2025-2026 San Joaquin County Civil Grand Jury

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Stockton City Council

Governance in Turmoil

Case No. 0125

Release Date: June, 2026

Front of Stockton City Hall (Photo by: Civil Grand Jury)

SUMMARY

What began as an investigation by the 2025-2026 San Joaquin County Civil Grand Jury (25-26 CGJ) into complaints regarding alleged Brown Act violations of confidentiality by Stockton City Council (SCC) members revealed far deeper problems with the business of City governance. A pattern of repeated conflicts between Council members emerged over time, suggesting a power struggle within the Council. Key members of the Council appeared to put their personal and political interests ahead of their duty to make sound business and policy decisions for the residents of Stockton. The absence of a permanent full-time City Manager for most of the 2025 calendar year resulted in a lack of checks and balances that typically define the City Council/City Manager system of governance. This report examines how internal battles at City Hall came to dominate the SCC, often at the expense of the City and its citizens whom the Council members were elected to serve.

During the investigation, additional questions emerged about certain decisions and actions taken by the SCC, individual Council members, and the Interim City Manager. Many of these issues evolved into public accusations of impropriety, incompetence and corruption. Community frustration with the behavior of Council members in public meetings grew rapidly. Consequently, the 25-26 CGJ investigation expanded over time to examine many of these decisions and actions to determine if any were violations of law, the City Charter, City Ordinances, administrative regulations or misconduct of public officials. Through document review, interviews, and in person and online observation of SCC meetings, the 25-26 CGJ determined that the issues and the scope of this investigation would extend well beyond the initial complaints of alleged Brown Act violations.

The investigation identified systemic problems related to governance, leadership instability, internal conflict, and adherence to legal and ethical standards. The scope of the investigation was expanded to assess the overall effectiveness, conduct, financial accountability, and capability of the SCC to fulfill its management responsibilities. The 25-26 CGJ found that persistent dysfunction and ethical challenges within the SCC limited its role as the legislative body of city government. Rather than tending to the business of the City, entrenched

infighting, a consistent 4–3 voting division, and public disputes between Council members have become the hallmarks of this Council. These conditions resulted in executive instability in the City Manager's office marked by the sudden resignation of then City Manager Harry Black and the subsequent controversial appointment of Interim City Manager Steve Colangelo. Allegations of improper involvement by Council members in personnel matters, and departures from established governance protocols created uncertainty and poor morale in multiple City departments.

The 25-26 CGJ identified concerns regarding the cost to taxpayers of internal investigations initiated by SCC members, which provided little or no evidence of demonstrable benefit. The Council's failure to comply with statutory requirements for timely responses to prior civil grand jury reports further undermined their accountability. Together, these issues reflect a breakdown in effective governance that diverted attention from stated priorities and impaired the City's ability to serve its residents. Additionally, the departure of numerous skilled and experienced employees has cost years of institutional knowledge and hundreds of thousands of dollars in severance payments, which clearly affect the City budget.

It is noted here that two members of the 2025-2026 CGJ were recused from all phases of this report, including investigations, deliberations, interviews, and the drafting of this report.

ACRONYMS

25-26 CGJ	2025-2026 San Joaquin County Civil Grand Jury
Cal. Pen. Code	California Penal Code
EDD	Economic Development Department
FPPC	Fair Political Practices Commission
ICM	Interim City Manager
ICMA	International City/County Management Association
NOFA	Notice of Funding Availability

SCC	Stockton City Council
SMC	Stockton Municipal Code
SMP	Social Media Platform

PURPOSE OF INQUIRY

The San Joaquin County Civil Grand Jury is charged with evaluating the effectiveness and integrity of city and county governmental operations and inquiring into the "willful or corrupt misconduct of public officers" pursuant to Cal. Pen. Code §919(c). In fulfilling this duty, the 25-26 CGJ examines whether public entities operate in a manner consistent with the law, sound governance principles, and the public interest.

