



**Staff Report**

**April 3, 2006  
Item 6.0**

ACTION: \_\_\_\_\_

DISCUSSION:     X    

**Title: Status Report on the West County First 5 Center**

**Background:**

Over the last four years, the Commission has supported the development of five First 5 Centers (originally called Family Resource and Learning Centers) in the high need areas identified in the strategic plan. The centers are intended to be physical locations of support and activities for families with young children. Specifically, they provide programs addressing parent education, family literacy, early learning for children, and tobacco prevention. The design of the centers strategy called for significant community input and support for selecting program contractors, developing program and locating sites. Each site is required to have a community governance or advisory board comprised of at least 60% unaffiliated residents. First 5 provides support and training for the boards in the form of facilitation and consultation.

The last year has seen a great deal of activity in the development of sites. Concord has opened its new building, Antioch is renovating a building, Brentwood is operating in a renovated site, Bay Point is still seeking additional funding for its site development, and the Commission purchased a site in San Pablo for the West County center.

The San Pablo site is ideal in many ways. It is a roomy and sturdy building from the 1950s, originally used as a small public school. Its previous owner operated a preschool there. The Commission purchased it with the intent of renovating it and passing the deed over to the County, with the requirement that it be used to serve families with young children.

Renovation on the site has taken longer than expected. Because the site would eventually move into the County's ownership, it was decided that the work necessary to open the building would be carried out by the County's General Services Department program, under the Commission's ability to make use of county services as necessary. A number of challenges have contributed to delays in the project. A complete set of drawings had to be prepared both to identify interior modifications to be carried out, and to present to the City of San Pablo as part of the application for a use permit for the site. The nature of First 5's agreement with General Services had to be considered by County Counsel. The final interior modifications had to be confirmed with the program contractor.

Work has progressed and the following tasks have been accomplished:

- Installation of a new roof, before the winter rains
- Replacement of damaged skylight framing
- Upgrade of locks and security systems
- Cleanup of yards and removal of extraneous playground fences
- Maintenance of site appearance
- Installation of new heating system
- Completion of final site drawings

The following tasks have yet to be accomplished:

- Interior modifications
- Interior paint and carpeting
- Grading, resurfacing, and striping of parking area
- Sidewalks from parking to front door

Staff are awaiting final timeline and costs for the remaining tasks from General Services. With the completion of the drawings, staff will finalize the site plan.

Community board members are understandably frustrated at the delays. Staff share their frustration and have met with them previously on this matter; staff also keep the program contractor updated on developments regarding the site. In recent weeks, staff have also met with BACR staff to discuss the program's status. Sean Casey and Susan Wittenberg also met with Supervisor Gioia to update him on progress on the site.

The community has also expressed concern that unspent funds from the current year will not be available in the next year. As a rule, First 5 does not roll over unspent funds from year to year for fear that contractors may build out their programs to unsustainable levels. First 5 is not "taking away" funds from this project. The program contract for next year will be at the same level as this year. Furthermore, 25% of the current year's contract may be used or set aside for one-time capital expense towards the site, such as furniture and equipment.

Community members have also expressed a concern that the First 5 Center address the needs of the Iron Triangle area of Richmond, citing a "state mandate" to do so. Staff

are unaware of any such mandate, but are attuned to the needs of this area and have always supported the development of a second or satellite site to do so.

Overall in the First 5 Center strategy, staff are working closely with all five sites, with both the contractors and the community boards. Site coordinators meet monthly to review policy and program. We are also providing consultation to all the First 5 Center community boards to strengthen their roles and operating procedures.