



**JANUARY 21, 2026 REGULAR MEETING  
DRAFT MINUTES**

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

The regular meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. in the City of Eureka Council Chambers with Chair Madrone presiding.

**2. FLAG SALUTE**

**3. ROLL CALL**

Members Present: Heidi Benzonelli, Michelle Bushnell, Cheryl Kelly, Steve Madrone, Elaine Weinreb\*, and Kimberley White  
Members Absent: Troy Nicolini  
Alternates Present: David Couch\*\* and Gordon Johnson  
Alternates Absent: Debra Garnes and Mike Wilson  
Staff: Colette Santsche, Executive Officer  
Amber Chung, Presiding Clerk/Analyst  
Ryan Plotz, Attorney

\*Commissioner Weinreb joined the meeting at 9:07am (Alternate Commissioner Johnson seated as voting member prior to arrival)

\*\*Alternate Commissioner Couch seated as voting member

**4. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR**

**Motion Bushnell/Couch** to appoint Commissioner Madrone as chair for the 2026 calendar year. Motion passed by 7-0-0 voice vote.

**Motion Bushnell/Kelly** to appoint Commissioner Benzonelli as vice chair for the 2026 calendar year. Motion passed by 7-0-0 voice vote.

**5. PUBLIC COMMENT**

No public comment was received.

**6. CONSENT CALENDAR**

**A) Approval of November 19, 2025 Regular Meeting Minutes**

**Motion Bushnell/Johnson** to approve the consent calendar. Motion passed by 7-0-0 voice vote.

\*Commissioner Weinreb joined the meeting.

**7. PUBLIC HEARING ITEMS**

**A) Humboldt Community Services District North McKay Ranch Annexation**

EO Santsche introduced the staff report and added that the Commission can expect agency representatives in attendance including HCSD General Manager TK Williams and County Planning Director John Ford. EO Santsche provided an overview of participation requirements under the CKH Act, in particular Government Code Section 56325.1, which expressly provides that any member appointed on behalf of

local governments shall represent the interests of the public as a whole and not solely the interests of the appointing authority and therefore does not require the abstention of any member on any matter. This relates to Commissioner Benzonelli since she serves on the HCSD Board.

EO Santsche noted that the property tax exchange process had been completed and the proposal included 100 percent landowner consent, eliminating the need for a protest hearing. Staff nevertheless noticed the item as a public hearing due to the size and regional importance of the project. HCSD previously adopted a resolution of application and worked with the developer to establish conditions of approval. Under the proposal, HCSD would provide water, wastewater, and street lighting services to the subdivision. The County has approved the development project and completed environmental review through certification of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR), which LAFCo will rely upon as a responsible agency. The Commission's action includes certification of the EIR and consideration of the annexation.

Chair Madrone opened the Public Hearing to accept public comment, but no public comments were received.

During Commissioner comments, Commissioner Benzonelli referenced the responsibilities of LAFCo, and relayed questions raised by members of the public regarding service rates and development activity in the McKay Tract area. She expressed concerns about infrastructure capacity, transportation impacts, and broader community planning considerations. Commissioner Couch asked how the County's dark sky ordinance would apply to street lighting, and County Planning Director John Ford confirmed the ordinance would apply to lighting within the subdivision.

County Planning Director further explained that long-range planning for the McKay area has included traffic analysis and phased infrastructure improvements tied to development. Cumulative Impacts were evaluated in the Eureka Community Plan and subsequently re-evaluated through the General Plan Update and the McKay Ranch Subdivision EIR. In response to questions regarding transportation mitigation, Mr. Ford explained that the developer will be responsible for specific roadway improvements at defined phases of the project under a proportional mitigation approach. This approach substitutes project-specific improvements in lieu of the impact fees that were previously identified as mitigation through the Martin Slough Interceptor project.

Commissioners also discussed road improvements and emergency access in the area. Commissioner Bushnell clarified that the annexation under consideration relates only to the North McKay project, consisting of approximately 324 residential units, and not the total potential development in the broader area. The Commission acknowledged that while regional planning considerations are important to ensure responsible development, including planning for critical utility infrastructure along the Walnut Drive corridor, LAFCo's review is focused on the proposed annexation and the ability of HCSD to provide services to the affected territory.

**Motion Bushnell/Kelly** to adopt Resolution No. 2026-01 certifying the Environmental Impact Report and adopting a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program and making Findings relative to the Humboldt Community Services District North McKay Ranch Subdivision Annexation. Motion passed by 4-2-1 roll call vote.

