



COUNTY CURRENTS

Santa Cruz County

www.santacruzcounty.us

Winter 2024

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



Board calls tax measure election

On December 5th, the Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to place a half-cent sales tax measure on the 2024 March primary ballot.

At 9 percent, sales tax in the unincorporated area is currently tied for the lowest among jurisdictions within Santa Cruz County. While all eligible voters may vote on the measure, the tax would only apply in unincorporated areas of the county. As part of the proposed measure, the Board adopted funding priorities for essential services including:

- Wildfire, flood and other disaster response, prevention, and recovery services
- Affordable housing to support work-

- ing families and frontline workers
- Critical community programs providing mental health crisis services for children, substance use disorder treatment, and homelessness services
- Continuing ongoing work to enhance the local road network, maintain and improve parks and recreation programs, and deliver high-quality public safety services to the community.

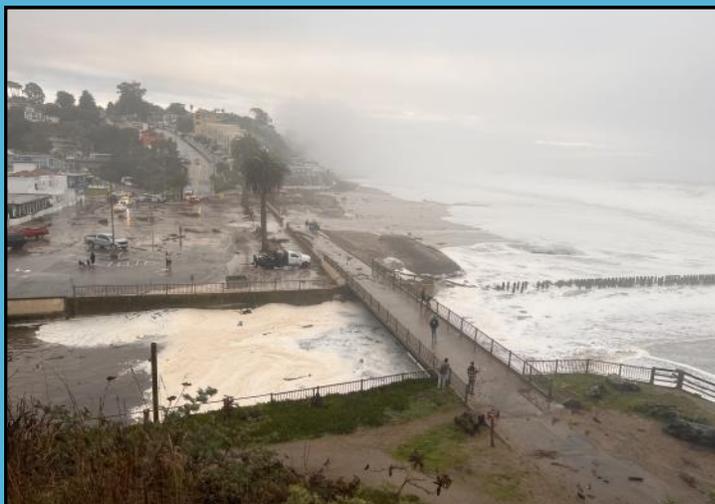


In June, the Board passed a Proposed Budget for Fiscal Year 2023-24 that supports the County's strategic vision and goals through the implementation of department objectives in the

2023-25 Operational Plan. However, the budget was austere and did not forecast significant new investments in our priorities, staff or community, while maintaining minimum levels of budget reserves and projecting significant future deficits through Fiscal Year 2027-28.

Santa Cruz County provides municipal services to more than half of the County population living in the unincorporated area, and delivers public safety, health, human and other mandated services countywide. It also receives just 13 percent of local property tax dollars, making it significantly underfunded compared to peer counties throughout California.

On December 28, 2023, **powerful surf** pounded Santa Cruz County's coastline. Riding unusually **high tides**, waves led to **coastal damage** in parts of the county, and the Board of Supervisors declared a **local disaster**.



In This Issue

- Artwork for Children's Crisis Stabilization Center
- Annual Green Business Awards handed out
- County Launches Digital Wallet for Residents
- Aptos Library to Open
- 'Age Well Santa Cruz County' Plan for Aging is Launched

Renovated Aptos Branch Library set to open February 4

35th World AIDS Day commemorated

December 1st, 2023 marked the 35th annual World AIDS Day. The theme of this year's observance was "Remember and Commit," and paid tribute to all our community has lost to HIV/AIDS.

More than 32 million people have died worldwide from AIDS-related illness. Awareness and improved access to screening, prevention, and early treatment can help prevent new infections. HIV infections are preventable and people living with HIV can have long, meaningful lives when receiving medical care, and HIV infections can be prevented through medications.

"The only way to know your HIV status is to get tested. Knowing your status gives you powerful information to keep you and your partner healthy," said Eliko Bridgewater, Santa Cruz County Public Health Nurse. "Even if both you and your partner are having sex only with each other, you should both find out your HIV status."

The CDC recommends that everyone between the ages of 13 and 64 get tested for HIV at least once as part of routine health care, and more often if you have increased risk factors such as having more than one sexual partner since your last HIV test, having sex with someone who's sexual history you don't know, and some sexually active gay and bisexual men.

