



JIM DESMOND
SUPERVISOR, FIFTH DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: **October 22, 2024**

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TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

**BACK TO BASICS: A REVIEW OF COUNTY GOVERNMENT CORE FUNCTIONS,
ESSENTIAL SERVICES AND CUSTOMER SERVICE RESPONSIBILITIES
(DISTRICTS: ALL)**

OVERVIEW

As a local government, we continuously adapt and work to address pressing issues impacting residents of the region. Some of these issues are clearly within the County of San Diego's (County) jurisdiction, such as when responding to storm impacts on the county-maintained road network, while others are more national or global in scope like the immigration crisis, so-called "book bans" or the impacts of climate change. The range of complex issues that often dominate the discourse at our Board of Supervisors (Board) hearings has led to a significant amount of local action on our part over the past few years. This has included establishing new offices, creating new staff positions, adopting new ordinances, frameworks, and policies, preparation of numerous consultant studies, supporting various state and federal bills, etc. While these actions are often noble and demonstrate this Board's commitment to addressing the needs and concerns of communities throughout the county, we must also ensure we don't inadvertently compromise our ability to provide and maintain high-quality, efficient customer service levels across the County's various departments. Staying on top of pressing issues is important; however, it is equally important that we periodically take stock of our capacity to deliver on core functions and responsibilities.

The County supports the day-to-day needs and activities of residents and businesses throughout the region through what today's item will refer to as "core functions." In this case, core functions are meant to be understood as bread-and-butter programs and services that deliver on critical government services and that more broadly help maintain public welfare, safety and quality of life. These may be either internal processes or public-facing services; what matters is if they support or directly contribute to delivering on the bread-and-butter programs and services. Examples include maintaining county roads, conducting restaurant and food safety inspections, issuing building permits, processing adoption requests, testing beach and bay waters, operating libraries and parks, managing sensitive preserve lands, providing fire protection and law enforcement services, conducting elections, issuing birth certificates, ensuring price accuracy at the gas pump, and providing in-home supportive services. People rely on the County every day to ensure their food is safe to eat, to support an aging parent, to trust that elections are fair, to know when it's safe to enter the water, and to trust their communities will be safe from crime.

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To remain focused on these everyday needs of residents and businesses, today's item requests a review of the various core functions that are served across the County's four major groups - Public Safety Group (PSG), Land Use & Environment Group (LUEG), Finance & General Government Group (FG3) and Health & Human Services Agency (HHSA). Each of these groups and the various departments housed within them are responsible for carrying out the daily operations of our government and directly interacting with the public we serve. As we continue to grapple with broad, often national issues affecting society (potentially prompting the further expansion of County programs and services), it's important that we don't overextend our resources or otherwise compromise our ability to provide and maintain high-quality customer service levels across the County's core functions.

Put more straightforward - at the heart of today's item is a simple question: are we exceeding, meeting, or struggling to meet mandated service levels that members of the public count on? For each instance in which the answer comes back either "exceeding" or "meeting" - what can we learn from these cases and how do we capture those processes and procedures for use across the enterprise? For each answer of "struggling to meet" - what are the root causes and how do we improve? To the extent specific departmental thresholds are already in-place (e.g., 80% of phone calls returned within 24 hours), those should be used to determine if certain service levels are exceeding, meeting, or struggling to meet service levels. To help answer the guiding question, today's item directs the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to conduct a review and report back within 180 days on core function service levels across the four major County business groups - Public Safety Group (PSG), Land Use & Environment Group (LUEG), Finance & General Government Group (FG3) and Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA).

RECOMMENDATION(S)
SUPERVISOR JIM DESMOND

1. Direct the CAO to conduct a review and report back within 180 days on core functions across the four major County Groups - Public Safety Group (PSG), Land Use & Environment Group (LUEG), Finance & General Government Group (FG3) and Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA). This review should include identifying programs that deliver these core functions and provide information on the service levels of these programs. This may include using existing metrics such as departmental performance measures, and other metrics as deemed appropriate.
2. Direct the CAO to compile and document the costs of Board directed actions since 2020 that expand beyond the County's core functions, and that have: 1) established new offices; 2) funded outside consultant research/studies; and/or 3) created new policies and ordinances, particularly as it relates to land use (e.g., "Right-of-Way Done Right," etc.).

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EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

People across the region, no matter their political, ethnic, sexual or religious background rely on the County every day to deliver core services that directly benefit their lives. Ensuring appropriate service levels are maintained should be the number one priority of the County. Every San Diegan deserves to know their food is safe to eat, that their communities will be free from crime, that their parents can age with dignity, and that prices are accurate at the gas pump and grocery stores.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The County's commitment to sustainability requires us to consider the long-term consequences of our actions on the environment, economy, and social well-being of communities throughout the region. As we continue investing time and resources into solving complex issues beyond the traditional scope of local government, we must always stay focused and support County core functions that help maintain public welfare, safety and quality of life.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with these recommendations. There will be no change in General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

The range of complex issues that often dominate the discourse at our Board of Supervisors (Board) hearings has led to a significant amount of local action on our part over the past few years. This has included establishing new offices, creating new staff positions, adopting new ordinances and policies, preparation of numerous consultant studies, supporting various state and federal bills, etc. While these actions are often noble and demonstrate this Board's commitment to addressing the needs and concerns of communities throughout the county, we must also ensure we don't inadvertently compromise our ability to provide and maintain high-quality customer service levels across the County's various departments. Staying on top of pressing issues is important; however, it is equally important that we periodically take stock of our capacity to deliver on core functions and responsibilities. This is what today's item calls for.

