



HOPLAND

MUNICIPAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Hopland Municipal Advisory Council Minutes

Regular Meeting – Hybrid

September 17, 2025, at 5:30 pm

Hopland Fire Protection District Community Room
21 Feliz Creek Road, Hopland, California

The Hopland Municipal Advisory Council (HMAC) meetings are held in-person and virtually via Zoom Video Communications. Meeting access information is available on the Agenda for this meeting.

Members: Julie Golden, Amy Frost, Dale Andrew, Chelsea Arnold, *Vacant*

Alternate: *Vacant*

Administrative Support: Melissa Frausto - LACO Associates

1. Call to order & roll call

The meeting was called to order at 5:39pm. Three members were present (Julie Golden, Dale Andrew and Chelsea Arnold) and one member was absent (Frost). No members attended virtually.

2. Public comment & announcements on non-agenda items

Vernon Budinger (*Public Comment*): Vernon stated that he is evaluating the Hildebrand Consulting Rate Study for the Hopland Public Utilities District (HPUD). He found that while construction costs have increased over the last ten years, the District's cash flow has been positive during that period, and he questioned where the built-up cash has gone. He also noted that the HPUD is paying down its loans faster than necessary. Vernon believes the study confuses net income and cash flow, and he pointed out that even if the HPUD does not have to pay for the relocation of the utilities, the community would still be charged rates as if they were, which would be a 100% rate increase. He mentioned that the community is uncomfortable the details and are organizing to oppose the rate increase unless it is lowered. He also challenged the perception that the consultant's study is completely accurate, citing a discrepancy in the numbers. Vernon stated that he attempted to contact the HPUD but thanked Julie for her help. He ended by expressing his hope that Assembly Bills (AB) 830 and 281 will pass.

A member of the public shared that they spoke with their elected representative, and Marie Brady (*Caltrans, Project Manager*). According to the speaker, Marie was surprised to hear about the rate increase for the Caltrans Hopland Highway 101 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Project (ADA Project). The speaker feels that because of the high cost and the project being split into two phases, Caltrans should bypass Hopland entirely, similar to what they did in Willits. The speaker also mentioned a past incident where a trailer killed pedestrians and expressed a strong belief that the project will not make the highway safe for pedestrians. They specifically noted that lowering utilities by ten inches will not improve safety. The speaker urged to be more realistic when presenting the project, acknowledging its large cost and questioning the claim that it will make the street safe.



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A member of the public provided comments based on a recent email from Jared Walker regarding the proposed rate increase that outlined reasons for the increase, such as long-delayed projects and new mandates. The speaker stated that, based on Mr. Walker's comments regarding the merging of water districts, it appears Hopland will see an 11 percent increase in staff. The speaker questioned this, raising concerns about the reasoning and stated that this "seems fishy."

3. Consent Calendar

- a. Approval of the August 20, 2025, Regular Meeting Minutes
Chelsea motioned to approve the consent calendar with a second from Dale. All voted in favor.

4. Discussion and possible action on community updates and issues

- a. Mendocino County Sheriff's Office: *General updates from Sheriff Kendall*

Sheriff Kendall provided the following updates:

- He noted an increase in activity in Covelo and an increase in methamphetamine use county-wide. He shared that there is a major concern about overdoses, as about 16% of accidental deaths in the past two years have been from methamphetamine and/or fentanyl overdoses.
- The Sheriff's Office is also seeing a rise in people choosing rehabilitation over jail since the passing of Proposition 36 in 2024.
- The new jail is on track to be completed in January 2026, though its construction costs have doubled.
- The Sheriff's Office has hired two behavioral health officers, which has led to a decrease in calls related to mental health crises, known as 5150 calls, because these officers have come to know the people who frequently need these services.