BACKGROUND

Stockton City Council at a Glance

Council Member	Position/Title	District	Term Begins	Term Ends
Christina Fugazi	Mayor	NA	January 2025	December 2028
Jason Lee	Vice Mayor	6	January 2025	December 2028
Michelle Padilla	Council member	1	January 2023	December 2026
Mariela Ponce	Council member	2	January 2025	December 2028
Michael Blower	Council member	3	January 2023	December 2026
Mario Enriquez	Council member	4	January 2025	December 2028
Brando Villapudua	Council member	5	January 2023	December 2026

Table 1 - Stockton City Council by name, title, district, year elected and year term ends.

The City Manager's 2025-2026 Proposed Budget letter of May 15, 2025 submitted by the Interim City Manager includes the following statement:

"The FY 2025-26 Proposed Budget will focus on three strategic priorities: maintaining public safety, addressing homelessness, infrastructure and maintenance. These areas reflect the

direction provided by the Mayor and City Council and are of utmost importance to Stockton's residents. This budget continues to prioritize targeted investments while preserving the city's commitment to responsible fiscal management."

These priorities are ambitious, necessary, and reflect the challenges facing the City of Stockton. The 25-26 CGJ acknowledges that progress has been made in certain areas and recognizes the importance of sustained focus and collaboration to achieve these goals.

However, the 25-26 CGJ's investigation revealed that the SCC's attention and resources were repeatedly diverted away from these priorities by internal conflict, leadership disputes, and governance controversies. Instead of functioning as a cohesive legislative body, the Council has frequently been consumed by disputes and infighting among its members, allegations of misconduct, and competing political agendas.

Central to these concerns has been instability within the City Manager's office, including the appointment of multiple Acting and Interim City Managers following the departure of the former City Manager in January 2025. Allegations surrounding these appointments—including claims of improper pressure to terminate City staff, including department heads—have contributed to uncertainty within City Hall, diminished employee morale, and created confusion regarding lines of authority. In the past year alone, the City has lost a significant number of experienced and valuable employees at a considerable cost in severance pay. The cost to hire and train new employees is also an added financial burden to the City.

The 25-26 CGJ also observed that public disagreements between Council members have been conducted in SCC meetings and through press conferences, formal complaints, and on social media platforms. Such conduct exacerbates divisions within the SCC, contributes to public distrust, and exposes the City to additional legal and financial risk.

The 2023-2024 Civil Grand Jury Final Report listed multiple Findings and Recommendations regarding the creation of hostile work environments and how to deal with them. The City of Stockton has been repeatedly incomplete in their response to the Investigative report in terms of both content and timeliness. Cal. Pen. Code §§ 933 and 933.05 require the City to

respond properly and in a timely manner. Timely and substantive responses are a critical component of governmental accountability and reform. Failure to adhere to these requirements undermines the effectiveness of the 25-26 CGJ process and signals a disregard for oversight and transparency. The SCC, as of the writing of this report, has yet to respond in accordance with the requirements of the Cal. Pen. Code to either the 23-24 or the 24-25 CGJ final reports. The 25-26 CGJ Continuity Report on the City of Stockton, in this Final Report, addresses these concerns.

METHODOLOGY

The 25-26 CGJ received multiple complaints alleging possible Brown Act violations within the SCC. Upon investigation of these allegations, it became obvious that alleged Brown Act violations were not the only issues hindering the effective performance of the duties and responsibilities of the SCC. The 25-26 CGJ conducted multiple interviews with SCC members and City staff members, both current and past. The first step in any investigation is to prioritize the interviews to define the scope of the inquiry and to establish a clear objective. It should be noted that two SCC members and several former and current City staff declined to be interviewed. These actions denied the 25-26 CGJ crucial firsthand information, different perspectives and possibly any details that could clarify the complaint. Members of the Civil Grand Jury attended City Council meetings and City Council Committee meetings. We also viewed various meetings online.

