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**Agenda Item
Regular Meeting of the
Board of Supervisors
Tuesday, March 24, 2026**

Item Number: 1.12

MEETING DATE: 03/24/2026

DEPARTMENT: RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AGENCY

AGENDA ITEM PREPARER: Abraham Prado

DEPT HEAD/DIRECTOR: Abraham Prado

SUBJECT:

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AGENCY/PLANNING AND BUILDING - A. PRADO

1. Approve retroactive contract with Ascent in an amount not to exceed \$58,595.00 for the period of March 10, 2026, through June 30, 2027, to analyze under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) any environmental impacts of the proposed Minor Subdivisions at 5201 Airline Highway (County planning file PLN250046) and 111 Best Road (County planning file PLN250035); and
2. Authorize the Chair, County Executive Officer, or designee to sign said contract.

SBC FILE NUMBER: 790

AGENDA SECTION:

CONSENT AGENDA

BACKGROUND/SUMMARY:

The County Resource Management Agency has received an application for two Minor Subdivisions located adjacent to one another at 111 Best Road, in unincorporated San Benito County and 5201 Airline Highway, in unincorporated San Benito County. The County has prepared a contract with planning consultant Ascent to produce this initial study at a cost of \$58,595.00, funded by the project applicant under an existing reimbursement agreement established upon application submittal. Other than the consultant's response to the County's request for services, the consultant has to date performed no work on this project. The initial study would analyze both Minor Subdivision applications. For County Planning file PLN250035, a minor subdivision at 111 Best Road, further identified as Assessor's Parcel Numbers [APNs] 025-190-033 and 025-190-032, the applicant proposes to subdivide an existing 234.8-acre parcel into four parcels and one remainder parcel, consisting of two parcels of 26.60 acres each, one parcel of 45.50 acres, one parcel of 72.60 acres, and a remainder parcel of 63.50 acres. Parcels One and the remainder parcel each contain an existing residence, and Parcel Four contains an existing cell tower.

The remaining parcels consist of undeveloped agricultural land. No new construction is proposed as part of this project.

The site is located approximately 6 miles southeast of downtown Hollister positioned around ½ mile to the northeast of the intersection of Highway 25 and Best Road. This subdivision occupies a rural area surrounded by agricultural activities. The proposed project has existing access from Best Road, which will also serve all four of the proposed parcels and the remainder. The property carries a Residential Rural (RR) designation under the General Plan and an Agricultural Productive (AP) designation under the Zoning Ordinance.

All parcels would remain commercially viable for agricultural production and would retain sufficient lot area to qualify as agricultural preserves under San Benito County Code Chapter 19.01, which establishes minimum parcel size standards for participation in the California Land Conservation Act (Williamson Act) program if the applicant desired to apply for it. This ensures the long-term preservation of the site's agricultural potential while supporting continued economic productivity.

For County Planning file PLN250046, a minor subdivision (subdivision map) at 5201 Airline Hwy and 55 Best Road, the applicant proposes to subdivide an existing 198.01-acres (APN: 025-200-001 & 002) into three lots of 174.82 acres, 5.84 acres, 5.84 acres, 5.00 acres, and a 6.14 acres remainder parcel. This project also includes a dedication of 0.36 acres. The property carries a Residential Rural (RR) designation under the General Plan and an Agricultural Productive (AP) designation under the Zoning Ordinance.

RFP and Bid History:

This is a new contract. Although the contract is between the consultant and the County, the project applicant is required under a reimbursement agreement to fund the contract cost. Planning staff on December 22, 2025, distributed a work scope to its 13 prescreened CEQA-compliance consultants (prescreening described later) and asked for a response by 5 p.m. on January 16, 2026. Staff received these five responses along with the amount for preparing an initial study pursuant to CEQA for both Minor Subdivisions:

1. EMC Planning Group, Amount \$50,043.50
2. Dewberry Engineers Inc., Amount \$225,227.20
3. Interwest, Amount \$50,160.00
4. DD&A, Amount \$112,390.00
5. Ascent, Amount \$58,595.00

These proposals were evaluated using clearly defined scoring criteria, which included the following categories and respective points: understanding of the project scope and CEQA requirements (25 points), technical expertise and qualifications (20 points), methodology and work plan (20 points), relevant experience and past performance (15 points), cost proposal (15 points), and responsiveness and overall proposal quality (5 points). The final evaluation scores for the responsive proposals were very close; however, Ascent received a slightly higher score than the others.

Consultant Name Response Status Comments EMC Planning Group, Inc. Responded; Proposal submitted Not Selected, consultant Denise Duffy & Associates (DD&A) Responded; Proposal submitted Not selected, ICF Jones & Stokes, Inc. Did not respond, Dewberry Engineers, Inc. Responded; Proposal submitted Not Selected, PlaceWorks Did not respond, Ascent; Responded; Proposal submitted Selected, Rincon Consultants, Inc. Did not respond, Kimley-Horn and Associates, Inc. Did not respond, David J. Powers & Associates, Inc. Did not respond, Harris & Associates Did not respond, MIG, Inc. Did not respond, Panorama Environmental, Inc. Did not respond, HELIX Environmental Planning, Inc. Did not

respond. Following this comprehensive evaluation, Ascent was selected to prepare the Initial Study pursuant to CEQA. Their work will fully comply with CEQA guidelines and comprehensively identify mitigation measures designed to minimize potential environmental impacts.

The prescreening of CEQA-compliance consultants took place in early 2023. Planning staff published a request for qualifications (RFQ), seeking to establish a list of 10 to 20 qualified environmental review firms that could enter into on-call contracts with the County. The review and acceptance of responses resulted in a list 13 qualified consultants, and this list would remain effective for three years, through 2026. Evaluation of each consultant's proposal was based primarily on understanding of the work to be done, experience with similar kinds of work, and quality of staff for work to be done, with further consideration for capability of developing innovative or advanced techniques, familiarity with state and federal procedures, financial responsibility, and demonstrated technical ability. The on-call tasks expected of consultants included:

- Independent peer review of documents or reports submitted to the County. Such reports may be as varied as the subject matters included in the CEQA Checklist: Aesthetics, Agriculture Resources, Air Quality, Biological Resources, Cultural Resources, Forestry, Geology/Soils, Global Greenhouse Gasses, Hazards and Hazardous Materials, Hydrology/Water Quality, Land Use/Planning, Mineral Resources, Noise, Population/Housing, Public Services, Recreation, Transportation/Traffic, Tribal Consultation, Utilities/Service Systems. This task may include peer review of other documents, reports or information as may be needed by the County.
- Preparation of Initial Studies and a determination whether a Negative Declaration (ND), Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND), or Environmental Impact Review (EIR) is necessary for CEQA compliance.
- Preparation of environmental impact reports and supporting documentation.
- Preparation of mitigation monitoring and reporting programs.
- Preparation of technical documents including but not limited to air quality/greenhouse gas modules, noise and vibration analysis, traffic studies, soil reports, biological surveys, geohydrology reports, septic suitability reports, geologic reports, cultural surveys, etc. In addition to CEQA compliance, the RFQ further asked consultants for more complex professional County planning functions and assignments; developing of planning studies, environmental reviews, community design, and general plan preparation; housing element preparation; zoning and other county code updates; responsibility for the development, coordination, and completion of assigned planning projects; assisting with planning policy formulation and implementation; zoning enforcement; explanation of planning and zoning ordinances, regulations, and policies to the public; and related work as required.

FISCAL IMPACT:

N/A

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

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ATTACHMENTS:

[Agenda Fact Sheet - Contract - Ascent](#)
[Ascent Environmental, Inc. Contract](#)