minimum time period after leaving office to restrict City elected officials in regard to accepting City employment. (Finding 12)
- K. The City establish a capital improvement program in accordance with its General Plan goal. (Finding 13)
- L. The City comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act Comprehensive Access Plan. (Finding 14)

Comment

The Grand Jury commends the city government and citizenry of Point Arena on its completion and adoption of its General Plan, its efforts to establish its emergency services program, its successful petroleum and solid waste recycling program, its support of the Safe Passages program, and its sound fiscal management. The Grand Jury applauds the dedication of the virtually unpaid elected officials of the city and the dedication of its salaried employees as well.

Misinformation and lack of communication between various factions of the citizenry and City government is endemic. The public does not regularly attend City Council meetings. The City Council in the past has had to appoint members because of lack of interest. The Grand Jury would remind the citizenry of Point Arena that “you get the government you deserve.”

Response Required

Point Arena City Council

Redwood Coast Fire District Board of Directors

Emergency Service Authority Board of Directors