Del Norte Triplicate

NEWS

Grant Saves Harbor

By Linda Sutter November 6, 2025

In a surprising revelation during Tuesday's Harbor District meeting, Fiscal Officer Sandy Moreno announced that MARAD grant funds will be used to cover Harbormaster Mike Rademaker's wages and those of maintenance personnel for the coming year.

Moreno explained that $75,000 would be subtracted from the District's $732,000 operational wage budget and replaced with anticipated MARAD grant funds, effectively using federal money to pay employee salaries — a decision that raised eyebrows across the board.

The fiscal officer further stated that she had authorized a payment of $181,500 to Moffett & Nickel for engineering work performed for the Harbor District. When Commissioner Annie Nehmer asked where the money would come from, Moreno replied, "From the grant."

Commissioner Nehmer pressed further, asking, "What account is that coming from?"

Moreno responded, "I am putting in a bill tomorrow to Cal OES for $181,500. When they reimburse us, we can then pay Moffett and Nickel."

Moreno added that Mike Bahr of CSS had confirmed that this procedure was acceptable. However, under normal Cal OES reimbursement protocol, a local agency must first pay the expense, retain proof of payment and receipts, and then submit documentation to Cal OES for reimbursement. The process Moreno described —billing Cal OES prior to payment—appears to reverse the standard procedure and could require clarification from the agency.

CPRA Policy Delays

Moreno also addressed delays in developing the Harbor District's California Public Records Act (CPRA) policies. She stated she is "behind" because she must review every document before releasing them to public requesters. Moreno added that she herself has outstanding CPRA requests related to the grants and is awaiting those records before conducting a new public document release.

Hemmingsen Weighs In

Former County Supervisor Gerry Hemmingsen attended the meeting, offering valuable insights into budget transfer procedures and fiscal oversight. His input appeared to provide much-needed guidance to the board on managing internal fund reallocations properly.

Public Disruption Over Legal Costs

In an unrelated matter, public member Roger Gitlin took to the podium during the discussion of insurance matters to verbally attack Commissioners Nehmer and Schmidt, repeating long-standing grievances about an alleged $55,000 in legal expenses he attributes to Commissioner Nehmer. The invoice in question has not been made available to the public for verification, leaving the claim unsubstantiated.

Concerns Over Federal Grant Use

The decision to use MARAD grant funds to pay wages and operational costs raises potential compliance questions. MARAD grants are generally intended for capital infrastructure or maritime improvement projects. If the funds are utilized for other purposes, such as personnel or maintenance, the Harbor District may be required to justify the expenditures under grant eligibility and reimbursement guidelines set by the U.S. Department of Transportation and Cal OES.