

23. RANCH HOUSE ESTATES COMMUNITY SERVICES DISTRICT

Ranch House Estates Community Services District (RHECSD) provides street maintenance services. RHECSD's governing body is entirely vacant and the District is not presently active. Three volunteers have offered to fill a portion of the board seats beginning in November 2013.

AGENCY OVERVIEW

Background

Ranch House Estates Community Services District was formed on December 30, 1977 as an independent special district.⁴⁶² RHECSD was formed to provide fire protection, recreation, street maintenance and water services. Fire protection and recreation services were never initiated. As recently as 1990, the District provided water service, but it subsequently transferred the service to Amador Water Agency. RHECSD is currently responsible to provide street maintenance service to three short courts within the district. All other roads within the District are county maintained roads.

The principal act that governs the District is the Community Services District Law.⁴⁶³ CSDs may potentially provide a wide array of services, including water supply, wastewater, solid waste, police and fire protection, street lighting and landscaping, airport, recreation and parks, mosquito abatement, library services; street maintenance and drainage services, ambulance service, utility undergrounding, transportation, abate graffiti, flood protection, weed abatement, hydroelectric power, among various other services. CSDs are required to gain LAFCO approval to provide those services permitted by the principal act but not performed at the end of 2005 (i.e., latent powers).⁴⁶⁴

Boundary

RHECSD is located at Ranch Road and SR 88, approximately three miles east of the community of Pine Grove. The bounds encompass parcels to the southeast and northwest of SR 88 along Meadowbrook Drive and Homestead Road. The District has a boundary area of approximately 142 acres.

LAFCO records indicate there have been three annexations to the District, totaling 102 acres. The first annexation occurred in 1978 and entailed 16 acres. Annexations also occurred in 1984 and 1989, consisting of 69 and 18 acres, respectively.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶² LAFCO Resolution 77-95. Formation date is from Certificate of Completion.

⁴⁶³ Government Code §61000-61226.5.

⁴⁶⁴ Government Code §61106.

⁴⁶⁵ LAFCO Resolutions 78-130, 84-181, and 89-218.

Sphere of Influence

RHECSD's SOI was first adopted in 1982. LAFCO minutes indicate the SOI included 566 acres of territory beyond the District's bounds. Accurate maps of the historic sphere are not available. Following the 2008 MSR, LAFCO adopted a zero sphere of influence for the District.⁴⁶⁶

Local Accountability and Governance

The principal act requires that districts have five-member governing boards, including a president and vice-president.⁴⁶⁷ RHECSD did not meet these requirements as of August 2013, and has had difficulty maintaining a board of directors since at least 1981, based on recruitment letters found from that time. The Board is completely vacant as former Board members have resigned, moved away or passed away. The County has been successful in finding three volunteers that may be willing to fill a portion of the board seats effective December 6, 2013. The newly appointed board members are Robert Bartley, Joe Crisafi, and Rhonda D'Agostini. While the issue has been temporarily addressed, filling all board seats continues to be an ongoing struggle for the District.

RHECSD directors are appointed by the County Board of Supervisors through a consolidated election, unless there is more than one interested party, in which case an at-large election is held. There have been no contested elections in recent history. Board members are elected to four-year terms.

The principal act requires that boards convene at least four times a year or every three months.⁴⁶⁸ When the District had active board members, RHECSD reported meeting twice per year in the past, which does not meet the principal act requirement of at least quarterly meetings. It is not known when the District board held its last meeting. As part of the 2008 MSR, the District reported that it has had no Brown Act violations in recent history.

The District did not report any constituent outreach efforts.

Given that the District does not presently have an active board, there was no one available to respond to the LAFCO requests for information for this review. A former board member was eventually contacted, but very little information was provided.⁴⁶⁹

Management

The principal act calls for community service districts to appoint a general manager to implement board policies.⁴⁷⁰ RHECSD did not have a general manager position as of August 2013. It is likely that the District has never appointed a general manager. RHECSD has no employees. The Board contracts out for maintenance services as needed.

⁴⁶⁶ LAFCO Resolution 2009-14.

⁴⁶⁷ Government Code §61040, §61043.

⁴⁶⁸ Government Code §61044.

⁴⁶⁹ Interview of former Director, Bob Bartley, August 2, 2013.

⁴⁷⁰ Government Codes §61050. Per §61040(e), the general manager may not be a member of the board.

The District has not adopted any planning documents, such as a master plan or mission statement.

The District did not report any financial planning efforts. The County manages district finances and produces an annual budget; however, district plans for maintenance services are not reflected in the budget. There is no formal capital improvement plan adopted by the District. Planning for capital improvements occurs on an as-needed basis. In that past, Board members annually walked the span of the courts, which are the roadways off Meadowbrook Drive maintained by the District, to check for cracks or other maintenance needs.

The District did not report whether its management practices include risk management, or identify the insurance that it holds.

Service Demand and Growth

RHECSD is a built-out residential community with no significant potential for development.

