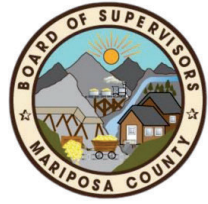


Mariposa County

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PLANNING DEPARTMENT



DRAFT MINUTES OF THE **WAWONA TOWN** **PLANNING ADVISORY COMMITTEE** **October 3, 2025**

A. Call to Order and Roll Call

Prior to calling the meeting to order, Chair Mee announced that the National Parks Service's Representatives were not in attendance due to the federal government shutdown, and asked that the public announce their name prior to providing public comment.

Chair Mee called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

Members present: Edward Mee, Tony Christianson, Chuck Jones, Richard Jacobson, Alton Brown, Joseph Liebman, Liv Eskola, Juliana McGaugh, Ken Kehrer, Marty Cerles, Federico Peinado, and Charlotte Gibb.

Members excused: Eugene Spindler and Gale Banks.

County Staff in attendance: Rosemarie Smallcombe, District I Supervisor, and Sophea Craighead, Planning Department Office Technician

B. Public Comment on Non-Agenda Items

Barry Perkins/Resident noted that at the last WTPAC meeting he requested that the Development Code Update, Chapter 17, regarding state housing issues that may affect ADUs in Wawona be included in the next agenda packet. This did not happen. Then Mr. Perkins commented on a previous presentation made by Acting Superintendent McPadden wherein he stated that an increase of Park visitors up to 5 million wouldn't affect public safety or emergency response issues. This contradicts a previous opinion of Park personnel that public safety was inadequate to support additional development in Wawona.

C. Approval of Minutes

1. Approve Minutes for April 4, 2025, Wawona Town PAC Meeting

No public comments were received.

RESULT: **Adopted (UNANIMOUS)**
MOVER: Marty Cerles
SECONDER: Ken Kehrer
AYES: Edward Mee, Tony Christianson, Chuck Jones, Richard Jacobsen, Alton Brown, Joseph Liebman, Liv Eskola, Juliana McGaugh, Ken Kehrer, Marty Cerles, Federico Peinado, Charlotte Gibb
EXCUSED: Eugene Spindler, Gale Banks

D. Discussion and Possible Action

Mr. Mee moved Item D1. **Selection of Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary to the end of the agenda and moved Item 2 forward, as the discussion of Bylaws in D6 could affect who was eligible to be nominated.**

2. MOU Between Yosemite National Park and Mariposa County

Mr. Mee withdrew this item due to the absence of the National Park Services Representatives.

3. Board of Supervisors Discussion and Action regarding the MOU between Yosemite National Park and Mariposa County

Supervisor Smallcombe noted that she brought the document prepared by the WTPAC to the Board of Supervisors, requesting that the Board authorize use of staff resources to approach the park and pursue a new MOU with NPS for a 20-year term, and not enforce the language that the park proposed in 2022. She explained that the Board said it would not authorize the resources to pursue an agreement along those lines and noted that it was up to the committee if they wanted to discuss possible MOU language.

4. Discussion of Possible MOU Language

Supervisor Smallcombe shared that she spoke with Acting County Counsel who recommended that she come back to the Board with draft language relating to the provision of water and wastewater services and ask for authorization to proceed with a new MOU with NPS. She also shared her belief that NPS would not change their position as it was outlined in October 2022. She noted that previous park Superintendent Mike Reynolds, when he wrote to advise the Wawona community in the Findings of No Significant Impact (FONSI) letter, was very clear that the park intended to provide wastewater services to the community. She reiterated that her intention was to find a path forward between the county and the park service to collaborate on planning a feasibility study for the groundwater that Jim Stahl and Jim Borchers identified as the primary potential for supplementation of the water that's taken from the river. Supervisor Smallcombe is looking for feedback from the Wawona community, so that she may go back to the Board and request staff resources to pursue an MOU if necessary.

Public comment was received by Jim Stahl, who provided his written testimony document and noted his recommendations for wastewater language in the MOU.

Rick Jacobsen/Member then thanked Jim Stahl and Supervisor Smallcombe. He noted that he didn't

think that discussing possible MOU language is appropriate at this time. He noted there had historically been disagreement between NPS and the County regarding who would provide water and sewer services for private properties in Section 35. Years ago, NPS committed to providing services in Wawona, and the MOU language that had existed for almost 40 years was changed in October 2022. Private properties have been relying on their own wells, but as the Park Service has noted, the South Fork of Merced River runs dry each late summer and fall, and there isn't sufficient water to meet demand. And the park service isn't committing to property owners that they can connect to NPS system, so the community can no longer enjoy that safety net. WTPAC should be involved in the discussions with NPS and the county so the community can have a voice, and a representative from the park service is supposed to be an ex-officio member of WTPAC. The committee isn't functioning optimally and shouldn't vote on crucial matters when they haven't been directly involved in the investigation and the study of the issues. The current language proposed by Supervisor Smallcombe is inadequate as there are no assurances from the park service about supplemental groundwater connections.