- b. Hopland Fire Protection District: *General updates from Chief Franklin*

Chief Franklin reported that it's currently a busy fire season for the Hopland Fire Protection District (HFPD). An engine that was in Happy Camp has returned. The HFPD is busy responding to local traffic accidents and small fires, while also helping with larger incidents in other parts of the State. The HFPD has a good number of volunteers, but they are hoping to add one more to their team.

- c. Board of Supervisors: *General updates from Supervisor Madeline Cline*

No update/ discussion.

- d. Shanél Valley Academy: *General updates from Amy Frost*

No update/ discussion.

- e. California Department of Transportation: *General updates from Jen Buck*

Jen Buck (*Caltrans, Office Chief of Project Management*) shared that the Caltrans ADA Project is currently going to the California Transportation Commission for funding approval. Caltrans will then put the project to bid for a contractor during the winter and then in spring will do an Informational Campaign with construction information and schedule. Phase 1 of the Project, known as Project A, will make ADA improvements such

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as improving curb ramps, sidewalks, and driveways, reconstructing the roadway, rehabilitating pavement, and signage in downtown Hopland. Phase 2 of the Project, known as Project B, will be completed at a future date once funding is confirmed from AB 830 if it passes. If it passes, Caltrans would be able to pay for the relocation of the underground utilities. Additionally, Jen shared that Caltrans will be completing maintenance work in late 2026 to add a left turn pocket lane just north of Hopland on Highway 101.

Vernon Budinger (Public Comment): Vernon asked if Jen could verify the cost of moving utilities to be approximately \$5 million. Jen confirmed the cost would be approximately \$5 million. She explained that while the initial estimate was \$2 million, the price has increased to between \$3 million and \$5 million since cost of construction rises every year, and the estimate depends on when the project is done. Then Vernon asked if Caltrans would pay half, Jen clarified that the HPUD would be responsible for the full cost. Julie provided context regarding the ADA Project, explaining that the HPUD's utilities are located within the Caltrans easement. She stated that the HPUD was unable to pay for the relocation when the project was first brought to them so District 1 Supervisor Madeline Cline and others helped search for funding, but when they couldn't find any, and Caltrans split the project into two phases. She also noted that the underground utilities include lines for AT&T and PG&E. In addition, the current gravity-flow sewer pipes might require pumps after the area is regraded.

A member of the public asked about what improvements would be made for Project B. Jen stated that it includes culvert replacement and Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon (RRFB) at crosswalks. They asked if solar beacons (RRFBs) had been researched. Julie responded that they had considered this, but State regulations require RRFBs to be placed at least 6 feet deep, which would impact the utilities regardless of whether the RRFBs are solar or not.

A member of the public asked if Project B would be paid for by AB 830 and if that would require Caltrans to take action. Jen Buck confirmed that if AB 830 passes, Caltrans would be legally required to pay for the relocation of the utilities because they are in the Caltrans easement.

A member of the public asked if the ADA Project would fix the flooding. Chelsea stated that they are restoring the area to its original grade, which will not cause flooding. Jen Buck added that Caltrans' analysis shows the flooding is due to the area's proximity to the Russian River. She noted that while replacing culverts might help, the geology of the area is a limiting factor. Jen also believes the reducing "turn hump" will be the best safety improvement because it will improve visibility as cars come around the corner.

A member of the public asked about a previously seen map for a beautification project with a sidewalk along Highway 175. Jen Buck said she didn't believe there were current plans for it but would look into the matter. Julie clarified that the project never happened.