Materials Reviewed:

- City of Stockton Charter
- Stockton City Council Policy Manual
- Transcripts of Civil Grand Jury interviews
- City emails, memoranda and other internal and external communication and documents

- Attended virtual Council meetings and listened to recordings of Council meetings, and reviewed relevant documents.
- Complaints received by the Civil Grand Jury
- "Ethics, Liability and Best Practices Handbook for Elected Officials Second Edition 2019. Tami A. Tanoue, Sam Light, Robert Widner, Christina McCormack
- "An Overview of Ethics Laws Governing Municipal Officials in California," Burke, Williams and Sorensen LLP

Other sources reviewed include:

- Cassie Dickman, "Mayor Fugazi 'unilaterally' dissolves city manager search committee. Policy shows she didn't have the authority." Stocktonia News, June 27, 2025, https://stocktonia.org/news/local-government/2025/06/27/mayor-fugazi-unilaterally-dissolves-city-manager-search-committee-policy-shows-she-doesnt-have-that-power/
- "Stockton mayor dissolves city manager search committee, citing alleged Brown Act. Violations," June 30, 2025, https://www.recordnet.com/story/news/politics/government/2025/06/30/stockton-mayor-dissolves-city-manager-search-committee-citing-alleged-violations/84379444007/
- "Stockton mayor alleges potential Brown Act violation amid city manager search." Evening News, ABC 10, September 15, 2025.
- "Stockton vice mayor calls for action amid city manager allegations." Evening News.ABC 10, September 15, 2025.
- "Interim City Manager quietly hires veteran city manager as $11K per month advisor." Tracy News Today, September 15, 2025, https://tracynewstoday.com/interim-city-manager-quietly-hires-veteran-city-manager-as-11k-per-month-advisor/

- Hope Munoz, "Council member, vice mayor squabble as DEI money debate heats up." Stocktonia News, June 25, 2025. https://stocktonia.org/news/local-government/2025/06/25/
- Cassie Dickman, " Possible city manager appointment, search ad hoc committee on Stockton council agenda" Stocktonia News, July 15, 2025. https://stocktonia.org/news/local-government/2025/07/15/
- Chris Woodyard, "Stockton spent $50K to prop up comedy show featuring the vice mayor. Two months later, the city is asking why." August 6, 2025. https://stocktonia.org/news/politics/2025/08/06/
- Chris Woodyard, "Vice Council member Jason Lee demands $25,000 in damages plus an apology-or he'll sue Stockton." September 3, 2025. https://stocktonia.org/news/local-government/2025/09/03/
- Madilynne Medina, "Calif. vice mayor accused of giving $50K to 'Wild 'N Out.' Now he's suing." https://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/calif-vice-mayor-suing-city-wild-n-out-21041602.php
- Attended Stockton City Council Meetings
- Reviewed City of Stockton Charter, SMC Codes and Civil Service Rules https://www.stocktonca.gov/government/city_clerk/
- ICMA International City/County Management Association online knowledge database. https://icma.org/topics/form-government
- City of Sacramento https://www.cityofsacramento.gov/clerk/good-governance-and-compliance
- City of San Francisco https://sfethics.org/
- City of Santa Clara https://www.santaclaraca.gov/our-city/government/city-committees/governance-and-ethics-committee

- City of Riverside https://www.riversideca.gov/cityclerk/boards-commissions/board-ethics

Interviews Conducted:

- Stockton City Council members
- City of Stockton staff

DISCUSSION OF FACTS

A. Decorum And Conduct

In the 2024 election three new SCC members were elected along with a new Mayor. The new Mayor had served on the SCC from 2016 to 2020, while new Council members had no prior elective service in Stockton or elsewhere. This new slate of SCC members ran on the promise of forward progress for the City of Stockton and its residents. Initially, the newly elected members and the established members appeared to be making a good faith effort to work together. The reality of the situation quickly devolved into something quite different.

The breakdown of decorum and conduct within the SCC is directly related to a series of questionable decisions and resulting actions by the Mayor and council members. These decisions were made in the absence of an experienced City Manager who would normally provide guidance and advice. The Council members' unreserved and sometimes derogatory and verbally offensive comments in Council meetings and on social media contributed greatly to the polarization of the SCC. Ultimately, the loss of trust and respect amongst Council members has resulted in the current dysfunction.