Ayes: Commissioners Bushnell, Couch, Kelly, and Weinreb  
Noes: Commissioners Benzonelli and Madrone  
Abstain: Commissioner White

**Motion Bushnell/Kelly** to adopt Resolution No. 2026-02 approving the Humboldt Community Services District North McKay Ranch Annexation subject to the conditions as identified in the staff report. Motion passed by 4-2-1 roll call vote.

Ayes: Commissioners Bushnell, Couch, Kelly, and Weinreb  
Noes: Commissioners Benzonelli and Madrone  
Abstain: Commissioner White

## 8. BUSINESS ITEMS

### A) Mid-Year Financial Report for Fiscal Year 2025-26

EO Santsche introduced the staff report and reviewed the recent changes to the budget including legislative advocacy and support for the North County Fire Services Study. She indicated that mid-year financials are on track and it is not anticipated that any expenses will be over budget by the end of the fiscal year. Commissioners asked clarifying questions then accepted and filed the report.

### B) Appointment of Voting Delegate for CALAFCO Business Meeting

EO Santsche introduced the staff report and provided an overview of the upcoming CALAFCO Business Meeting. The meeting will be held virtually and focus on proposed bylaw changes. Commissioners asked clarifying questions regarding the meeting format and content prior to making a motion.

**Motion Benzonelli/Kelly** to appoint Commissioner Bushnell as the voting delegate for the CALAFCO Business Meeting. Motion passed by a 7-0-0 voice vote.

## 9. INFORMATIONAL AND CONTINUING ITEMS

### A) Brown Act Update 2026

EO Santsche introduced the staff report and noted that several changes have been made to the Brown Act that went into effect on January 1, 2026. She provided a brief summary of the notable changes and provided opportunity for clarifying questions.

### B) Form 700 and Ethics Training

EO Santsche introduced the staff report and noted that annual Form 700 is required along with biannual ethics training. Additionally, a new law has gone into effect that now requires Commissioners to participate in biannual fiscal training.

Commissioners asked clarifying questions and requested that a list of which Commissioners need to submit documentation on these items be provided to the Commission.

### C) Status of Expiring Commissioner Terms

EO Santsche provided an update on Commissioner terms expiring in 2026. She reported that the Mayors' City Selection Committee appointed a new City Member, Commissioner White, at their recent meeting. Additional appointments will be made in June as needed. It was noted that staff will be starting the recruitment process for an Alternate Public Member.

#### **D) Status of Municipal Service Review Preparations**

EO Santsche introduced the staff report and provided an overview of current MSR preparations. Staff is working on drafting the City of Eureka and Scotia Community Services District MSR/SOI Updates.

No Commissioner comments or questions. The Commission received and filed the report and no further action was taken.

#### **E) Status of Current and Future Proposals**

EO Santsche introduced the staff report and provided updates on current projects. Staff has prepared a contract for the North Coastal Fire Study and coordinated with legal counsel prior to sending the agreement to the consultant for review. EO Santsche also reported that staff is pursuing a potential legislative solution regarding the exclusion of commercial timberlands from fire protection districts. Staff met with Assemblymember Rogers staff to begin discussing potential bill language and has also engaged with the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) and forest industry representatives regarding the issue.

During Commissioner discussion, Commissioner Kelly suggested potential future agenda topics, including a presentation from the Southern Humboldt Community Healthcare District and an opportunity for information exchange regarding healthcare service needs in Northern Humboldt. EO Santsche indicated that a countywide Municipal Service Review focused on healthcare services could be considered in the future for that purpose.

Commissioners also discussed regional fire service issues, including State funding for expanded CAL FIRE staffing which may affect the Amador Contract (CSA #4) and Willow Creek FPD's recent coordination with McGuire's office regarding State Highway calls. EO Santsche reported that staff is assisting with a Down River Regional Fire Services Municipal Service Review through Trinity LAFCo to evaluate regional service needs along the Highway 299 corridor, including Salyer, Hawkins Bar, and Downriver fire departments (in coordination with Willow Creek Fire). This will be followed by an East County Regional Fire Services MSR by Humboldt LAFCo to include Willow Creek, Hoopa, and Orleans fire departments.

### **10. EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT**

#### **A) CALAFCO Legislative Update (January 2026)**

EO Santsche noted that legislative items currently being tracked by CALAFCO have been included in the agenda packet for review.

The Commission received and filed the report and no action was taken.

### **11. WRITTEN CORRESPONDENCE – None**

### **12. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 10:40 a.m. The next regular meeting of the Commission will take place on March 18, 2026, at 9:00am at the City of Eureka Council Chambers located at 531 K Street, Eureka, CA 95501.