

Supervisors Reply 4-13-71 To Jury Report

By WALLACE WOOD
Sentinel Staff Writer

County supervisors are expected to file their reply to the 1970 Grand Jury report today, and it contains some notable differences of opinion among officials.

Supervisors are required by law to give an answer to the Grand Jury, which will be on file with the county clerk. In addition to the board's comments, four county elected officials also filed comments on the jury's report. These include the auditor-controller, sheriff, superintendent of schools, and county clerk.

Some of the highlights from the county's answers to the Grand Jury:

MT. HERMON SLIDE — A majority of supervisors rejected Grand Jury charges of favoritism toward Kaiser Sand and Gravel Company for not moving against Kaiser in the Mt. Hermon Road slide problem.

Grand jurors had concluded Kaiser may have triggered the massive earthslide which closed

the road in 1969 and led to a controversial bypass project around Mt. Hermon.

Jurors said the county should hire a disinterested engineering firm to see if Kaiser is responsible for the slide, and sue Kaiser if there was any evidence.

Supervisors say in their reply that "the Grand Jury cites no competent geological evidence to support the conclusions as to causation" of the slide. They declared that a "consensus of expert opinion" is that the slide existed before Kaiser began its operation and proving Kaiser responsible would involve a costly investigation.

Supervisors also claimed that Kaiser is in "general conformity" with a county use permit.

However, a minority view was presented by Supervisors Ralph Sanson and Phil Harry, both attorneys, who said they believe the Grand Jury's charges alone are enough cause to reopen Kaiser's use permit and to investigate the slide causes.

SCHOOL UNIFICATION — Dr. Richard Fickel, county superintendent
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perintendent of schools, rejected Grand Jury suggestions for a single county-wide unified school district.

Dr. Fickel noted voters have twice rejected unification in the Santa Cruz High School district area, even though a mandatory third election will be held in June, 1972.

Fickel cited the "strong community identity" of such areas as Watsonville, Santa Cruz, and the San Lorenzo Valley as making "meaningful cooperation" virtually impossible in a county-wide district.

He added that such a district "would create a greater distance between the local voting public and its representative board and school administration. This continuing erosion of local control would seem to deny the effectiveness of our republican form of democracy."

FULL-TIME SUPERVISORS

County supervisors said they are puzzled at a Grand Jury suggestion they must decide if they will become full-time supervisors with higher salary or give the county administrative office more staff and control.

The county board's comment was that just because state law now allows them to put higher supervisors' salaries up for a vote is no reason to suddenly decide if a supervisors job should be part-time or full-time.

"The real question raised by the jury's recommendation is whether people who have to work for a living should be systematically excluded from the board of supervisors to make room for the retired, the independently wealthy, and the career politician," supervisors replied.

The county board also said it has given as much money and staff to the County Administrative Office as it could afford.

EMPLOYEES

Supervisors also answered a jury criticism that there should be a wage and salary review board by noting there is almost daily contact between the County Employees' Association and county personnel representatives, so no such board is needed.

HOSPITAL — Jury criticisms of the billing system at General Hospital were quietly answered with notations, the system is rapidly being improved. Auditor-Controller Art Merrill added a gentle criticism of the jury for not coming to his office to discuss its findings before they were issued in the report.

LIBRARY — The county did agree with jury suggestions for working toward a countywide library system, and said this is being done. The county also is exploring a joint library processing center, and a system-wide book catalog.

JAIL COMPLEX — The jury had recommended the county

start planning now for a new county jail and law enforcement complex. While noting that the new sheriff's honor farm was supposed to ease the pressure for a new jail, the county replied it will begin planning for the new facility as part of its long-range program.

WELFARE — Supervisors did not fully agree with a jury declaration that "political pressure should be exerted upon lawmakers to curb abuses" in welfare, such as long-haired students and drug addicts receiving welfare aid.

Supervisors said letters and resolutions have been forwarded to state legislators, but noted the reference to long-haired students and addicts "poses some very real sociological problems which only time, experience, and an enlightened citizenry will be able to provide programs that can be acceptable to the beneficiaries and to the public that supports them."

PRIVATE FIRMS — The county agreed with jury recommendations for hiring local private firms when engineering

and consulting jobs are needed, but the county's reply explains local talent is not always available.

The county also noted it is trying to negotiate for a 25 percent reduction in title costs through local title companies, along the lines of a jury recommendation to rotate title service and try to put property transactions up for bid among the local title firms.

PARKS AND TRAILS — The county is working on a master trails system and has adopted a policy for adding bicycle paths

along new highways, and is currently preparing a parks, recreation and open space plan for the county along the lines favored by the jury.

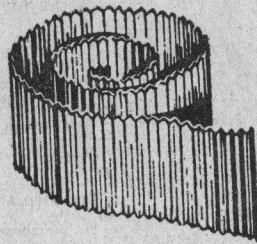
PARKING LOT — Supervisors rejected a jury proposal to tear down buildings owned by the county on the north side of Water Street for additional parking, and to construct a Water Street over or underpass.

The present county parking lot is not fully used, the county answered, and the City of Santa Cruz has rejected the overpass idea.

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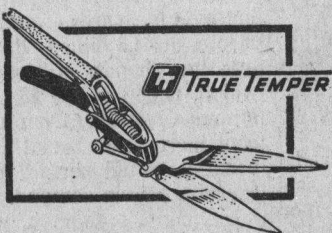
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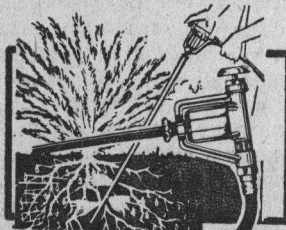
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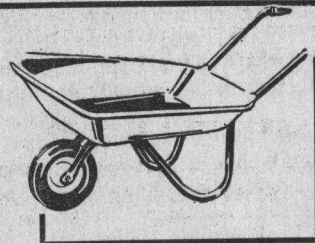
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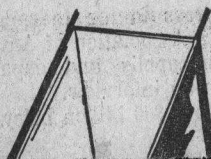
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