Since the beginning of the new term on January 7, 2025, the SCC has faced episodes of internal discord, leadership challenges, and governance instability. Public records and media coverage document the many disagreements among Council members and contentious Council meetings characterized by sharp exchanges and personal accusations. Votes frequently divide the body along consistent inflexible lines. This Council drama has attracted considerable attention from residents and prompted widespread concern about the Council's

ability to operate as an effective governing board. A self-serving, dysfunctional SCC erodes public trust and weakens City Hall operations.

Elected officials' participation and communication on Social Media Platforms (SMPs) is an individual decision. However, each individual Council member should assess the effect of their interaction with the SMP on public perception of the integrity and honesty of the individual Council members and the entire SCC.

The two major failures in proper decorum and civil conduct were between the Mayor and the Vice Mayor and between the Vice Mayor and Council member Villapudua. There is little doubt that all of these officials ran for office with the intent of making positive changes in the City of Stockton. However, a desire for greater control of the City's decision-making process, which typically should include the SCC, City Manager, City Attorney, Chief Financial Officer and the public, seems to motivate some of these disputes. Additionally, unresolved interpersonal conflicts among Council members have led to turmoil and disruption of public meetings.

The void left by the resignation of the City Manager and the terminations of the Chief Financial Officer and the Assistant Chief Financial Officer early in 2025 contributed to the instability in City government. The absence of an effective City Manager left a void in the "balance of power" between the SCC and City Administration, particularly with respect to adherence to City administrative processes and procedures.

SCC decisions and actions to appoint an Acting or Interim City Manager were problematic and quickly sparked disagreements between some Council members.

The appointment of an Ad Hoc Committee by the Mayor to find and recommend a recruitment firm for the City Manager position, and to screen and narrow down the number of applicants for consideration by the Council, also became an issue. Two SCC members were appointed by the Mayor to serve with her on that three-member committee. The Ad Hoc Committee completed one half of its mission before being disbanded by the Mayor for alleged Brown Act violations.

Concurrent with the City Manager issues, the Mayor raised questions about the Vice Mayor's motives in promoting certain projects and activities. Several official investigations of the Vice Mayor were launched at the initiation of the SCC; some ultimately concluded that there was no violation of law, and some are still pending at the release of this report.

The SCC budgets $500,000 yearly to fund all City investigations, including those initiated by the SCC itself. In a typical year, $200,000 to $300,000 of this budgeted amount is used. The entire $500,000 was exhausted by the first half of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025-2026. It is important to note that not all of this budgeted amount was spent on SCC investigations. As of the date of the release of this report, the 25-26 CGJ has been unable to verify the amount spent on SCC investigations.

Poor decorum and conduct were most evident in social media postings by the Vice Mayor and during SCC meetings by the Mayor. The Vice Mayor, in particular, vented his arguments and complaints through social media, which also included inflammatory personal attacks on the Mayor's conduct and family.

On November 12, 2025, during an SCC meeting, in what appeared to be a retaliatory action, the Mayor played a video recorded by the Vice Mayor posted on social media that criticized the City and made disparaging and lewd remarks about the Mayor.

The behavior of the Mayor and the Vice Mayor reflects badly on themselves, the SCC and City government in general. More importantly, there is a loss of confidence and trust in City government by its residents.

B. Interim City Manager Appointment and Aftermath

Paramount among the problems instigated by the SCC was the resignation of City Manager Harry Black on January 9, 2025 and the ensuing succession of Acting and Interim City Managers. After Harry Black resigned, Deputy City Manager Will Crew was appointed to fill the position on a temporary basis. Within a very short time, Mr. Crew was then replaced by Interim City Manager (ICM) Steve Colangelo. Mr. Colangelo, according to multiple interviews,

was hand-picked by Mayor Fugazi and hired on a 4-3 vote by the SCC on February 4, 2025, was signed to a six-month contract.

The City of Stockton operates under a City Council-City Manager form of government. The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) states that this form of local government combines strong political leadership (elected governing body) with the professional experience of an appointed manager or administrator. In accordance with the ICMA, best practices point to this form of local government.

In this structure, the SCC serves as the legislative body and is responsible for setting policy and providing overall direction, while the City Manager and professional staff handle the City's daily operations. Effective governance under this model relies on the observance of professional ethics, legal mandates and internal guidelines established by the SCC.