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Lastly, Jen Buck acknowledged the community's history of feeling disappointed with past projects. She said she wants to have open communication to face challenges together and to deliver on what they promise.

f. Hopland Public Utility District: *General updates*

Joan Norry [*Hopland Public Utility District (HPUD), President*] shared that the HPUD had their regularly scheduled meeting on September 11, 2025. Although a large turnout was expected due to recent concerns about the rate increase, only a few people attended. The next HPUD meeting will be on October 9, 2025, where Hildebrand Consulting will be present in person to address questions about their Rate Study.

g. Hopland Cemetery District: *General updates*

Joan Norry [*Hopland Cemetery District (District), Board member*] announced that the District will receive a historical monument at the cemetery on Saturday at 10 a.m. The monument is from the Sam Brannan Chapter of E Clampus Vitus, a historical society focused on preserving California history. The community is invited to join the monument installation ceremony.

h. Hopland Research and Extension Center: *General updates*

Hannah Bird (*Hopland Research and Extension Center, Community Education Specialist/Community Outreach*) provided the following written updates:

1. *"Oak Discovery Day, a family friendly free event is on October 11th, there will be workshops, guided hikes and a community performance of the play 'And Who Shall Heal The Ground' by local resident Diana Pepetone. You can sign up on the California Oak Discovery Day 2025 at: <https://bit.ly/oakday25> . We also have a display of oak photographs/artwork and you can upload submissions at <https://bit.ly/oakart25>*
2. *Sheep flock increased to allow greater fuels reduction and education work.*
3. *As part of the Governor's California Jobs First program we have been awarded a grant to bring 5 high schools/community colleges to compete in the International Farm Robotics Challenge. Each participating school will receive a drone or farm robot to answer a problem faced by local farmers. If any farmers would like to bring their challenge to the groups please e-mail hbird@ucanr.edu, interested teachers and schools can also contact this e-mail. This gives local students the opportunity to gain experience and an important resume builder if they are interested in future tech jobs.*
4. *We will be conducting fall prescribed burns on the site with the CAL FIRE Vegetation Management Plan, dates not decided yet, but we'll keep our social media updated, contact neighbors and Mendocino Winegrowers Association when they are. There is an accompanying research study being conducted to understand the impact of smoke taint on winegrapes and how prescribed burns*



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can be coordinated with winegrowers to avoid impacting the crop while still reducing wildfire fuels.

5. *We have been awarded a grant to trial and provide education about virtual fencing, this involves a collar on grazing animals which will alert the animals if they are too close to the virtual boundaries that have been set. It would decrease the need for costly fencing, which can impact wildlife movement, and will allow finely tuned grazing practices. Workshops will be announced on our social media.*
6. *If folks would like to keep up to date, we also have an e-mail newsletter, you can sign up for at <http://eepurl.com/bisJHj>.*

5. Discussion and possible action on legislative updates on the California State Assembly

Assemblymember Chris Rogers, who represents the 2nd Assembly District, gave an update. He was elected last December and previously served on the Santa Rosa City Council. He shared his goal is to focus on communities that have been overlooked in the past. Assemblymember Rogers highlighted the work of District 1 Supervisor Madeline Cline for bringing the Caltrans ADA Project to his attention. His office noticed that other communities were facing similar issues with capital improvement projects, where costs are often passed on to residents. This led to the creation of Assembly Bill 830, which mandate Caltrans to fund utility line relocation within their right-of-way. While it started as a broad bill, it was narrowed down to focus on Hopland's specific issue. AB 830 was sent to the Governor's office last week. He encouraged everyone to contact the Governor to show their support. The bill has a five-year sunset date to motivate Caltrans to complete the projects. Assemblymember Rogers also mentioned his office is working with Senator Mike McGuire to get direct funding for the project.

Assemblymember Rogers also spoke about AB 1014, which came from a safety concern in two areas of his district: Del Norte County and the community of Duncan Mills in Sonoma County. People were parking on the side of the highway and having to cross in unsafe conditions due to speeding cars. Caltrans had told the Duncan Mills community that they couldn't lower the speed limit unless someone was severely injured. AB 1014 will allow Caltrans to do speed assessments and lower speed limits when necessary. This bill is also currently on the Governor's desk. Lastly, Assemblymember Rogers thanked everyone for their hard work and said he feels optimistic about both bills.

