

Civil Grand Jury 2025-2026



El Dorado County Code Compliance

A study of communication, contracts, code enforcement,
and data compliance



Case No. 26-05

05/27/2026

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SUMMARY

Increased development in areas of the county has presented a problematic environment for local citizens impacted by construction projects. Submitting grievances to the appropriate government department is a complicated process to navigate. The County of El Dorado (County) does not provide a central website or phone number to direct complaints appropriately when it comes to construction related grievances.

While this investigation began by looking into perceived shortcomings of the County to respond to citizen complaints concerning construction violations or nuisances, the Civil Grand Jury discovered something else. The system proved to be complex, with no direction provided by the County regarding the process for enforcement of County Codes, policies, and State laws.



The Grand Jury found that County departments provide inadequate communication and direction to the public, and that significant communication deficiencies also exist between departments.

GLOSSARY

Developer Agreement: Sections 65865 et seq. of the California Government Code enables a county government and an applicant for a development project to enter into a development agreement establishing with certainty what zoning standards and land use regulations of the county will govern the construction and implementation of the development project from beginning to completion.

Conditions of Approval mean the requirements placed on the Project Approvals as conditions to development of the Project.

Code Enforcement Division of Planning and Building Department: Code Enforcement investigates a variety of building code, zoning code, and cannabis code complaints. El Dorado County Code Enforcement Violation Complaint Form

<https://us.openforms.com/Form/9b04ab47-fc61-43c9-ada2-c8911f3936f7>

Air Quality Management District (AQMD): Air District staff respond to outdoor air quality problems. AQMD does not respond to indoor Air Quality complaints. See Complaints - El Dorado County <https://www.eldoradocounty.ca.gov/Land-Use/Air-Quality-Management-District/Rules-and-Compliance/Complaints>

El Dorado County Ordinance Code Title 9, Chapter 9.02 Code Enforcement: Enforcement Official means the Sheriff, Fire Chief, Code Enforcement Officers, Chief Administrative Officer, Director of the Planning and Building Department, Director of the Environmental Management Department, or their authorized designee(s).

“Western Slope” is local slang for the western portion of El Dorado County west of Echo Summit and excludes the South Lake Tahoe area.

“Unincorporated Communities” refers to regions within El Dorado County that exclude both of its incorporated cities: Placerville and South Lake Tahoe.

The Megabyte Systems database refers to the backend of the Megabyte Property Tax System (MPTS), a specialized software solution developed by Megabyte Systems, Inc.. It's primarily used by over 35 California counties for managing property tax processes, including assessment, auditing, collection, and reporting.

BACKGROUND

El Dorado County has experienced significant growth in new construction over the past decade. Builders and consumers have chosen El Dorado County, specifically the Western Slope, as a primary area for new housing and commercial development.

Increased development in areas of the county has presented a problematic environment for local citizens impacted by construction projects. Submitting grievances to the appropriate government department is a complicated process to navigate. The County of El Dorado (County) does not provide a central website or phone number to direct complaints appropriately when it comes to construction related grievances.



During active construction, a variety of County departments are responsible for the enforcement of County codes, ordinances, and development agreements with contractors. Larger construction projects are also held to Conditions of Approval that establish additional operating rules. Enforcement could involve the Environmental Management Department, the Planning and Building Department, the Department of Transportation, or the Air Quality Management Board (AQMD), among others.

Once construction has been completed, the Code Enforcement Division of the Planning and Building Department receives and investigates complaints that can be submitted to them via their website or by phone.

While this investigation began by examining perceived shortcomings in the County's response to citizen complaints regarding construction violations and nuisances, the Civil Grand Jury identified additional significant inadequacies with communication within the current system.

METHODOLOGY

INTERVIEWS

Complainants
County Staff
County Administrators
Elected Officials

DOCUMENT REVIEW

Project Conditions of Approval
Developer Agreements
Civil Grand Jury Case # GJ 13/14-18
Civil Grand Jury Case # GJ 13-16
Board of Supervisors Agenda and Meeting Minutes
[10/11/22 Legistar item 22-1764](#) Code Enforcement activities and procedures
[9/13/23 Legistar item 23-1118](#) Code Enforcement Amnesty Program
El Dorado County Strategic Plan (<https://www.eldoradocounty.ca.gov/County-Government/County-Departments/Chief-Administrative-Office/Strategic-Plan>)

WEBSITE REVIEWS

Planning Services web page (<https://www.edcgov.us/Planning>)
Planning Services Code Enforcement Division web page (<https://www.eldoradocounty.ca.gov/Public-Safety-Justice/Code-Enforcement-Division>)
Building Services Division web page (<https://www.eldoradocounty.ca.gov/Land-Use/Planning-and-Building/Building-Division>)
Environmental Management web page (<https://www.eldoradocounty.ca.gov/County-Government/County-Departments/Environmental-Management>)

DISCUSSION

CODE ENFORCEMENT

Communication is the cornerstone of effective governance. Effective communication in government is essential for transparency, trust, and citizen engagement, utilizing modern tools and technologies to improve information sharing.