Supervisor Smallcombe responded that the park isn't having private meetings without the WTPAC, and the idea that the County is deliberately hiding things from the Wawona community is false. WTPAC has been involved in all substantive conversations.

Ken Kehrer/Member noted that the county and Board are of paramount importance in achieving a solution to this issue. WTPAC exists to provide research, information, advice and recommendations to the Board. NPS is not going to change their position about the 2022 language, as that has already been solicitor-approved, unless they can be shown that there is a reasonable alternative. A solution can only be found through being collaborative and non-confrontational, and through conducting a study to find alternative water options.

Chair Mee noted that WTPAC hasn't always been at the table for important discussions between the county and the park with regards to Wawona. He gave as an example the EMS agreement between the County and Park Service, which had already been signed by the time WTPAC was involved. He suggested that the Wawona community become involved at least a year before the contract expires, so that WTPAC can have their issues addressed.

Chair Mee noted that it was the duty of WTPAC to request the county's help to commission a study or environmental impact report for an expanded water system and help the community with their water crisis.

Supervisor Smallcombe stated she could bring this issue to the Board, but it may not be financially feasible. And for the park to pay for the study would require an allocation from Congress. She doesn't believe that anyone in the Park Service would state that they don't *want* to help Wawona, only that they don't have the money to do it.

Mr. Kehrer stated his understanding that private property doesn't fit well into the organization of a national park, and that the ebb and flow of cooperation and harassment between the national park and property owners has always been determined by the administrations in power. Members noted that it appears that in recent years, the relationship has turned frosty again. Discussion continued with a historical perspective of the good and bad relationships Wawona residents have had with NPS.

In response to Mr. Kehrer, Supervisor Smallcombe noted that the County doesn't have the internal expertise necessary to conduct the study, but that she could work with staff to try to find funding for one if that's what the community wants. It was suggested that the County and Park and possibly WTPAC could jointly fund a study.

Mr. Stahl suggested finding out from NPS who did the study for the rehabilitation of the sewage treatment system to serve Wawona campground. They have familiarity with Wawona and could give WTPAC an idea as to cost and perhaps provide insights about water service from an engineering standpoint. It was noted that next steps appear to be identifying funding options and resources who can advise on possible study costs, and then it may be time to go to Congressional representatives for assistance.

Barry Perkins/Resident wondered if additional water storage was needed, or if existing storage and infrastructure just needed to be audited and perhaps repaired. He wondered what had happened suddenly in 2022 and suggested that the park service's change of heart might have coincided with the leak that was "unrepairable."

Joseph Liebman/Member commented that he liked the idea of exploring additional or functional water storage to augment existing well service and seasonal fluctuations in river levels. Storing excess water during winter/spring wouldn't negatively impact wildlife or downstream users, and this option should be considered in conjunction with a water service study and a new MOU. It was also noted that additional water storage for residential use would be helpful in fire suppression and should be a part of the fire suppression MOU. He also stated he thought it was premature for Supervisor Smallcombe to take any action back to the Board before the scope and language of the water supply MOU was decided.

Supervisor Smallcombe encouraged WTPAC to form an ad hoc committee and discuss the particulars of this issue before the next scheduled meeting of WTPAC in April 2026. Mr. Liebman volunteered to serve, as did Jim Stahl, Katie Jacobson and Berry Perkins.

At 10:36 AM, Chair Mee requested a break. The committee reconvened at 10:46 AM.

5. Wawona Town PAC 2025 Draft Annual Report

Mr. Jacobson provided a summary of the committee's draft annual report to the Board, and highlighted the following accomplishments in 2025:

- Recruited five new committee members
- Continued discussing MOU with NPS

He also noted objectives for the committee in the upcoming year:

- To increase committee membership
- Review and amend By-Laws to allow committee to function more effectively
- Elect new officers
- Assert WTPAC's role in the MOU discussions with the Park
- Advocate for continued enforcement of the 2016 MOU
- Encourage NPS involvement in WTPAC meetings

- Bring recommendations to the Board regarding emergency medical services, water issues

Chair Mee requested a motion to approve the WTPAC Draft Annual Report.

