County of San Mateo Planning & Building Department

Agricultural Advisory Committee

Natalie Sare, Chair
Peter Marchi, Vice Chair
Cole Mazariegos-Anastassiou
Crystal Chaix
Daniel Theobald
Ryan Casey
James Oku
John Vars
Marilyn Johnson
Kristen Kurczak Nightingale
Rick Hernandez
Jess Brown
Koren Widdel
Andrew Miller

County Office Building
455 County Center, 2nd Floor
Redwood City, California 94063
650/363-1825
planning.smcgov.org

MINUTES

Monday, October 19, 2026

IN-PERSON WITH REMOTE PARTICIPATION

A full recording of this meeting can be accessed on the official government YouTube channel of the County of San Mateo at: https://www.smcgov.org/planning/event/agricultural-advisory-committee-meeting-october-19-2026.

Call to Order
Chair Natalie Sare called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

Member Roll Call

Regular Committee Members Present:
James Oku
Natalie Sare
Peter Marchi
Ryan Casey
Crystal Chaix
Marilyn Johnson
John Vars
Daniel Theobald
Rick Hernandez
Kristen Kurczak Nightingale

Regular Committee Members Not Present:
Cole Mazariegos-Anastassiou

Nonvoting Committee Members Present:

Nonvoting Committee Members Not Present:
Andrew Miller, UC Co-Op Extension Representative
Koren Widdel, San Mateo County Agricultural Commissioner
Jess Brown, San Mateo County Farm Bureau Executive Director

Planning Liaisons Present:
Robby Miller, San Mateo County Planning & Building Department

Public Comment to allow the public to address the Committee on any matter **not** on the agenda. If your subject is not on the agenda, the Chair will recognize you at this time.

SPEAKERS
Public Speaker, Kerry Burke, states that there was a successful pumpkin festival; Announces there is a Mid-Pen Open Space Purisma Creek Redwood Comprehensive Management Plan and asks Mid-Pen to come speak to the Committee about it if not talked about tonight.
Chair, Natalie Sare, reads WB Bettencourt comment letter on farm stand.
Planning Liaison, Robby Miller, announces two errors found on the agenda that was posted on the website and they will be updated.

Action To Set Agenda & To Approve Consent Agenda Items

1. Consideration to set the agenda and approve the Minutes of the Agricultural Advisory Committee for October 21, 2024 and September 14, 2026.

COMMITTEE ACTION:
Committee Member, Ryan Casey, motions to approve the October 21, 2024 Minutes.
Committee Member, Jon Vars, seconds motion.
Motion fails 2-1-7 (Nay: Theobald; Abstain: Hernandez, Sare, Oku, Marchi, Johnson, Chaix, Nightingale).

Committee Member, James Oku, motions to set the agenda.
Committee Member, Marilyn Johnson, seconds motion.
Motion passed 8-0-2 (Abstain: Hernandez, Nightingale).

Committee Member, Marilyn Johnson, motions to approve the September 14, 2026 minutes with a correction that John Vars was present.
Committee Member, James Oku, seconds motion.
Motion passed 7-0-3 (Abstain: Chaix, Hernandez, Nightingale).

2. Consideration of an Agritourism Event application, PLN2026-00319, for the temporary, seasonal Santa's Tree Farm operation starting on November 14, 2026 and ending on December 29, 2026. No operational changes from last season.

COMMITTEE ACTION:
Committee Member, Marilyn Johnson, motions to approve Agritourism application PLN2026-00319.
Committee Member, Crystal Chaix, seconds motion.
Motion passed 8-0-2 (Abstain: Sare, Nightingale).

Regular Agenda

3. **Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District Leasing Practices, etc.** – Discussion with Brian Malone, Assistant General Manager, and Brandon Stewart, Facilities and Fleet Manager.

SPEAKERS

Chair, Natalie Sare, states that farmers who attended the AAC April public workshop were concerned that MidPen is terminating long term leases for farmers and cattle ranchers here and then leasing to out of county residents who do not pay the MidPen tax no their property taxes.

Presenter, Brian Malone, responds that the base tax does not apply in the coastal protection areas, and that the leasing described in the presentation heavily favors current operators but is still competitive process.

Committee Member, Crystal Chaix, asks about the 5, 5, 5 leasing strategy and what happens at the end of the 5 years.

Presenter, Brandon Stewart, responds that it is a 15 year lease with checkpoints every 5 years where there is a discussion and recommendation letter is prepared for the general manager on whether to continue the lease.

Committee Member, Crystal Chaix, asks if lease applicants can see their grades or deficiencies on their paperwork to see how to improve their chances of getting leases.

Presenter, Brandon Stewart, responds in the affirmative adding that the documents are public documents.

Vice Chair, Peter Marchi, states that as a coastside property owner, he also pays unsecured property taxes, and that should increase the points generated when determining leases

Presenter, Brian Malone, responds that there are points given just for living or running a business in the County.

Vice Chair, Peter Marchi, expresses concern about mountain lions coming onto farmers properties from MidPen's land.

Presenter, Brian Malone, responds that MidPen's mission is balancing preserving open space and natural environment including large predators with other things like preserving agriculture, and adds that they have reduced lease amounts and have a reimbursement program.

Committee Member, Ryan Casey, asks what their doing to support newer ranchers.

Presenter, Brandon Stewart, responds that there are opportunities but significant infrastructure cost are often needed to make them viable, so the focus has been to make existing ranches more secure and later help with newer opportunities like 4-H.