A member of the public asked if AB 830 passes, will Caltrans pay for the relocation of utilities, and will the project return to a single phase. Assemblymember Rogers said that even if the bill passes, Caltrans is moving forward with Project A as planned because the funds have already been set aside. He explained that a settlement case requires Caltrans to complete a certain amount of ADA improvements, for which funds have already been allocated. Jen Buck added that the project does not lack funding, but that existing laws prevent Caltrans from paying for the relocation of the utilities. Jen also stated that Caltrans is aware of the sunset date and has already begun work on Project B.

A member of the public asked if the Caltrans ADA Project's goal is to help people in wheelchairs cross the highway. Assemblymember Rogers explained that the Americans with Disabilities Act

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(ADA) is for people with mobility issues. He noted that some communities have been sued for not complying with the law. Since infrastructure improvements are costly, a settlement was made that allocates a certain amount of money for ADA improvements so that communities don't go bankrupt. The member of the public then asked if making sidewalks ADA-compliant would imply that it's safe to cross, possibly making it more dangerous. Assemblymember Rogers stated that making these ADA improvements does not make crossing more dangerous. In fact, they provide increased safety measures. He further added that Caltrans is legally required to make reasonable efforts to ensure public safety. Jen Buck shared a website in the Zoom chat to provide information ADA funding. The webpage, which can be found at <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/civil-rights/ada-infrastructure-program>, and also discusses the settlement that provides these funds for ADA improvements.

6. Discussion and possible action on County of Mendocino 2024-25 Civil Grand Jury Report - Planning & Building Services Structural Issues: Exposing the Cracks
No update/discussion.

7. Discussion and possible action on Rehabilitation of the Highway 101 Northbound Hopland Sign
Chelsea gave an update on the Highway 101 Northbound Hopland Sign Rehabilitation Project. Julie has confirmed with Tiffany Gibson and her family that the sign is on their property, and they just need to be notified before any work begins. Chelsea added that "Concrete Pete" will be looking at the sign over the weekend.

Joan Norry (Public Comment): Joan asked if the sign needed to be replaced, and Chelsea replied that she's still figuring out the best way to improve it and whether a permit is needed. The goal is to fix the existing sign and possibly trim the surrounding trees. Chelsea sees this as a project that will need community support. She plans to visit the lumber mill to check on materials. Joan offered to provide the contact information for a Boy Scouts of America troop leader, as the troop recently completed a project at the cemetery and might be able to help.

8. Discussion and possible action on Downtown Hopland Pedestrian Lighting
Julie would like to begin preparing for the Downtown Hopland Pedestrian Lighting Plan now since AB 830 will sunset in five years. At the January 2025 HMAC meeting, Caltrans told the HMAC that a lighting plan is needed for them to be able to install the conduits during Project B. Julie is uncertain about how Caltrans will handle putting in the conduits now given that the ADA Project has been split into two phases and would like to discuss this further with Jen Buck to clarify this. Additionally, the community would be responsible for the obtaining the light poles for which a cost estimate has been completed. Julie suggested that a way to get funding for the light poles is through the Mendocino Community Foundation. She noted that the Mendocino Community Foundation received about \$100,000 in community-raised funds from the St. Francis Guild, which can only be used in Hopland.



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Julie also noted that pedestrian lights could also encourage drivers on the highway to slow down. Julie stated that Amy has offered to help with grant writing, and Julie has research to share for anyone who wants to work on the project.

9. Council Members' and staff reports regarding assigned tasks, committee meetings, and other items of general interest

a. HMAC Vacancies

Julie announced that the HMAC currently has open positions and could use more support. She encouraged anyone interested to call her for more information. You can also find the HMAC board page and apply on the County of Mendocino website at <https://mendocino.legistar.com/Page.aspx?M=W>. Dale added that requirements for serving include living within the District and taking a Brown Act class.

b. Hopland Community Liaisons Update

No update/discussion

10. Discussion on agenda items for October 15, 2025, HMAC meeting

No update/discussion

11. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 7:05pm.