

County addresses transparency in CAO recruitment

Despite claims of transparency, residents, legal experts say board can be more open

By Josh Cozine The Trinity Journal: Feb 4, 2026

The county Board of Supervisors released a press release last week, Wednesday, Jan. 28, acknowledging input from multiple Trinity County residents over the County Administrative Officer recruitment process.

The press release came following a Tuesday, Jan. 27, special meeting of the county supervisors where the only thing on the agenda was another in a string of closed session discussions labeled as “Public Employee Appointment: County Administrative Officer,” going back to November (“CAO stepping down at end of contract,” Nov. 19 and “CAO recruitment decided behind closed doors,” Dec. 24). Residents have alleged potential violations of the Brown Act and other open records rules.

The supervisors’ address stated they are sure all legal requirements are being followed in the current process, which differs with an appointed position like the CAO, rather than an elected position. It said that recruiting a CAO is a “personnel matter that requires a careful balance between transparency and the confidentiality necessary to attract and protect candidates.”

Some of the complaints at the board’s closed session recruitment processes brought up can be read further by several of those making them in this week’s letters to the editor (see guest column, Feedback, page 4).

A legal expert with the American Civil Liberties Union, Shaila Nathu, said that closed session discussions are appropriate for certain “personnel matters,” but not for other matters regarding the process itself.

Such issues are by their nature “hard to litigate,” however, she said, “because of the informational asymmetry that exists” when you can’t know what is being discussed in closed session with no additional information provided.

Finally, experts and residents also stated that open records and open meetings acts and laws only set the floor for the minimum amount of transparency required to be reported by government officials, not a ceiling for which officials cannot be more transparent.