In order for this system to function properly, it requires the City Manager to be experienced in city government leadership and conversant in directing its various departments. The Interim City Manager had no experience in city government and did not fulfill the requirements the SCC established when it hired a search firm to find candidates to fill the City Manager position full-time.

This inexperience negatively affected staff, who were required to work amid shifting priorities, inconsistent direction, and heightened political scrutiny. As attested to by multiple 25-26 CGJ interviews, the Interim City Manager instructed SCC members to contact City staff directly with issues within their respective districts. Historically, and in accordance with the City Charter, these issues should be addressed to the City Manager, who would then direct staff. Members of the SCC have repeatedly violated Section 408 of the City Charter, which states that:

> *Interference with City Manager: Neither the Council nor any of its members nor the Mayor shall interfere with the execution by the City Manager of his or her powers and duties, nor in any manner dictate the appointment or removal of any City officers or employees whom the City Manager is empowered to appoint except as expressly provided in Charter Section 406.*

However, the Mayor and Council members may express their views and fully and freely discuss with the City Manager anything pertaining to the appointment and removal of such officers and employees. Except for the purpose of inquiries and investigations under Charter Section 406, the Council, its members and the Mayor shall deal with City officers and employees who are subject to the direction and supervision of the City Manager, City Attorney, City Clerk or City Auditor, solely through the City Manager, City Attorney, City Clerk or City Auditor, respectively, and neither the Council nor its members nor the Mayor shall give orders to any of the subordinates of those appointees, either publicly or privately, except as otherwise provided in this Charter.

Section 408 specifies that except for informational requests, all SCC interaction with City staff pertaining to City business shall be conducted through the City Manager. Circumvention of City Charter Section 408 weakened City staff's confidence in City leadership and contributed to decreased morale and increased turnover in key administrative positions, making it difficult to recruit and retain qualified staff. This has resulted in a toxic environment, along with unreliable governance, increased the City's exposure to legal and financial risk, including potential open meeting law violations, budgetary challenges, and additional costs to taxpayers associated with internal investigations and consulting services.

Mr. Colangelo's tenure was not extended at the end of the initial six months, and Will Crew was again made Acting City Manager until a full-time City Manager could be hired. Johnny Ford was hired as the new City Manager with a November 19, 2025, start date.

C. SCC Power Struggles

Transparency is perhaps the most often used and abused word heard in SCC meetings and documents. The Ralph M. Brown Act of 1953 was enacted to address concerns regarding transparency. When the new SCC was sworn in on January 7, 2025, there was optimism that its members would act collaboratively and in a collegial manner to further the best interests of the City and its citizens. Mayor Fugazi appointed Jason Lee, a new member of the SCC, with no prior elective governmental experience, to the post of Vice Mayor. Initially the

relationships on the Council appeared to promise goal-oriented action which would reflect positively on the Council as a whole and its members individually.

This initial optimism was replaced by dysfunction. After only a few months, the SCC began facing episodes of internal discord, leadership challenges, and governance instability. Numerous Brown Act violations, unverified, have been alleged by members of the SCC against one another. Accusations, once again unverified, of unethical and possibly criminal actions from SCC members against other SCC members, have helped exacerbate the toxic environment during SCC meetings. The use of online forums to attack one another without rebuttal or defense, has left the public unable to trust the SCC to pursue an honest and open work environment. Public records and media coverage document the many disagreements among Council members, contentious Council meetings characterized by sharp exchanges and personal accusations, and votes that frequently divide the body along consistent partisan lines. This Council drama has attracted considerable attention from residents and prompted widespread concern about the Council's ability to operate as a unified and effective governing body.

In addition to internal power struggles, members of the SCC have attempted to circumvent Charter policy (Section 408 of the City Charter as previously referenced) in order to further their control, both individually and collectively, over City functions and departments. This has led to confusion among City staff, which will require valuable time and resources to correct.

In a truly transparent environment, the members of the SCC would be able to identify and address important issues for the City. They should resolve their differences in an amicable manner and further the business of the City. Instead, the City has been led down a seemingly never-ending path of discord, hostility and an inability to work together on the part of the SCC.