Committee Member, Marilyn Johnson, agrees with Crystal that providing youth opportunities is crucial for preserving agriculture and asks if they lease land for things other than grazing.

Presenter, Brandon Stewart, responds that they have a couple of small row crop operations, chestnut orchard, and Christmas tree orchard.

Chair, Natalie Sare, opens public comment.

Public Speaker, BJ Burns, asks why they cannot allow the small property for 4-H, if they can come to the coast instead of bayside for meetings, and wants better communication between MidPen and farmers.

Presenter, Brian Malone, responds that he is willing to work to find a 4-H property and try to educate and make it as easy as possible.

Public Speaker, Vince Fontana, concerned that the MidPen's Board is not getting the right information, and believes that the mountain lion situation was not handled correctly.

Presenter, Brian Malone, responds that MidPen's Board is very well informed on the issue and explains some of the history and mentions they are partnered with USDA Wildlife Services to look at livestock loss for reimbursement program.

Public Speaker, Kerry Burke, encourages MidPen to retain Williamson Act contracts on their land to help keep farming viable.

Presenter, Brian Malone, responds that the governmental agencies or nonprofits are already exempt from taxes, their 15 year leases are longer than the 10 year phase out period for Williamson Act, and the coastal mission requires us to supporting agriculture and preserving agricultural land.
Public Speaker, Bridget Jett, asks about the percentage of points awarded to locals; wants MidPen to help 4-H with the permitting process; asks about the status of HMB exemplary tax like the one for La Honda and Pescadero.
Presenter, Brian Malone, responds that land purchased by Midpen for HMB would not use the same formula used for La Honda and Pescadero, and adds that the only taxes paid to MidPen on the coastside is for Measure AA.
Committee Member, Daniel Theobald, states that he encourages MidPen to provide space for 4-H or FFA, and adds that he has also offered to provide space on his land with a long term lease free of charge with only stipulation of protection from being sued if someone gets hurt on the property.

4. <u>New Member Introductions</u>

SPEAKERS:
None

5. COMMITTEE MEMBERS UPDATES & QUESTIONS

SPEAKERS:
Committee Member, James Oku, announces seeing people harvesting pampass grass and not to do that to prevent spreading it.
Committee Member, Crystal Chaix, announces Veterans dinner at Long Branch Salon Friday, and wants to make sure pop-ups farm stands are addressed.
Committee Member, Marilyn Johnson, asks about whether there was a position switch and not seeing it on the roll sheet.
Committee Member, Crystal Chaix, asks about agendizing SB 707 and requiring the Chair to be in-person.
County Counsel, Brian Pettit, responds that requiring the Chair to be in-person is not an SB 707 issue.
Chair, Natalie Sare, responds that the determination last meeting was a discussion could be added to the agenda.
County Counsel, Brian Pettit, agrees.
Chair, Natalie Sare, gives gift to Crystal Chaix and Peter Marchi for their work on the AAC April Workshop subcommittee.

6. PLANNING LIAISON REPORT

SPEAKERS:
Public Speaker, BJ Burns asks if the Stone Pine Cove is for only farm workers.
County Counsel, Brian Pettit, responds the one of the members of a household needs to be a farm worker at the time of lease.
Public Speaker, BJ Burns asks who is responsible for the facility.
Planning Liaison, Robby Miller, responds that Department of Housing.
Committee Member, James Oku, asks the overall demand received for the units.
Committee Member, Ryan Casey, responds that several of his employees applied and only one got in.
Committee Member, Rick Hernandez, asks for confirmation if there are still available

units, and requests annual updates on whether the occupants are farm workers or not.

7. Officer Election for Chair and Vice Chair

SPEAKERS:
Chair, Natalie Sare, asks for any questions on the process.
Committee Member, Daniel Theobald, asks how it works if multiple people run.
County Counsel, Brian Pettit, responds that it can be done different ways, but recommends a standard motion and vote until an individual is selected.
Committee Member, Daniel Theobald, announces that James Oku is running for Chair, and his intention to run for either Chair or Vice Chair.
Planning Liaison, Robby Miller, asks if any other Members intend to run.
Chair, Natalie Sare, opens public comment.
Public Speaker, BJ Burns, urges Members to vote for James as Chair, and is upset that Daniel has a farm stand along the highway and believes he is using this Committee for personal gain and urges Members not to vote for Daniel.
Committee Member, Daniel Theobald, responds that the accusations against him are false attacks and that he has worked extremely hard for farmers on the coast, and willing to work with him to resolve the issue.
Chair, Natalie Sare, mentions the public comment letter says that it is illegal along the Caltrans right-of-way for farm stands, and Members should set a good example.
Committee Member, Daniel Theobald, responds that the Committee's concerns around pop ups has been with non-county farmers.

COMMITTEE ACTION:

Committee Member, Daniel Theobald, motions to have James Oku be Chair.
Committee Member, Crystal Chaix, seconds motion.
Motion passed 9-0-1 (Abstain: Nightingale).

Committee Member, Crystal Chaix, motions to have Peter Marchi Vice Chair.
Committee Member, Marilyn Johnson, seconds motion.
Motion fails 4-5-1 (Nay: Oku, Vars, Casey, Theobald, Hernandez; Abstain: Nightingale).

Committee Member, James Oku, motions to have Daniel Theobald Vice Chair.
Committee Member, Ryan Casey, seconds motion.
Motion passes 5-4-1 (Nay: Sare, Marchi, Chaix, Johnson; Abstain: Nightingale).

8. ADJOURNMENT Chair, Natalie Sare, adjourned the meeting at 8:09 p.m.