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Revised Keller Canyon Mitigation Fund rules ready for Contra Costa supervisors

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Contra Costa Times

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MARTINEZ -- Contra Costa County's finance committee has completed a proposed list of guidelines regarding the distribution of money from the Keller Canyon Mitigation Fund that supervisors will consider later this month.

The money comes from a \$3-per-ton tax on garbage dumped at the Keller Canyon landfill, and is designed to offset the landfill's effects on local traffic, open space, recreational facilities and agriculture.

The fund has distributed between \$800,000 and \$1.8 million annually over the past decade to charities and community organizations.

The new rules are designed to provide more transparency on how the money is distributed and focus more of the spending on organizations in Pittsburg and Bay Point, where the landfill is located.

Under the new guidelines, members of the committee reviewing applications for funding would be required to seek advice from the county counsel if they have any financial interest in an organization under review. If there is a conflict, they would be required to recuse themselves from voting on the application.

Agencies that receive county, state and city funds on a cost-reimbursement basis will also receive Keller Canyon money on that basis.

Agencies for which reimbursement would be a hardship would be given half their grants upfront, with the rest to follow after they have documented how the original grant was spent.

The

committee is recommending other steps, including making the public more aware of how to apply for grants by requiring the announcement of applications and making the forms available on the county's website as well as the District 5 website.

It is also recommending regularly updating the list of nonprofits interested in funding and more closely monitoring their tax-exempt status.

Bay Point organizations, including its municipal advisory council, would receive 70 percent of the mitigation money, with Pittsburg, Antioch and other East County areas eligible for the rest. Other municipal advisory councils would no longer receive money.

Pittsburg receives \$1.25 of the \$3-per-ton Keller Canyon dumping fees for its general fund, with the other \$1.75 going to the mitigation fund.

Supervisors will consider the new policies at their May 17 or May 24 meeting.

The proposals follow a critical report by former county auditor Steven Ybarra in November that said the mitigation fund's managing board had drawn nearly \$400,000 from the county's general fund to make up a deficit over four years, spent \$634,000 outside grant guidelines over 10 years, and given out more money than it had collected in seven out of the past 10 years, among other allegations.

Contact Rick Radin at 925-779-7166.

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