RESULT: **Adopted**
MOVER: Joseph Leibman
SECONDER: Federico Peinado
AYES: Edward Mee, Tony Christianson, Chuck Jones, Richard Jacobsen, Alton Brown, Joseph Liebman, Liv Eskola, Juliana McGaugh, Ken Kehrer, Marty Cerles, Charlotte Gibb
EXCUSED: Eugene Spindler, Gale Banks

6. Wawona Town PAC Bylaws – Ad Hoc Committee Report: Scope and Purpose

Mr. Jacobson noted that in response to an earlier proposal to the Board to eliminate WTPAC, an ad hoc committee was formed to identify the scope and purpose of the committee, and present this to the Board. Marty Cerles and Katie Jacobson made up the ad hoc committee, and met with Joe Lynch, the County Administrative Officer and Danielle Bondshu, Clerk of the Board. The group came up with some amendments to the by-laws to better state the role of WTPAC (attached in the agenda packet).

Mr. Mee asked for comments from the committee.

Supervisor Smallcombe noted that she believes Wawona needs a committee but isn't convinced it should be a planning advisory committee. However, she's convinced that Wawona needs the County's support in terms of finding funding and pursuing alternative sources of water. She noted that a specific action – whether a request for discussion and direction, or action – has to be brought to the Board for them to take a formal position. Rather than advising on community planning activities (which works with the County's Planning Department), she believes the issue is re-establishing security with respect to the availability of water in the community of Wawona, and this requires the expertise that resides in the County's Public Works Department.

Additional discussion occurred regarding what the Wawona community wants to bring to the Board of Supervisors, and what department would best address its needs.

Chair Mee asked for a motion to approve the proposed language of the ad hoc study committee regarding Section 1 of the WTPAC by-laws to clarify the scope and purpose of the committee.

RESULT: **Adopted**
MOVER: Richard Jacobson
SECONDER: Joseph Liebman
AYES: Edward Mee, Tony Christianson, Chuck Jones, Richard Jacobsen, Alton Brown, Joseph Liebman, Liv Eskola, Juliana McGaugh, Ken Kehrer, Marty Cerles, Federico Peinado, Charlotte Gibb
EXCUSED: Eugene Spindler, Gale Banks

Chair Mee referred to page 97 of the agenda packet and the seven additional suggested changes to the by-laws and asked for comments from the committee.

Lengthy discussion ensued regarding the overlap between the purposes and duplicative discussions of WAPPOA and WTPAC. Supervisor Smallcombe encouraged a clear delineation of the roles of each organization.

Mr. Jacobson then withdrew his seven recommended changes to the WTPAC by-laws presented in the April 4, 2025, Agenda Report, as they are unnecessary if WTPAC and WAPPOA stick to their respective jurisdictional purviews.

Supervisor Smallcombe also discussed the proposed changes to the Brown Act that would allow virtual participation in meetings and stated she will update the committee on that provision at a future meeting.

7. Reimbursable Agreement for Emergency Medical Service (EMS) between the County of Mariposa and the United States Department of Interior National Park Services, Yosemite National Park

Mr. Jacobson reminded the group that at issue is the question: did an agreement for Emergency Medical Service (EMS) approved by the County Board of Supervisors on May 16, 2023, materially change EMS response in Wawona, without notice to the Wawona community? It was recommended WTPAC create an ad hoc committee to understand the changes and possibly recommend action to the Board of Supervisors. The original MOU for emergency care stated: “Yosemite National Park shall, subject to the availability of funds, continue to provide a dedicated ambulance properly staffed and equipped for immediate service into Section 35.” The 2023 agreement lumped EMS services for Wawona and Yosemite West in with a pre-existing agreement with El Portal and doesn’t speak to immediate service into Section 35. There is no clear understanding of expectations for emergency response within the community.

Mr. Kehrler noted that Wawona rangers will always respond if they are available, and they are trained up to the Emergency Medical Technician 1 level. The Park can’t guarantee response in an MOU due to limited staffing.

Supervisor Smallcombe shared several documents with the room, including the Mercy and Sierra Ambulance 2015 Coverage Agreement and a map of the Mercy Ambulance Zones (included). She presented some statistics regarding emergency response times from search and rescue and medical crews, and shared that the County’s agreement with Mercy Ambulance says only that they will document their response times, they don’t guarantee a response time. She also noted that there is an Emergency Medical Care Committee that meets quarterly (agenda included), composed of 14 different agencies, which also includes a North County citizen representative and a South County citizen representative. She recommended that WTPAC put forward a person to be an Eastern County citizen representative advocating for Fishcamp, Wawona, and Yosemite West, and Barry Perkins was suggested for the role.

There was general discussion and anecdotal stories about EMS activity in the Wawona area.

Supervisor Smallcombe noted that Amy Clubb, the Emergency Medical Response Coordinator from Mariposa County Public Health, could attend the next WTPAC—or WAPPOA—meeting if desired. She

further noted that Mr. Perkins and Ms. Clubb could get together to lay out a list of topics that she or anyone from NPS could be prepared to cover for public education purposes. The first step is public education to understand how emergency services work in Wawona; then send a representative for the East County to the EMCC meetings; then WTPAC can decide if further action is required.