Santa Cruz County Public Health offers targeted testing services, linkage to care and works with community partners to increase awareness of preventative services. For HIV case management and preventative services, please visit: CARE Team Integrated Services Website: <http://bit.ly/CareTeamHIV> or call (831) 454-4730. Contact your primary care provider and ask about HIV testing. Find HIV Testing Sites in Santa Cruz County at <https://bit.ly/SCCHIVTesting>.

New branch and upcoming completion of Live Oak Annex completes County library renovations under Measure S



Santa Cruz Public Libraries has announced a Grand Opening and Community Celebration for the new Aptos Branch Library on Sunday, February 4, 2024.

"Our beautiful new library in Aptos embodies the values of our community, from its commitment to lifelong learning and civic engagement, to its thoughtful design, which reflects not only Aptos' history and a unique setting at the intersection of land and sea, but also includes energy-efficient design features," interim Director Eric Howard said. "This will be a community asset for generations to come."

The Grand Opening and Community Celebration will take place from 1 p.m.-5 p.m. and will feature a ribbon-cutting, live music and performances, story time, and crafts. Speakers will include Santa Cruz County Supervisor Zach Friend, Friends of the Aptos Library President Gale Farthing, interim SCPL Director Eric Howard, Friends of the Santa Cruz Public Libraries Board President Janis O'Driscoll, John Hibble, founder of the Aptos History

Museum, Mark Schoeman from Anderson Brulé Architects (ABA), and Jared Bogaard from Bogard Construction.

Following the ribbon-cutting and opening remarks, the community will be invited into the branch to enjoy music by Kuzanga Marimba of Santa Cruz, a performance by MusicalMe with Lizz, and a show by magician James Chan.

This effort was made possible through the passion and hard work of community members, the Friends of the Santa Cruz Public Libraries, the Friends of the Aptos Libraries and funding from voter-approved Measure S.

Santa Cruz-based Bogard Construction and ABA of San Jose collaborated on this design-build project, the first of its kind in the county. The brand-new 12,408 square foot building includes a new community room, a dedicated teen-only space and patio, two group study rooms, adult reading room and patio, displays curated by the Aptos History Museum, a children's room, and the Live Like Coco Foundation Children's Reading Garden.

Board selects new Chair

Meeting for the first time in 2024, the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors on January 9th selected Supervisor Justin Cummings as Chairperson.



Cummings represents the Third Supervisorial District, which includes the city of Santa Cruz and the North Coast, including Davenport and Bonny Doon. Cummings is the first African-American Chair of the Board of Supervisors in County history.

"I'm deeply honored to accept this role from my colleagues and look forward to the year ahead as we work with our community to build a more equitable and just Santa Cruz County for all residents," Cummings said.

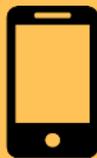
A native of Chicago, Cummings has a background in environmental sciences with a Ph.D. from UCSC in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. He was first elected to the Santa Cruz City Council in 2018 before being elected to the Board of Supervisors in 2022.

Cummings will serve a one-year term. Supervisor Felipe Hernandez was chosen to serve as Vice Chair. The Board meets at 701 Ocean St., 5th Floor, Santa Cruz.

To view agendas and meeting materials, visit <https://santacruzcountyca.iqm2.com/citizens/default.aspx>.

MY SANTA CRUZ

County+



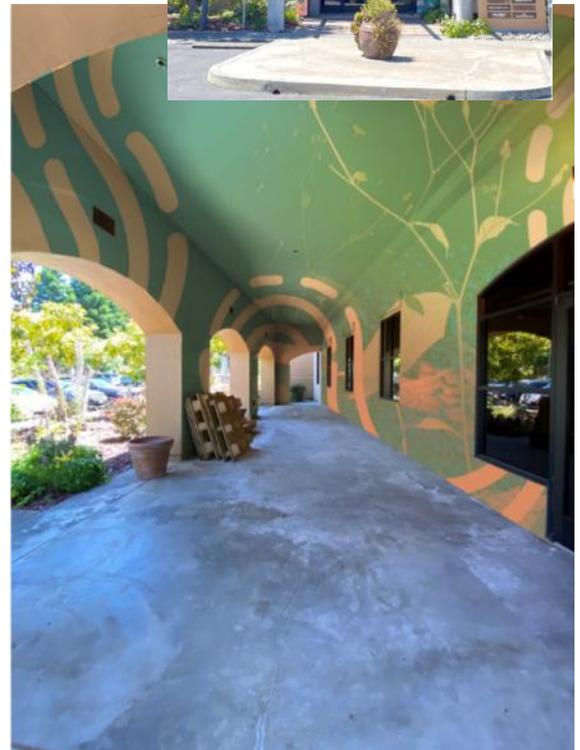
Our award-winning My Santa Cruz County app has been updated to include a secure digital wallet where you can store important information! Check it out today on iTunes and Google Play.

