

Resolution No. 2023-

RESOLUTION OF THE SOLANO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS RECOGNIZING JAMES W. LAUGHLIN, DEPUTY COUNTY COUNSEL, UPON HIS RETIREMENT FROM THE OFFICE OF COUNTY COUNSEL, WITH OVER 34 YEARS OF DEDICATED PUBLIC SERVICE TO SOLANO COUNTY

WHEREAS, James (“Jim”) Laughlin began working for Solano County on November 13, 1989 as a Deputy County Counsel initially assigned to the Department of Environmental Management and Planning Commission; and

WHEREAS, after a brief stint in the Child Protective Services assignment, Jim returned to his natural habitat in the land use assignment where he skillfully advised on zoning and development codes, specific plans, individual public and private development proposals for consistency with the Orderly Growth Initiative adopted in 1994 as well as the County’s 2008 General Plan which he helped draft; and

WHEREAS, Jim was instrumental in determining that Measure E, a 1984 voter initiative that precluded the importation of more than 95,000 tons of solid waste from outside the county, was unconstitutional and spent nearly 5 years litigating the matter before the California Supreme Court finally agreed with him; and

WHEREAS, Jim was successful in defending the certification of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and the County’s approval of the Montezuma Wetlands project in *Friends of Suisun Marsh et al. v. Solano County* that has since proven to be an incredible success in contributing to the sustainability of the multi-billion dollar economic engine that the Bay Area Ports provide for the region and the nation by beneficially re-using dredge materials to sustain and create nearly 1,500 acres of wetlands habitat restoration; and

WHEREAS, Jim was involved in the planning that resulted in the formation of the Rural North Vacaville Water District and was successful in defending its formation and collection of assessments in *Not About Water v. Solano County et al.*; and

WHEREAS, Jim advised the Airport Land Use Commission on its adoption of the first Travis Air Force Base Land Use Compatibility Plan (TALUP) in 1990, an amendment in 1994, and most importantly, its plan in 2002 which established land use compatibility policies applicable to future development in the vicinity of Travis Air Force Base ensuring that future land uses in the surrounding area will be compatible with the realistically foreseeable, ultimate potential aircraft activity at the base and successfully defended the TALUP before the California Supreme Court in *Muzzy Ranch Co. v. Solano County Airport Land Use Commission*; and

WHEREAS, from controversial gun club permits to moratoriums on cannabis dispensaries to the siting and assessment of windmills, Jim’s calm demeanor in the face of controversy have proven invaluable to staff and residents alike ensuring comprehensive and meaningful public participation in county land use matters; and

WHEREAS, in addition to these cases involving the County, Jim has been extremely proactive in offering his talents to draft amicus briefs, a shorthanded version of the Latin phrase of “amicus curiae” meaning “friend of the court,” to support other public agencies; and

WHEREAS, such efforts earned him the recognition of his peers in the County Counsel’s Association in 2008 in appreciation of his contributions in the *Witt Home Ranch, Inc. v. County of Sonoma* case which involved an interpretation of the Subdivision Map Act and whether a map recorded in 1915 by the mere fact of being recorded, created legally subdivided parcels; and

WHEREAS, building on his arguments in *Witt*, Jim was successful in convincing the appellate court in *Abernathy Valley, Inc. v. County of Solano*, that an ancient map recorded in 1909 did not create a subdivision in the heart of Suisun Valley; and

WHEREAS, on behalf of both the County and California State Association of Counties (CSAC), Jim was successful in requesting that the California Supreme Court invalidate and order the depublishing of *G.I. Industries v. City of Thousand Oaks*, arguing that the central purpose of both CEQA and the Brown Act is to foster better-informed governmental decision making and neither should be interpreted in a manner that elevates form over function, or that needlessly creates opportunities for “gotcha” litigation; and

WHEREAS, most recently, Jim was successful once again in gaining the California Supreme Court’s attention when he requested the depublishing of another ancient map case, *Crescent Trust v. City of Oakland*, where Jim was so persuasive, the Supreme Court took the request to depublish one step further and granted review; and

WHEREAS, not only has Jim been a “friend of the court” but Jim has been a friend to our fellow counties as well, stepping in to advise when the other County Counsel’s offices were otherwise conflicted, providing excellent advice and contributing to the professional reputation of Office of the Solano County Counsel; and

WHEREAS, Jim retired from Solano County on November 24, 2023 leaving behind an incredible legacy of a very dedicated and talented public servant.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the Solano County Board of Supervisors recognizes Jim Laughlin for over 34 years of dedicated public service to Solano County and wishes him well in his retirement and future endeavors.

Dated this 5th day of December 2023

JOHN M. VASQUEZ, Chair
Solano County Board of Supervisors

ATTEST:
BILL EMLIN, Clerk
Solano County Board of Supervisors

By: _____
Alicia Draves, Chief Deputy Clerk