Be it a residential or commercial project, certain conditions must be met for permit approval known as Conditions of Approval (conditions). The conditions are based on the County Code of Ordinances, state law, and state and local policy. Conditions may include, but are not limited to, requirements such as public outreach, soil erosion and dust control, noise control, acceptable work hours (including weekends), and open burning. The developer, builder, or property owner is required to adhere to these conditions.

Failure to enforce County Ordinance, policy, state law, and adherence to developer agreements is failure to enforce the law. That failure benefits property owners who act unlawfully while denying the law's specific protection to others. This leads to a perception of corruption on the part of County officials and general mistrust of County government.



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

As part of an investigation into citizen complaints, the Grand Jury found that while the contractor agrees to the conditions and receives permit approval, compliance is not always consistent.

In the absence of clear direction, residents frequently contact the Planning and Building Department's main phone number as a starting point. Associated staff then attempt to direct the complainant to the appropriate department. Often those calls are forwarded to the Code Enforcement Division for evaluation. This process causes frustration for the complaining parties and delay in addressing immediate issues.

As established in Title 9 of the County Ordinances, the Code Enforcement Division is responsible for enforcing building and zoning regulations related to health, life, and safety across all El Dorado County unincorporated communities. Interviews with County staff



indicated that Code Enforcement is reactive, responding to citizen complaints rather than seeking out violations. Typically, Code Enforcement gets involved after a project is completed, unless it is discovered that unpermitted construction is in progress.

According to the complaint form available on the Code Enforcement website, ([Code Enforcement Division - El Dorado County](#)) "Code Enforcement investigates a variety of building code, zoning code and cannabis code complaints. New complaints are reviewed, assigned, and prioritized as workload allows."

The identity of the complainant is kept confidential according to [County Ordinance Section 9.02.070](#), but based on interviews with County staff they caution that anonymous complaints are not recommended. A full investigation may not be

completed without contact information. In fact, the identity of reporting parties remains confidential unless the County is required to release that information pursuant to a lawful subpoena or at the direction of a hearing officer or judge. Knowingly filing a false complaint is a misdemeanor pursuant to County Ordinance Section 9.02.070.

During construction projects, residents often do not know which department oversees compliance with the Development Agreement or the permit Conditions of Approval.

There are multiple departments with authority to enforce the conditions.

For example, dust complaints get referred to AQMD for air quality. Smoke from burning vegetation or construction debris may be reported to the Fire Department and/or AQMD. Early morning or late-night noise from machinery may be reported to the Planning Department. Mud, runoff, and other issues may be reported to the Department of Transportation or Environmental Management or even the Stormwater Management Division of the Planning and Building Department. The process is difficult to navigate.

PROSESSING COMPLAINTS

Once the appropriate department receives a complaint, it is assigned to County staff for investigation. The reporting party may be contacted for additional information such as site details, directions, or current conditions. This may be the end of contact with the complainant. It is not the end of the investigation. County staff coordinate with developers, contractors, or landowners to resolve issues.

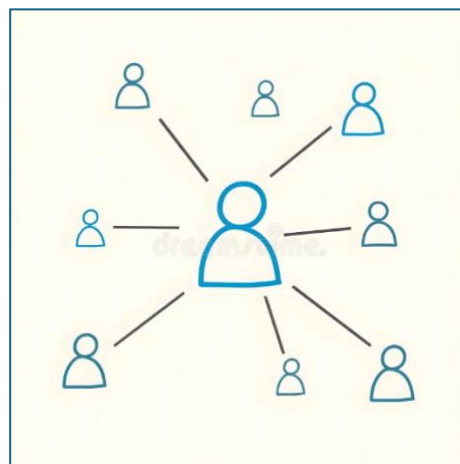
Through interviews and reviewing El Dorado County Board of Supervisors (Board) agenda items, the Grand Jury found that the first step for County staff is to make contact and educate the violators about the rules and the consequences if the problem is not rectified. The next step is to issue warnings and/or fines. Work can be halted or permits withheld, but consequences depend on the department's authority and the relevant ordinance or law.

The Grand Jury requested a procedures manual for the Code Enforcement Division to clarify the complaint process but found that a complete procedures manual was not available. The documented procedures are limited to those presented to the Board

during the Code Enforcement Division's October 11, 2022, presentation ([Legistar item 22-1764](#)).

Understanding codes and regulations can be challenging. All affected parties are not familiar with the rules and processes involved. The Planning and Building Department created a liaison position to help landowners navigate the permit processes and to help resolve issues that may arise. The primary focus of the liaison is to assist homeowners and contractors, not complainants.

The Grand Jury found that many departments provide a complaint process available on the County website. Those related to building and construction include Code Enforcement, Environmental Management, and AQMD. The County lacks a coordinated web page or phone number to guide residents with grievances to the appropriate authority.



As previously stated, effective communication in government is essential for transparency, trust, and citizen engagement. Providing a centralized referral hub would enhance the Board's commitment to their Strategic Plan goal to "improve external and internal service delivery in a more convenient and efficient way."