There is little to no economic activity within RHECSD's bounds, as land use is entirely suburban residential (five acres per unit).⁴⁷¹ Economic activity in the surrounding area includes farming and several small businesses in Pine Grove, including a drug store, auto body shop, realtor, and a dentist's office.

The District serves approximately 179 residents and encompasses 78 parcels.⁴⁷² The bounds include homes located on Meadowbrook Drive, which is a County-owned road running through the District. The population density in the District is 2,081 per square mile (although the District encompasses only one tenth of a mile). Comparatively, the County's overall average population density is 64 per square mile.

The District reported that there has been no increase in growth or demand for service within the District's bounds.⁴⁷³

The District is not a land use authority, and does not hold primary responsibility for implementing growth strategies.

Should the District become able to effectively reactivate, there might be opportunities to provide additional new services such as a solar lighting system at the entrance and annual landscaping along the roadsides.

Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities

LAFCO is required to evaluate disadvantaged unincorporated communities as part of this service review, including the location and characteristics of any such communities. A disadvantaged unincorporated community is defined as any area with 12 or more

⁴⁷¹ Amador County, *General Plan, Existing (2007) Land Use Classifications Map*, 2007.

⁴⁷² The population estimate for the District is the product of the total occupied parcels within the boundary area and the average household size (2.3) in Amador County in 2009-2011, according to the United States Census Bureau.

⁴⁷³ Interview of former Director, Bob Bartley, August 2, 2013.

registered voters, or as determined by commission policy, where the median household income is less than 80 percent of the statewide annual median.⁴⁷⁴

The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) has developed a mapping tool to assist in determining which communities meet the disadvantaged communities median household income definition.⁴⁷⁵ DWR identified nine disadvantaged communities within Amador County—three of which are cities and are therefore not considered unincorporated.⁴⁷⁶ None of the identified disadvantaged communities are within or adjacent to RHECSD.

However, DWR is not bound by the same law as LAFCO to define communities with a minimum threshold of 12 or more registered voters. Because income information is not available for this level of analysis, disadvantaged unincorporated communities that meet LAFCO's definition cannot be identified at this time.

Financing

During the previous service review (2008), the District reported that its financing level was adequate to deliver services.

Finances are tracked through a single general fund for road maintenance activities. Accounting for the District's single fund is maintained by the County, through the County Auditor's office.

Total revenues as of June 30, 2013 amounted to \$3,567.57. The District receives revenue solely from property assessments. The District charges \$51 per parcel on 71 of the 117 parcels within the District.⁴⁷⁷ The District did not identify what year the assessment was approved. Recent research by the County Surveyor has identified those parcels which do and do not pay the assessment. While all parcels that front the district-maintained courts do pay the assessment, other parcels elsewhere within the District also pay for the court maintenance.

The District did not appropriately notify the County of those parcels to be assessed for the current fiscal year (FY 13-14); consequently, no assessments are to be collected on behalf of the District this year, and RHECSD will not receive revenue from the assessment.

The District had no expenditures in FY 13 as road maintenance activities occur approximately every five years and most recently occurred in 2011.

The District has no long-term debt.

There is no formal District policy on maintaining financial reserves. RHECSD had a fund balance of \$34,489.74 as of June 30, 2013, which was entirely represented by cash funds in the County treasury.

⁴⁷⁴ Government Code §56033.5.

⁴⁷⁵ Based on census data, the median household income in the State of California in 2010 was \$57,708, 80 percent of which is \$46,166.

⁴⁷⁶ DWR maps and GIS files are derived from the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) and are compiled for the five-year period 2006-2010.

⁴⁷⁷ All of the lots that front the courts pay, but many other parcels that front on the County-maintained roads also are assessed. None of the parcels in the section of the District north of the highway pay the assessment.

ROADWAY SERVICES

Nature and Extent

RHECSD provides road maintenance services to three short courts within the District. All other roads within the District are county-maintained roads. Repairs are completed by a contractor. It is not clear how services related to weed control, drainage, etc. are completed.

Location

RHECSD provides road maintenance on three courts off of Meadowbrook Drive. The District does not serve Brook Court or the portion of Meadowbrook Court east of Brook Court, as these roads are maintained by the County. The seven unassessed parcels do not front district-maintained roads. The District does not provide services outside of its bounds.

Infrastructure

The District provides street maintenance on three small roads totaling 0.5 miles extending from Meadowbrook Drive—Dogwood Court, Valley View Court, and Shadow Glen Court. The District reports that roads were most recently chip sealed in 2011. There are no current infrastructure needs.

When the subdivision was originally being constructed, an offer of dedication was made for these roads to the County's public road system. The County rejected the offer for the courts and the drainage easements, until such time as the streets and drainage easements are constructed to County standards and accepted into the County road system by a resolution of the Board of Supervisors. However, the roads do not meet design standards, and were never accepted into the County's public road system.