D. Ethics, Brown Act, and Code of Conduct Enforcement

In the context of municipal government, ethical behavior generally means the conduct of public business in a way that earns and maintains the public's trust. Although elected officials

and city employees are guided by laws, charter provisions, ordinances, and adopted policies, ethical conduct goes beyond simply following the rules. It is dependent upon personal integrity, honesty, and a genuine commitment to uphold both the intent and the requirements of those rules. Ethical behavior also recognizes that achieving a desired result does not justify using improper means.

During its investigation, the 25-26 CGJ reviewed the extent to which the SCC emphasizes ethics and ethical behavior for its elected officials. The City of Stockton Council Policy Manual Chapter 2.03: Code of Ethics for Elected Officials and Commissioners addresses this area. The policy merely states that officials are required to take the State prescribed two-hour ethics training course as established by State Law commonly known as AB 1234. The course is to be taken during the first year of service, and every two years thereafter. Beyond the training requirement, the City's Code of Ethics does not include any guidelines or procedural instructions for elected officials or commissioners.

The 25-26 CGJ investigation included a review of ethics policies from several other cities in California, and it was noted that some are more comprehensive when compared to the City of Stockton policy, including key points covered in AB 1234 training. A comprehensive written policy serves as a reference document for elected officials during the course of their term of service.

One area in which current policies fall short is in addressing campaign contributions. According to the Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC) Assembly Bill 571 cities without a statutory campaign contribution limit revert to the state limit of $5,900 per candidate per election. Currently Stockton does not have campaign contribution limits beyond AB571. An especially concerning problem is the ability of City Council members or persons running for City Council to contribute to another City Council member or person running for City Council. This gives the obvious impression of attempting to create consistent voting blocs to influence City policy. The public needs to be assured that SCC members are voting with the best interests of the citizens of Stockton in mind and not the narrow interests of a few. A possible

solution to this problem is to establish a contribution limit to candidates, as the City of San Francisco's $500 and the City of Oakland's $600 have done.

The 25-26 CGJ also reviewed the SCC Code of Conduct, which is included in the Council Policy Manual Chapter 3.13: Council Member and Commissioner Conduct Policy. This policy is much more detailed and specific in terms of behavioral expectations and requirements and requires that the elected official or appointed commissioner read and sign the policy at the time of assuming office.

The 25-26 CGJ investigation revealed that the SCC has a chronic pattern of Ethics and Code of Conduct violations extending back several years. This pattern suggests that the current implementation of these policies is not adequate. The SCC needs in depth training on the Political Reform Act, Government Code Section 1090, Common Law Conflicts, AB571, Levine Act, Brown Act and Public Records Act. Adhering to these already existing guidelines would go a long way to restoring public confidence in the SCC and would help eliminate future problems.

Given the SCC's history of Brown Act and Code of Conduct violations, the 25-26 CGJ has concluded that the City of Stockton should establish its own Board or Commission to oversee compliance with Ethics, Brown Act, Conflict of Interest, and Code of Conduct rules and regulations. The body must be independent from the SCC and have the resources and authority to receive complaints, investigate thoroughly, and enforce remedial actions.

The Sacramento Ethics Commission, established in 2017, presents a viable blueprint for the establishment of an Ethics Commission for the City of Stockton. The City of Sacramento's ordinance for their Ethics Commission is Chapter 2.112 of the Sacramento City Code.

Most large cities in California have some form of Ethics Commission or Board. The 25-26 CGJ found that the placement of such bodies within city government provides greater authority and access to information to address alleged violations of rules, laws, ordinances and policies. This commission would bridge the gap between current ethics standards and needed additional standards. This would provide the public with a greater sense of trust in the

decisions and actions of the SCC. The Ethics Commission would be an effective body to address the purported Brown Act violations which are reported on a regular basis.

City staff are trained and qualified to investigate and make recommendations regarding City contracts and grants to private entities doing business with the City of Stockton. It is important to recognize City staff has the expertise to ensure decisions are made in accordance with legal compliance, financial feasibility and are operationally sound. Although the SCC is not mandated to follow staff recommendations, their recommendations to the City Council should be carefully considered.

A Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) is an official public announcement made by government agencies or organizations stating that grant or loan funding is available to be distributed. It outlines exactly how much money is available, it's purpose, who is eligible and how to apply.

According to the State Housing NOFA Scoring Matrix, City staff rates projects according to a variety of criteria which should be considered when awarding money. After the November 2025 NOFA posting, City staff rated eight applicants. After completing their rating, staff then submitted the applications to an AI based evaluation program for further confirmation of an unbiased rating. AI confirmed staff's recommendations and the City Economic Development Department (EDD) then presented their findings to the SCC. After review, at the April 14, 2026 SCC meeting, the SCC, with a predictable 4-3 vote, chose to ignore these qualified professional recommendations and awarded money to developers who scored lower on the prioritized list of applicants. Again, while SCC is under no obligation to follow City staff recommendations, SCC's actions put into question why they have ignored their own staff's work.

The public business conducted by the SCC has too often been marred by the infighting, discord and accusatory language which has undermined the public's trust in government. To effectively function, the SCC must have the trust and confidence of the people of Stockton. Without it, positive progress in the City will be impossible.

FINDINGS

F1 The very public conflicts among Council members have seriously undermined public faith in the Council's ability to conduct business transparently and professionally.

F2 In violation of City Charter Section 408, the Stockton City Council has directly interfered with the duties and responsibilities of City staff. These actions have contributed to operational challenges within City government that will require additional time and resources to resolve.

F3 Public records and media coverage indicate that the Stockton City Council has experienced ongoing internal conflict, including frequent disagreements, contentious meetings, and voting patterns that consistently divide the Council and lead to Council improprieties and the appearance of improprieties.

F4 The Stockton City Council has attempted to bypass established protocols regarding fiscal matters, thus raising the possibility for further delays in the approval process and the possibility of the District Attorney's intervention.

F5 The Stockton City Council appears not to follow the ethics principals that are set forth in AB 1234, and the Stockton City Council Code of Conduct, which erodes public trust in the Council as a governing body.

F6 The use of social media platforms (SMPs) and public forums such as press conferences to further personal agendas and air grievances is inappropriate.

F7 The Stockton City Council has shown disrespect to City staff and communicated with staff in a manner contrary to Section 408 of the City Charter, contributing to a loss of skilled and professional employees and resulting in a substantial financial loss to the City.

F8 In their efforts to influence decisions made by the Stockton City Council, outside of Council chambers, some Council members have pursued personal agendas and advancement of business interests, thus compromising transparency.

F9 The City of Stockton does not have an ordinance regarding limiting campaign contributions beyond state law, leading to a lack of transparency.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1 Within 90 days of the issuance of this report, the Stockton City Council should provide the Civil Grand Jury with written documentation detailing the actions taken to comply with the Stockton Council Policy Manual provisions governing member conduct, including standards applicable to meetings, public statements, online activity, professionalism, decorum, and mutual respect (F1, F3 and F5).

R2 By December 31, 2026, all Stockton City Council members should complete formal training conducted by the City Manager on Charter Section 408, all Charter provisions governing Council conduct, and the requirements of the Stockton Council Policy Manual. Written verification of completion should be submitted to the Civil Grand Jury (F1, F3 and F5, F7).

R3 By December 31, 2026, the Stockton City Council should receive training from the City Manager on established City policies and procedures governing fiscal matters, including the approval, funding, and oversight of City projects (F4, F7).

R4 By December 31, 2026, the Stockton City Council should demonstrate documented and measurable efforts toward establishing an Ethics Commission or similar body, including clear steps taken, draft frameworks, and publicly visible actions showing active development. The goal should be to formally establish and operationalize the Commission by January 2028 (F1, F5, F6, F7 and F8).

R5 By December 31, 2026, the City Manager and City Attorney should rewrite and expand the City of Stockton Council Policy Manual Chapter 2.03: Code of Ethics for Elected Officials and Commissioners, to include more specific information and explanation of ethical behavior and action requirements (F1, F5, F6, F7 and F8).

