

From: "Paz Dominguez, Karen" <KPazDominguez@co.humboldt.ca.us>
Subject: RE: Special Meeting Agenda Item
Date: November 21, 2020 at 6:33:22 PM PST
To: "thad@northcoastjournal.com" <thad@northcoastjournal.com>
Cc: "Baker-Beale, Theresa" <tbaker-beale@co.humboldt.ca.us>, "Cherry, Amanda" <acherry1@co.humboldt.ca.us>, "Fraser, Shanna" <sfraser@co.humboldt.ca.us>, "Hamilton, Chance" <chamilton@co.humboldt.ca.us>, "Henderson, LaNae" <lhenderson1@co.humboldt.ca.us>, "Hussey, James" <JHussey@co.humboldt.ca.us>, "Karnes, Courtney" <ckarnes@co.humboldt.ca.us>, "Ladino, Geanlucca" <gladino@co.humboldt.ca.us>, "Loftis, Amanda" <ALoftis@co.humboldt.ca.us>, "Luke, Cynthia" <cluke@co.humboldt.ca.us>, "Paz Dominguez, Karen" <KPazDominguez@co.humboldt.ca.us>, "Watson, Brett" <bwatson1@co.humboldt.ca.us>

Hi again,

I want to share with you that I appreciate your inquiry. Based upon the wording of request, it appears to me that you are interested in an in-depth response and that you will take the time to review the information completely before just running with a sensationalist story. For that reason, I'd like to share with you the following.

When I was hired in the A-C office as the Assistant Auditor-Controller in 2017, the office did not have a detailed operational plan that compiled all of its duties and assignments into documented form. In fact, employees were assigned specific tasks and worked independently of each other. There were limited instructional documents, limited networking interactions, limited teamwork, limited investment in employee training, and very few educational documents to provide context for how and why each task was performed. I would describe the tone of the office as "survival mode". Staff had no time to write detailed instructions or work on group projects or go to trainings because the department was in constant survival mode and staff had no room to breathe in between tasks. Requests to the Board for additional staffing were routinely denied. I believe that having operated that way for the past decade, the department's management gave up on instituting progressive change to improve operations because it wouldn't have the staff to maintain any new systems. I had walked into a "rubber stamp, get it done" department.

Transactions were processed without scrutiny and departments had no expectation that there would be pushback from the Auditor-Controller department for anything they did. Unfortunately, this resulted in annual audit findings that would not improve and continued frustrations directed at the Auditor-Controller department for not fixing them. Then, when long-term staff retired or left the County, their unwritten institutional knowledge left with them. This made it difficult for A-C management to track and monitor performance metrics since we were regularly catching up on what tasks needed to be covered and by whom.

It was at that point that I determined that if I was ever going to successfully perform the duties of my position as Assistant Auditor-Controller to protect public funds and manage the day-to-day operations of the department, then I would need to make some institutional changes starting with ending the “rubber stamp, get it done” way of operating. I started researching government code and methodologies used by other Counties to understand the functions of the office and the relationship the office was supposed to have as an independently-elected office with the County organization as a whole. It quickly became apparent that the responsibilities of the Auditor-Controller were too great to be carried by our small department.

Recognizing that the department’s employees’ engagement and participation was critical to the department’s sustainability and success, I sought the input and counsel of the department’s staff for how to improve efficiency and take on the task of protecting public funds. They knew best the where/what/why/how/who of the department and I brought the perspective of public accounting (vs governmental accounting) to the table. Together, we worked on the document that we refer to as the “Master Task List”. We compiled this document and agreed that it would hold us together as a team. We agreed that our internal communication and A-C management’s transparency with A-C employees would be critical components to ensure a cohesiveness for our department.

I provide you this working document as a visual representation to address your specific inquiry about the functions of our department. Since the pandemic began and operations switched to essential functions

being prioritized, we stopped filling in the task assignments. Given our current workload and staffing levels, we're back to assignments being distributed on a daily basis given that moment in time. My stance before the pandemic was that we do not have sufficient staffing to execute every single task our office is responsible for. My stance during the pandemic is that due to the continued denial of our requests for additional staffing, we are having to revert back to that survival mode I walked into 3 years ago. The difference now is that we refuse to let go of our commitment to protecting public funds by ensuring that all transactions are accurate, appropriate, and authorized. It is the one function that inspired the formation of this office and it is the most important when considering that we are elected by the public to serve the public.