Artist selected for new Children's Crisis Stabilization Center



In November, the Board of Supervisors chose Joey Rose as the artist for the upcoming Children's Crisis Stabilization Center, to be located on Soquel Avenue near the Sheriff's Office.

The proposal includes 11 on-site murals within and on the exterior of the facility. The murals focus on native flora and fauna of Santa Cruz County, aiming to create a sense of calm and serenity in the space for future clients.



Looking for employment?
www.santacruzcountyjobs.com



County launches digital wallet for residents

Santa Cruz County has launched a digital wallet and new MySCCounty+ app for residents, incorporating all the functionality of the MySCCounty app but providing residents a digital platform to purchase and store digital permits and other County services.

Available on the App Store and Google Play, MySCCounty+ still allows residents to access community services, apply for public benefits, sign up for emergency alerts, report potholes, abandoned vehicles and other nuisances, and access many other programs and services. But the new app also represents a technological advancement by allowing residents to purchase and store digital permits and other credentials on their elec-

tronic devices.

"With the launch of the new MySCCounty+ app, the County has taken a technological leap forward that helps lay the groundwork for fully secure anywhere, anytime County services," Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors Chair Zach Friend said. "No other local government in California is as dedicated to leveraging the power of technology to serve residents."

The MySCCounty+ app allows visiting relatives or anyone else to secure RV Parking permits for roadways in unincorporated areas. Additionally, the app allows public safety officials and residents to rapidly verify whether someone has permits without needing to make contact with permit hold-

ers. Additional permits and other available credentials will be included in future updates.

The app is powered by HUMBL, a San Diego-based technology company that develops mobile apps for digital payments, including transactions founded on blockchain technologies. This is the first municipal app developed in conjunction with a local jurisdiction in California.

The app includes a library of credentials called a "Vault." Payments are made online, and HUMBL does not store or have access to users' financial information. Similar to other apps, the highly secure MySCCounty+ app can use biometrics to login for an additional layer of security.

Grant will fund workforce education for local students

The County of Santa Cruz is excited to announce a California Labor and Workforce grant will fund up to 32 scholarships as a Regional Equity and Recovery Partnership between the County's Workforce Development Board (WDB) and Cabrillo College.

The scholarships will provide eligible students enrolled at Cabrillo College with \$4,500 to cover fees and tuition toward certification in one of six approved certificated programs. These six certificates include the college's IT Institute 11-week program, phlebotomy technician certification, culinary arts certification, completion of an entry-level construction course, completion of a basic construction course focused on fundamentals in carpentry, and a beginning course for those interested in becoming a community health worker.

Students will also receive supportive services to cover fees such as interview clothing, tools and transporta-

tion costs.

Eligibility for this scholarship opportunity centers on students enrolled at Cabrillo who identify as an English language learner, homeless or housing insecure, immigrants, justice-involved individuals, people with disabilities, veterans, out-of-school youth (under age 18), first generation college students, low income or unemployed students.

Recruitment starts now for the 2024 spring semester, and unless all 32 scholarship spots are filled sooner, will run through the fall 2025 semester. There is no prioritization beyond eligibility, and the first 32 eligible applicants will be offered this scholarship opportunity.



"These scholarships will provide students with the greatest need with an opportunity to obtain an industry recognized credential in a high-demand occupation," said Santa Cruz County WDB Director Andy Stone. We encourage everyone who thinks they may be eligible to apply."