R6 Effective upon publication of this report, members of the Stockton City Council, when speaking or posting in their official capacity or on matters related to City business, should refrain from using social media platforms or public forums to make disparaging or demeaning statements about fellow Council members or City staff (F1 and F6).

R7 By December 31, 2026, the Stockton City Council should establish written guidelines regarding Council members' use of social media platforms and public forums in order to discuss City business and to maintain proper decorum (F1 and F6).

R8 By December 31, 2027, the Stockton City Council should establish their own ordinance limiting campaign contributions by individuals and organizations in city elections as exampled by San Francisco, Oakland and Los Angeles. This ordinance should include all monetary, in kind and campaign committee contributions. This will allow public transparency in campaign finances. (F9)

CONCLUSION

The City of Stockton and the Stockton City Council have a recent history of not responding to Civil Grand Jury reports in a timely or appropriate manner according to the requirements of Cal. Pen. Code §933.05. As previously stated, it is imperative that these responses be submitted in appropriate form and content in order for governmental transparency and adherence to law be maintained.

The Stockton City Council has a history of issues with dysfunction and collegiality. The Council seated in 2025 has continued this unenviable trend. Public input at City Council meetings clearly shows the frustration and dissatisfaction by Stockton citizenry regarding Council

members' relationships with one another. Their failure to maintain basic decorum, coupled with seemingly endless infighting, undermines the Council's effectiveness and weakens the City's ability to conduct its business responsibly.

Termination of contract and at-will employees add expense and lower employee morale. Long term employees are an invaluable organizational asset, stewards of both institutional knowledge and community relationships. They enhance operational efficiency, reduce turnover cost and provide stability. Tenured staff serve as mentors thus strengthening productivity. A stable workforce is essential to timely and efficient delivery of City services.

The citizens of Stockton are ultimately the ones who suffer from these actions by the Stockton City Council. As the Stockton City Council seems unable or unwilling to enforce decorum and civility on themselves, there appears to be little that the people of Stockton can do to stop this unfortunate momentum. At the end of the day, the ballot box is the final arbiter.

NOTES

Present and past San Joaquin County Civil Grand Jury Final Reports and Responses can be accessed on the San Joaquin County Civil Grand Jury website at: https://www.sjcourts.org/divisions/civil-grand-jury

RESPONSES REQUIRED FOR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

California Penal Code §933(c) and §§933.05(a) and (b) require that specific responses to all Findings and Recommendations contained in this report be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the San Joaquin County Superior Court within 90 days of receipt of the report unless the responder is an elected County officer or agency head where such responses are required within 60 days.

For Findings: Pursuant to California Penal Code §933.05(a) the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following for each Finding:

1. *The respondent agrees with the Finding.*
2. *The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the Finding; in which case the response shall specify the portion of the Finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reason(s) therefore.*

For Recommendations: Pursuant to California Penal Code §933.05(b) the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following for each Recommendation:

1. *The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.*
2. *The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a timeframe for implementation.*
3. *The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for*

discussion by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.

4. *The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation of the reason(s) therefore.*

RESPONSE DEADLINES

Response from the City of Stockton is required within 90 days from receipt of this report.

Mail or hand deliver response to:

The Honorable Lance G. Jacot, Presiding Judge
San Joaquin County Superior Court
180 E Weber Ave, Suite 1306J
Stockton, California 95202

Email response to:

Ms. Krystal Gonzalez
Staff Secretary to the Civil Grand Jury
San Joaquin County Superior Court
civilgrandjury@sjcourts.org

DISCLAIMER

Civil Grand Jury reports are based on documentary evidence and the testimony of sworn or admonished witnesses, not on conjecture or opinion. However, the Civil Grand Jury is precluded by law from disclosing such evidence except upon the specific approval of the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court or another judge appointed by the Presiding Judge (Cal. Pen. Code §§911, 924.1 (a) and 929). Similarly, the Civil Grand Jury is precluded by law from

disclosing the identity of witnesses except upon an order of the court for narrowly defined purposes (Cal. Pen. Code §§924.2 and 929).