INTERDEPARTMENTAL COMMUNICATION FLAWS

To achieve the County's Strategic Plan goals that include "Working as One Organization," communication between departments with enforcement responsibilities is critical. County staff should be aware of overall County operations to better serve constituents.

During this Grand Jury investigation, a lack of communication was denoted between associated but distinctive departmental staff. For instance, the County Assessor's Office routinely inspects properties for improvements that, by state law, are added to the assessed value for the tax rolls. Regardless of the permit status, improvements are

recorded in the Assessor's database (Megabyte Property Tax System). For example, non-permitted square footage is routinely added to permitted living area square footage without delineation and reported as living area square footage.

The Assessor's Office routinely provides property information, for a fee, to outside agencies for use by the public, lending institutions, and government entities. This includes property information for real estate transactions and the characteristics of each property.

The Assessor's database does not interface with the Planning and Building Department's TRAKiT, a land management software system, which can create conflicting information for users.

The Assessor's Office provides a highly visible disclaimer on their web page that warns the following:

Assessor maps and property characteristics are prepared for assessment purposes only. County maps are not intended to illustrate legal building sites or establish precedence over local ordinances. Official information concerning size or use of any parcel should be obtained from recorded documents and local governing agencies.

A reasonable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the data provided; nevertheless, some information may be out of date or may not be accurate. The County of El Dorado and the Office of the Assessor assume no responsibility arising from the use of this information. Associated data are provided without warranty of any kind, either expressed or implied. Do not make any business decisions based on this data before validating the data. [Revenue and Taxation Code 408.3(d)]

It is incumbent upon prospective property owners to perform due diligence in real estate transactions. They may find after contacting the Planning and Building Department for a site or parcel permit history, that property improvements were completed without required building permits. This is problematic, in that prospective property owners have

limited access to the Assessor property records of their desired property (pre-purchase), due to privacy laws that were enacted over the past decade.

The Grand Jury found that the Planning and Building Department provides the Assessor's Office with permit issuance data. The Assessor's Office does not provide the Planning and Building Department with information regarding property improvements, permitted or not, per the Revenue and Taxation Code. The California Revenue and Taxation Code is the primary body of state law governing all taxation matters in California, including property, income, sales, and special taxes.

In 2023, the Board authorized a building permit [Amnesty](#) program providing a reasonable solution for property owners for circumstances they did not cause themselves and were not aware of when purchasing or inheriting a property. Code Enforcement and Building Services staff continue to work with property owners, providing a reasonable solution.

As part of the Amnesty Program approval in 2023, staff reached agreement to hold more regular discussions about information sharing between the Planning and Building Department and the Assessor's Office. The Grand Jury determined through interviews with County staff that this has not been implemented.

The Board was made aware that enhanced communication between the Planning and Building Department and the Assessor's Office regarding unpermitted structures may result in an increase in property taxes from property assessments and/or fines from code enforcement violations. By law, the Assessor may capture up to four years of escaped assessments (meaning not previously captured on the tax roll) on unpermitted structures.



Because code enforcement is a key function of government, the Grand Jury found it important to remind prospective property owners of their responsibility to conduct due diligence, as well as to provide resources and solutions when information is inconsistent. It is also important for the Planning and Building Department and Assessor's Office to ensure that prospective property owners can obtain accurate property characteristics.

FINDINGS

F1 Citizens with complaints are not routinely informed of resolutions.

F2 There is no central County web page or phone number to direct complaints.

F3 There is no procedure manual specific to the Code Enforcement Division.

F4 The Planning and Building Department and the Assessor's office have associated roles which are not being utilized to the fullest potential.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1 The Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors direct the IT Chief Information Officer to establish a central web page and phone number that will provide the public with directions for submitting grievances to the appropriate authority by December 31, 2026.

R2 The Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors direct the Planning and Building Department Director to develop a Procedure Manual for the Code Enforcement Division by February 1, 2027.

R3 The Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors form a working group of representatives from the Planning and Building Department and the Assessor's Office by December 31, 2026, to propose solutions for property owners and stakeholders seeking verified property information.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

A Civil Grand Jury report details a single investigation. Each report lists FINDINGS and RECOMMENDATIONS. The organization responsible is notified and is required to respond to the report.

The California Penal Code Section 933(c) specifies response times.

- *PUBLIC AGENCIES. The governing body of any public agency (also referring to a department) must respond within 90 days from the release of the report to the public.*
- *ELECTED OFFICERS OR AGENCY HEADS. All elected officers or heads of agencies/departments must respond within 60 days of the report's release to the public.*
- *FAILURE TO RESPOND. Failure to respond to a Grand Jury report violates California Penal Code Section 933.05 and is subject to further action that may include additional investigation into the subject matter of the report by the Jury.*
- *The following responses are required pursuant to Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05:*

From the following governing boards within 90 days:

- *El Dorado County Board of Supervisors*
 - *All Findings*
 - *All Recommendations*

For more information refer to How to Respond to an El Dorado County Civil Grand Jury Report available on the El Dorado County Grand Jury webpage at <https://www.eldoradocounty.ca.gov/Public-Safety-Justice/Safety-Justice/Grand-Jury>.

Reports issued by the Civil Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code Section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury do not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.