Additionally, the transition to a new Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and executive leadership team provides an opportunity for, and perhaps warrants an in-depth look at the fundamental processes, services and functions that make up the foundation of our local County government. An honest, transparent review of core functions across the enterprise can refocus our attention on those foundational services during a time of transition and will inform the new executive team and the Board of Supervisors (Board) where additional attention and resources may be needed. For departments struggling to meet core service levels, what can County leadership and the Board do to support making improvements?

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In the County, “performance measures” are often used to track a department’s year-to-year success and help identify efficiencies in internal processes and procedures. For example, Aging & Independence Services (AIS) - housed under HHSA – uses a performance measure for response times, in which all AIS Call Center calls are answered in under 5 minutes. AIS exceeded their 2022-23 goal of 80%, answering 86% of calls in under 5 minutes. Similarly, the Register of Voters (ROV) – housed under FG3 - has a goal to count 80% of mail-in ballots by the Monday following election day. In 2022-23 the ROV exceeded this goal, counting 100% of mail-in ballots by the following Monday. To the extent similar performance measures are available for each department under the four major groups, we should use them as a baseline for the review as being requested by today’s item. However, other metrics that align with the intent of today’s item should be considered as deemed appropriate in each department. Examples might include the time it takes to fill a pothole (Department of Public Works); the time it takes to return customer phone calls/emails (all departments); scoping letter turnaround times (Planning & Development Services); toxicology report turnaround times (Medical Examiner); staff retention and vacancies (all departments); etc. These serve only as examples of ways service levels across the County’s core function may be further measured beyond existing “performance measures.” Individual and specific metrics should be considered and developed by leadership in each respective department as part of this review.

As discussed, the County’s core functions are served to the public across the four major groups. To provide more context on what services and responsibilities these groups are charged with, following is a brief overview of each.

Public Safety Group (PSG)

PSG is responsible for the safety and protection of residents across the County. The group is made up of our first responders, law enforcement and the County’s criminal justice system. Departments within PSG include Animal Services, Child Support Services, the District Attorney, Emergency Services, Medical Examiner, Probation, Public Defender, San Diego County Fire, and the Sheriff’s Office. These departments provide essential services that keep San Diego County safe from crime and resilient to natural disasters. Common metrics in these departments include response times, call times, and case times. Ensuring that we are quickly and adequately responding to crises is imperative to public safety.

Land Use & Environment Group (LUEG)

LUEG is responsible for building, county infrastructure, environment, and agriculture in the county. Agriculture, Weights & Measures, County Libraries, Environmental Health & Quality, Office of Sustainability and Environmental Justice, Parks and Recreation, Planning & Development Services, and Public Works make up LUEG. These departments approve building plans and discretionary projects in the unincorporated areas, ensure our beaches and waterways are safe, and maintain our public infrastructure like roads and stormwater facilities in the unincorporated area. Common metrics for these departments include customer response times, permit processing times and meeting project deadlines. Effective and engaged departments under LUEG are essential for solving the housing crisis, planning and building thriving communities and supporting the agricultural community adapt to shifts in climate and land uses.

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Finance & General Government Group (FG3)

FG3 serves as the core for the administrative functions of the County. The group is home to almost 20 departments that make up the bureaucratic backbone of the County. The Assessor/ Recorder/ County Clerk, Auditor & Controller, Chief Administrative Office, and the Treasurer-Tax Collector, General Services, and Purchasing & Contracting are housed in FG3. An effective FG3 allows the County to operate smoothly, professionally and within budgetary constraints.

Health & Human Services Agency (HHSA)

HHSA serves as the public health, housing, and social services agency for San Diego County. Departments in HHSA include Aging & Independence Services, Behavioral Health Services, Child and Family Well-Being, Self-Sufficiency Services, Homeless Solutions & Equitable Communities, Housing & Community Development Services, Medical Care Services, and Public Health Services. These departments handle a variety of services for the county that encompass every age group and community. HHSA is essential for helping disadvantaged communities get connected with social services, and for providing care to vulnerable populations. HHSA takes care of many who cannot care for themselves and provides programs for those who need extra help to get through life. Tracking the levels of service across HHSA is critical to determine if we're providing adequate and timely public health, housing, and social services to those in need.

As we continue adapting to and attempting to solve broad-reaching issues that go beyond the traditional scope of local government, we must always keep our eye on the ball and first support essential, core functions provided by the four major groups that help maintain public welfare, safety and quality of life.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's proposed actions support the *Empower: Transparency and Accountability*; and *Community: Engagement, Safety, and Quality of Life* Strategic Initiatives in the County of San Diego's 2024-2029 Strategic Plan.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jim Desmond', with a stylized, cursive script.

JIM DESMOND
Supervisor, Fifth District

ATTACHMENT(S)
N/A