For inquiries and to apply, please contact info@workforcescc.com, or 831-763-8518

62 Santa Cruz County green businesses honored

The Department of Community Development & Infrastructure and Environmental Innovation announced in December that 62 local businesses have achieved green certification.

It was the Green Business Program's 20th anniversary, a testament to Santa Cruz County's ongoing commitment to environmental stewardship and advocacy among residents and businesses. The Santa Cruz County Green Business Program is a leading member of the California Green Business Network. For more information on the Green Business Program and how to become a certified Green Business, please contact Claudia Villalta-Mejia, Santa Cruz County Green Business Coordinator, at (831) 359-9277 or enroll at greenbusinessca.org.



Owners of some of the 62 businesses honored as part of the County's 20th anniversary Green Business Program cohort celebrated at the Dec. 5 Board of Supervisors meeting.

Report examines cases with mental health component in local justice system

A new report by the Criminal Justice System of Santa Cruz County focuses a spotlight on criminal cases with a mental health component in the justice system, finding common ground on many issues while highlighting areas that can be improved.

The study is the first collaborative and comprehensive look at the handling of criminal cases with a behavioral health component by local justice system partners. The review found that justice system partners approach cases with a behavioral health component with compassion and a belief that incarceration is not the most effective response in most cases. All partners also expressed a desire to increase and strengthen collaboration on such cases, including more integrated case management and improved data sharing.

The report also notes that diversions from criminal court for cases with a mental health component have increased significantly in the last sever-

al years, and that additional resources are needed to fully address mental health issues for justice-involved individuals.

"This report shows that there is common ground when it comes to handling cases with a mental health component in our community," said Donna Lind, chair of the Criminal Justice Council of Santa Cruz County. "It also identifies areas of need and provides a platform for improving outcomes for those individuals involved in the criminal justice system."

Criminal Justice Council partners include public safety leadership throughout Santa Cruz County, including the Sheriff and police chiefs from each of the four cities, the District Attorney, the Chief Probation Officer, the Public Defender's Office, members of Santa Cruz County Superior Court, County Behavioral Health, and many more.

The report also acknowledged that

the aging Santa Cruz County Main Jail is not conducive to housing or managing cases with a behavioral health component, and that alternate facilities specializing in crisis stabilization with higher security are needed.

The report comes during a period of significant change to the State's justice system and its response to justice-involved individuals with mental health needs, including a 2021 California Supreme Court decision limiting the use of cash bail, caps on the number of individuals who can be committed as Incompetent to Stand Trial (IST), the upcoming implementation of the Community Assistance, Recovery and Empowerment (CARE) Act, and Medi-Cal mandates impacting those with behavioral health issues, along with other State and local changes.

The report was created by Watsonville-based Applied Survey Research. To view the report, visit santacruzjc.org.

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

County, partners begin work to develop local plan for aging

The County of Santa Cruz's Human Services Department is developing a Master Plan for Aging in partnership with the Seniors Council and local cities. The effort is called "Age Well Santa Cruz County."

"The County Of Santa Cruz is dedicated to promoting the well-being of older residents and people with disabilities," said Alicia Morales, Director of the Human Services Department's Adult and Long-Term Care Division. "Age Well Santa Cruz County will be a blueprint for implementing strategies and partnerships that promote healthy aging for all."

The State of California developed a Master Plan for Aging (MPA) that was released in 2021. The MPA is a 10-year blueprint for advancing a California for all ages and abilities.

Individual counties, including Santa Cruz County, are now creating local MPAs to ensure people of all ages and abilities in their communities are engaged, valued, and afforded equitable opportunities to

thrive as they age, how and where they choose.

To initiate Age Well Santa Cruz County, a local survey has been launched to collect community feedback focused on aging in the county. The survey is supported by a Steering Committee of engaged community members and outreach efforts to maximize community participation will take place widely.

Results from the survey will inform the plan's goals. Age Well Santa Cruz County will partner with organizations, businesses, clubs, agencies and individuals throughout Santa Cruz County to ensure as many people as possible participate in the survey.

The survey will be available through March 31, 2024, at www.agewellsantacruzcounty.org and www.buenavejezcondadodesantacruz.org.

For more about the survey, email AgeWell@santacruzcountyca.gov or call (831) 454-4397.

