



**SAN BENITO COUNTY
AGENDA ITEM
TRANSMITTAL FORM**

Dom Zanger
District No. 1
Vice-Chair

Kollin Kosmicki
District No. 2
Chair

Mindy Sotelo
District No. 3

Angela Curro
District No. 4

Ignacio Velazquez
District No. 5

Item Number: 1.30

MEETING DATE: 08/12/2025

DEPARTMENT: RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AGENCY

AGENDA ITEM PREPARER: Victor Tafoya

DEPT HEAD/DIRECTOR: Abraham Prado

SUBJECT:

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AGENCY - A. PRADO, PLANNING AND BUILDING DIRECTOR

Approve contract with EMC Planning Group Inc. in an amount not to exceed \$75,546.75, for the period of August 12, 2025, through August 31, 2026, to prepare an Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the Hippo Harvest Conditional Use Permit Project (County Planning file PLN250038), located at 2370 Shore Road, and authorize the Chair to sign said contract.

SBC FILE NUMBER: 790

AGENDA SECTION:

CONSENT AGENDA

BACKGROUND/SUMMARY:

The Resource Management Agency received a Conditional Use Permit application (PLN250038) from Hippo Harvest for the development of an approximately 28-acre hydroponic greenhouse facility at 2370 Shore Road in unincorporated northern San Benito County. The proposed project includes a 45,000-square-foot agricultural processing facility and ancillary infrastructure to support comprehensive operations of cultivating, processing, packaging, storing, and distributing USDA Certified Organic leafy greens.

The project will be developed in four phases:

- Phase 1 (early 2026 completion): 4 acres greenhouse, 25,000 sq. ft. processing facility, approximately

30 employees

- Phase 2 (2027 completion): Additional 4 acres greenhouse cultivation
- Phase 3 (2028 completion): Additional 8 acres greenhouse cultivation
- Phase 4 (late 2028 completion): Additional 12 acres greenhouse cultivation, expansion of processing facility by 20,000 sq. ft. to a total of 45,000 sq. ft., and approximately 70 additional employees (total of 75-100 employees working two shifts, 6:00 AM to 8:00 PM, Monday-Saturday)

The Resource Management Agency has contracted EMC Planning Group Inc. (Contract ID: RMA-2025-041) to conduct the environmental analysis required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The contract covers preparation of an Initial Study and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP), addressing potential environmental impacts. The contract is fully funded by the project applicant through a reimbursement agreement established at the time of application submittal; no County General Fund dollars will be used for this environmental analysis. EMC Planning Group Inc.'s scope of work specifically includes thorough evaluations of agricultural resources, biological and cultural resources, hydrology, geology, air quality, greenhouse gas emissions, transportation, and energy use. Their analysis will comply with CEQA guidelines, identifying potential impacts and feasible mitigation measures to minimize environmental effects.

The project site presents several significant considerations requiring focused assessment:

- Williamson Act enrollment, requiring careful land-use consideration and tax implications;
- Location within an official Earthquake Fault Zone, necessitating compliance with seismic safety regulations and additional geological assessments;
- Prime Farmland designation, triggering heightened environmental and agricultural scrutiny.

RESOLUTION OR ORDINANCE NEEDED FOR THIS ITEM:

No

CONTRACT NEEDED FOR THIS ITEM:

Yes

RFP AND BID HISTORY:

On June 26, 2025, Planning staff issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) containing a detailed scope of work to environmental consultants pre-qualified by San Benito County. 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 advance 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. The firms included RCH Group Planning & Environmental Consulting, SWCA Environmental Consultants, Aspen Environmental Group, M-Group, CSG Consultants Inc., EMC Planning Group Inc., Dewberry Engineers Inc., FirstCarbon Solutions International Inc., Ascent Environmental, Inc., JHS Consulting LLC, PlaceWorks Inc., Denise Duffy & Associates, Inc., and ICF.

The RFP detailed the requirements for preparing an Initial Study and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) in support of a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) application for the Hippo Harvest facility located at 2370 Shore Road. The environmental analysis required by the RFP necessitated a thorough evaluation of potential impacts, specifically addressing critical areas including agricultural resources, biological and cultural resources, hydrology, geology, air quality, greenhouse gas emissions, transportation, and energy use. The RFP emphasized adherence to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) guidelines to accurately identify potential environmental impacts and feasible mitigation measures.

Four responsive proposals were received by the submission deadline of July 11, 2025. 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:

- EMC Planning Group Inc.: 97 points
- Denise Duffy & Associates, Inc.: 96 points
- ICF Jones & Stokes, Inc.: 94 points
- PlaceWorks Inc.: 94 points

Consultant Name	Response Status	Comments
EMC Planning Group, Inc.	Responded; Proposal submitted	Selected consultant
Denise Duffy & Associates (DD&A)	Responded; Proposal submitted	Not selected
ICF Jones & Stokes, Inc.	Responded; Proposal submitted	Not selected
PlaceWorks	Responded; Proposal submitted	Not selected
Ascent Environmental, Inc.	Did not respond	
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, EMC Planning Group Inc. was selected to prepare the Initial Study and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP). Their work will fully comply with CEQA guidelines and comprehensively identify mitigation measures designed to minimize potential environmental impacts.

LAST CONTRACT AMOUNT OR N/A:

N/A

CONTRACT HISTORY (Describe all amendments and previous contracts):

None.

STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS: 1. Operational Development & Excellence

No

STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS: 2. Planning And Sustainable Growth

Yes

STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS: 3. Technology

No

STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS: 4. Community Engagement

Yes

STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS: 5. Health & Safe Community

Yes

BUDGETED:

Yes

BUDGET ADJUSTMENT NEEDED:

No

SOURCE OF FUNDING:

General Fund

UNFUNDED MANDATE:

No

SBC BUDGET LINE ITEM NUMBER:

101.65.1265.1000.619.222

CURRENT FY COST:

\$75,546.75

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the contract with EMC Planning Group Inc., for the period of August 12, 2025, through August 31, 2026, to prepare the Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Hippo Harvest Conditional Use Permit Project (County Planning file PLN250038), in an amount not to exceed \$75,546.75, and authorize the Chair to sign said contract.

ATTACHMENTS:

[Contract with EMC Planning Group Inc. for the Hippo Harvest Conditional Use Permit CEQA analysis \(County file PLN250038\).](#)