8. County Special District Services Area 2-W (Wawona) Local Agency Formation Policy

Mr. Jacobson provided history regarding the role of Mariposa Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo)—an independent body—which approved the formation of and adopted a sphere of influence for Community Services District 2 Wawona (CSD 2W). CSD 2W was legally formed and enacted as a special district within Mariposa to provide local services to Wawona. Although that district was established to provide water, sewer and other local services as needed, the NPS executed an MOU with the County to provide water and sewer services to the private properties in Wawona. This existed for 40 years until recent language was proposed. He noted that the district was not active but still exists by law, and could still be used, if necessary, by the County and WTPAC for the provision of water, sewer or other types of community needs. He also noted that there are various ways that the district can be funded and those funds could be used by the district if the NPS is not providing water or sewer services. He further stated that if a resolution cannot be reached with the Park, then WTPAC needs to use this special district to ensure that the private properties are protected for future generations.

Mr. Jacobson expressed his concern that NPS agreed to provide wastewater services to the community in issuing a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), but hasn't explicitly stated that in the MOU. If the relationship with NPS is unstable, then residents need and deserve some certainty and clarity.

A conversation ensued regarding a recent "Will Serve Letter" and the community's frustrating relationship with NPS. In support of the Committee, Supervisor Smallcombe noted that she can work with County Counsel to create a position statement that can be sent to NPS in the event that they are unwilling to provide services again.

After discussion, Chair Mee moved back to Item D1, Selection of Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary.

D1. Selection of Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary for Wawona TPAC

Chair Mee noted that the role of Secretary is currently being served by County Staff, and the Committee requested that County Staff continue clerking the meeting.

Chair Mee asked if anyone present wanted to stand for Chair or Vice Chair for a term of one year. No one volunteered. He requested nominations, and after discussions, Rick Jacobson was nominated for Chair.

With a majority of votes by the members present, the WTPAC elected Richard Jacobson to be the Chair.

After discussion, Marty Cerles was nominated for Vice Chair.

By a unanimous vote of the members present, the WTPAC selected Marty Cerles as the Vice Chair.

After the selection of Chair and Vice Chair, Chair Mee moved down to Item E.

E. Information Updates

1. Supervisor District 1

Supervisor Smallcombe reported that she has completed one project and taken on another related to wildfire risk insurance costs. Essentially, insurance companies must take into consideration the work that communities have done to reduce their fire risk. First, they must consider if a property owner is part of a recognized fire-wise community and take this into consideration when determining rates. Second, they must consider whether a community is on a Fire Risk Reduction Community List, and Supervisor Smallcombe just completed an application to make Mariposa County such a community (results due next year). Although Wawona is not currently listed as a fire-wise community, she wants to restart the fire-wise recognition for this area.

2. Yosemite National Park Service

No specific update was provided.

3. New / In-Process Agreements

a. Structure Fire Protection Agreement Draft

b. Yosemite National Park and Mariposa County Agreement to Cross-Deputize Appropriate Staff

Supervisor Smallcombe noted that the County and the Park worked together (Steve Ward and Dan Buckley) to put in place a Structure Fire Protection Agreement including Wawona. The Board approved, it went to the Park, and County is awaiting approval from the DOI solicitor general.

4. Existing Joint Service Agreements

a. Emergency Medical

b. Mental Health Services

Supervisor Smallcombe noted that the EMS and Behavioral Health agreements were all approved in 2023 and aren't due to be renewed until 2027 or 2028. (When asked about a joint service agreement for the libraries in Wawona and the valley, she noted that that's not happening.) She noted that the genesis of the agreement is that the Park has had a position in El Portal, held by Kelly Singer, who is responsible for training, education, organizing volunteers, and representing that community in larger conversations. Dan Buckley was pushing for a counterpart in Wawona, so the agreement was for \$100,000 a year from the County to the Park to fund a position like Kelly Singer's, and that person could advocate for the Wawona community. The next step is to talk to our Congressional representatives to see what we need to do to get the Park to sign the agreement.

F. Topics for Next WTPAC Meeting: June 5, 2026

- **Development Code Update from Planning Commission – Chapter 17 pertaining to Accessory Dwelling Units**
- **MOU Between Yosemite National Park and Mariposa County**
- **Updates from the Ad-Hoc Committees**

G. Adjournment

Chair Mee adjourned the meeting by consensus at 1:05 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sophea Craighead
Office Technician

Maureen McCormick
Office Technician

Richard Jacobson
Chair, WTPAC