

## **Supervisors May Close Local Building Department Office**

The Bass Lake Building Department (Madera County satellite office) has been serving local, mountain-area homeowners since 1975. However, the Madera County Board of Supervisors is considering the closing of this office. In fact, there is a sign at the Bass Lake office that states the office *is* closing September 28 with building inspectors going to Madera September 21. Technically, though, the Bass Lake office cannot be closed prior to the Board of Supervisors making a decision to do so, which is on the agenda for Tuesday, September 22, 2009. If you believe the Building Department needs to remain in Bass Lake, it's important you attend this meeting either in Madera or in Oakhurst at the Oakhurst Community College remote viewing room (Room #10), which is available starting at 9 a.m.

Resource Management Agency Director Ray Beach said at a recent Board of Supervisors meeting that the closing of the Building Department at the Bass Lake Government Center would not affect or impact customer service. I disagree. The Bass Lake Building Department has a huge impact on our community and this potential closure would be detrimental to our foothill and mountain communities.

"Despite the downturn in new housing starts, the need still exists *here* for repairs to existing homes, new garages, residence additions, roof repairs, storage buildings, decks, electrical panels, retaining walls, well meter permits, air conditioning/heating units, commercial building remodel, tenant improvements, and many more types of permits," said Patrice Jensen, architect.

"If closed, mountain homeowners, local contractors, drafts people and architects will have to drive 100 miles roundtrip to Madera for plan back-checks, corrections, and questions and many will have to pass on the costs and time to their clients."

Jensen spoke with Beach regarding the potential closure of the Bass Lake Building Department and reported that Beach is proposing a system whereby a teleconference system could be put in place to speak with a planner or building inspector in Madera. However, this system is not yet in place.

In addition, the building industry, according to Jensen requires face-to-face interaction and speaking to someone on the phone or via remote viewing would be difficult especially when going over plans. She added that submitting plans over the internet is one thing; however, with back-checks or changing something on the job you need to do this in person. It is an important aspect of the building industry and a great public service.

"We, as Eastern Madera County residents, refuse to accept the closing of the permit office as it is critical to the survival of Madera County. It is an essential service to the mountain area," said Jensen.

REALTORS® recognize the importance of this office and direct people to the Bass Lake office frequently as it is more accessible, involves less travel time, and is a cost savings, especially with higher gas prices, for not only the residents in the area but the contractors and others that obtain the permits for their clients. The Bass Lake Building Department has been a great relief and help to the community; closing it would be detrimental to the residents of Eastern Madera County.

Madera County District 5 Supervisor Tom Wheeler said he is fighting to keep the office open. He'd like to have at least one inspector full time in the area rather than paying to have someone go back and forth from Madera. Wheeler said the county wanted a building inspector supervisor at the site, which increased the expense of operating the facility. "The office is overloaded with people we don't need," said Wheeler. In addition, Wheeler said there is not much cost in maintaining the building as they have just electric and propane utilities to pay and there is no rent.

If people have to go to Madera for all their permit needs, some may decide not to obtain permits and the county would lose additional needed funds. Wheeler acknowledged this concern and said honest people would consider not getting the necessary permits if they had to go to Madera to obtain them.

Wheeler said it is important for people to participate in the meeting on Tuesday (September 22). If you can't be at the meeting on Tuesday, please write an email ([supervisors@madera-county.com](mailto:supervisors@madera-county.com)), fax (559-673-3302), or mail a letter to the Board of Supervisors. You can email our District 5 Supervisor directly at [tom.wheeler@madera-county.com](mailto:tom.wheeler@madera-county.com).

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