The challenge we face is that the County as an organization has not fully adapted to working with our department in its new form. There are still several key players that still yearn for the "rubber stamp" days and are hoping that by placing increased pressure on us to cave, we will do so. This finds us in the unfortunate position of frequently being at odds with those key players.

Fortunately, we are enjoying improved relationships with several departments with whom we struggled to communicate with in the past. Throughout the pandemic, departments have been able to visit us at our virtual zoom office and have been assisted by available staff. They have expressed appreciation for our accessibility and assistance. We would be able to offer that type of real-time assistance more consistently for our e-mail requesters if we had more available staff to monitor inboxes.

With regard to Monday's special meeting, I am relieved that these conversations will continue in a public forum as that's where they should be held. I am personally grateful for this because the public will have the opportunity to weigh in on the direction the office should go in. Did they elect me because they expected me to rubber stamp approvals for the sake of "this is how we've always done it" or did they elect me because we need to correct the County's accounting practices to ensure that the public is protected from litigation and so that it has transparent and accurate financial information? I believe it's the latter. It is only with the

Board's acceptance to make transparent and accurate accounting the priority that this County will course correct. After all, they are the "tone at the top" and what they direct is what appointed departments will follow.

Attached you will also find my last correspondence with Virginia Bass and Rex Bohn about this topic. It will hopefully address the bulk of your inquiry about the information contained in the staff report. I did not receive a response from either Supervisor after my reply to their inquiry. I was not aware that they were drafting Monday's agenda item as they did not seek additional information or clarification or discussion after my reply. I learned about the agenda item at 4:30pm yesterday when it was published.

Thanks again for your inquiry. Please let me know if I can provide additional information or clarification. As I expressed earlier, it is only with the A-C department's employees' engagement and participation that our department will be successful. For that reason, I have cc'd them to this e-mail. If I have misconstrued any information in my response, then they are free to correct me or provide additional context. I would also like for them to have your e-mail should they have a need to contact you directly.

Thank you,

P.S. I received an inquiry from Lost Coast Outpost as well. In order to avoid duplicative work this late on a Saturday, I'm going to forward this response to them, too.



Karen Paz Domínguez
Auditor-Controller

Office of the Auditor-Controller
Main Phone: 707.476.2452
Main Fax: 707.476.7449
ctyauditor@co.humboldt.ca.us

From: Paz Dominguez, Karen
Sent: Saturday, November 21, 2020 5:30 PM
To: thad@northcoastjournal.com
Subject: RE: Special Meeting Agenda Item

Hi Thad,

Thank you for your inquiry. I was able to draft a quick response to the Times-Standard by their 2pm print time but it was a rushed job and didn't address your specific request. I'm attaching it in case it is helpful to you at this time for some context. I would still like to provide you a focused response to address your specific questions, though, so if time still allows, I'd like to request that you wait for that one instead. I will send it to you as a reply to this e-mail. Would that be ok?

Thank you,



Karen Paz Domínguez
Auditor-Controller

Office of the Auditor-Controller
Main Phone: 707.476.2452
Main Fax: 707.476.7449
ctyauditor@co.humboldt.ca.us

From: thad@northcoastjournal.com
<thad@northcoastjournal.com>
Sent: Saturday, November 21, 2020 3:34 PM
To: Paz Dominguez, Karen
<KPazDominguez@co.humboldt.ca.us>
Subject: Special Meeting Agenda Item

Hello Ms. Paz Dominguez-
I'm working on a story about the agenda item set for Monday's special Board of Supervisors meeting,

which essentially alleges that delays at the Auditor Controller's Office with a number of functions are putting the county at risk of losing millions of dollars in state and federal reimbursements. I'm hoping you can provide me a statement detailing your response to the information contained in the staff report and your stance on the current functions and performance of your office as it relates to the rest of county governance.

Thanks very much for your time and help.

Best,
Thad

Thadeus Greenson
News Editor
The North Coast Journal
(707) 845-1766 (cell)