The courts exist as separate parcels; individual lots lines extend under the other roads in the District except those along these courts. It is unclear who owns the property under the roads in questions. In 1968, the recorded final map shows that the County specifically rejected the offer of dedication of these three courts, pending improvements to bring the courts up to county road standards. The County did, however, accept the offer of dedication for all the other roadways in the District. There is no evidence that the developer offered the courts for dedication to the District. LAFCO is in the process of researching whether the developer maintained ownership of these parcels, or if ownership was transferred to another party on construction.

Service Adequacy

The District reported that it has the means to provide services adequately.⁴⁷⁸ The District maintains an adequate reserve to fund needed street improvements. Preventative maintenance to minimize excessive costs is provided on a regular basis.

⁴⁷⁸ Interview of former Director, Bob Bartley, August 2, 2013.

To comply with the Community Services District Law, the District must, at a minimum, fill its vacant board seats. It should hold board meetings at least four times annually and designate a general manager. In addition, the District would benefit from a community outreach program for recruitment to achieve a five-member governing body in compliance with the principal act.

Figure 23-1: Ranch House Estates Street Profile

Street Service Profile			
<i>Service Configuration</i>			
Street Maintenance	Direct	Drainage Maintenance	NA
<i>Service Demand</i>			
Street Sweeping Frequency:	Service not provided.		
<i>Circulation Description</i>			
The District serves three courts or cul-de-sacs stemming off of Meadowbrook Drive.			
<i>System Overview</i>			
Street Centerline Miles	0.5	Signalized Intersections	0
Privately maintained roads	0.5	Bridges	0
Publicly maintained roads	0	Other	NA
<i>Infrastructure Needs/Deficiencies</i>			
There are no current infrastructure needs according to the District.			
<i>Service Adequacy</i>			
Street Miles Rehabilitated FY 12	0%	Costs per Street Mile ¹	\$0
Road maintenance performed in 2011 consisted of chip sealing the roads in the District. The next chip sealing will be in 2016.			
<i>Service Challenges</i>			
The District faces challenges in maintaining a full governing board, due to a lack of constituent interest.			
<i>Facility Sharing</i>			
Current Practices: None identified.			
Opportunities: The District transferred financial administration activities to the County since the last MSR.			
Notes: (1) CSD expenditures on road maintenance in FY 12 divided by centerline miles of street.			

SUMMARY OF DETERMINATIONS

Growth and population projections

- ❖ There has been no growth within the District as the area is entirely built-out. No future growth is anticipated.

The Location and Characteristics of Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities Within or Contiguous to the Agency's SOI

- ❖ There are no disadvantaged unincorporated communities within or adjacent to the District's service area, based upon mapping information provided by the State of California Department of Water Resources. However, given the large size of the defined community in the census data used, it cannot be discounted that a smaller community that meets the required income definition and has 12 or more registered voters may exist within or adjacent to the District.

Present and planned capacity of public facilities and adequacy of public services, including infrastructure needs and deficiencies

- ❖ Present and planned capacity of public facilities is sufficient, and service provision is adequate, as the District has chip-sealed all roads in 2011.
- ❖ All roads appear to be in good to excellent condition, and no infrastructure needs were identified.

Financial ability of agencies to provide services

- ❖ As reported in the previous MSR, current financing level appears to be adequate to deliver services.
- ❖ The District maintains a fund balance that will allow it to continue providing services into the future.
- ❖ The District's assets appear to be entirely represented by the cash maintained in the County treasury.
- ❖ The District did not appropriately notify the County of those parcels to be assessed for the current fiscal year (FY 13-14); consequently, no assessments are to be collected on behalf of the District this year, and RHECSD will not receive revenue from the assessment.

Status of, and opportunities for, shared facilities

- ❖ The District does not currently share facilities and did not identify any opportunities for shared facilities.

Accountability for community service needs, including governmental structure and operational efficiencies

- ❖ The District faces a significant challenge in maintaining an operational board, due to a lack of interested candidates to fill vacant positions. The District has tried to fill board vacancies by posting notices on the community bulletin board, but reports that community interest in serving on the board is low. Even with the three volunteers, personally recruited by a member of the Board of Supervisors., it is anticipated that the Board will continue to struggle for adequate leadership.
- ❖ Accountability to local voters is constrained by a lack of members on the board of directors, not having a designated president or vice-president on the board, and not meeting at least once every three months. The District also lacks a general manager to implement board policies.
- ❖ Given the struggles faced by the District, in particular the presently inactive Board, a potential alternative for RHECSD is dissolution with services assumed by another agency or private entity to continue services. There may be several alternatives. County Service Area (CSA) 5 presently provides street maintenance to 13 zones of benefit located throughout the County. The CSA was formed for the purpose of providing maintenance to both public and private roads, and could potentially take on the services that are presently offered by RHECSD. Depending on the condition of the roads, however, CSA 5 may not accept the roads. The existing homeowner's association may be able to take over the services, or they may be privatized in some other way.