

Michele King

From: Melissa Stone on behalf of Clerk of the Board
Sent: Tuesday, January 08, 2019 4:04 PM
To: Michele King
Subject: FW: For tonight: Agenda Item 2.7
Attachments: 4.18.18 Letter.pdf; 1.8.19 Letter.pdf

Importance: High

From: Meehan, Michael [mailto:michael.meehan@pln.sccgov.org]
Sent: Tuesday, January 08, 2019 3:59 PM
To: John Varela <jvarela@valleywater.org>
Cc: Clerk of the Board <clerkoftheboard@valleywater.org>; Eastwood, Rob <Rob.Eastwood@PLN.SCCGOV.ORG>; Deviney, Joseph <Joseph.Deviney@cep.sccgov.org>
Subject: For tonight: Agenda Item 2.7
Importance: High

Director Varela,

Good to see you at the Farm Bureau meeting today. Please find attached letter from Rob Eastwood and Joe Deviney, regarding **tonight's Agenda Item 2.7**, and the County's recommendation to maintain the Open Space Credit and groundwater rates generally for farmers in Santa Clara Valley. Also attached is a 4/18/2018 letter from Supervisors Wasserman and Cortese echoing this recommendation.

I understand this is a late submission, but **please do share with the other Directors** to whatever extent possible – I will also be attending the meeting.

Cc: Clerk of the Board, SCVWD

Much appreciated!

Michael Meehan
Agriculture Plan Program Manager
Senior Planner, County of Santa Clara
work cell: 408.517.5805



January 8, 2019

Board of Directors
Santa Clara Valley Water District
5750 Almaden Expressway
San Jose, CA 95118

Subject: Santa Clara Valley Open Space Credit Policy

Dear Members of the Board of the Santa Clara Valley Water District –

On behalf of the County of Santa Clara Department of Planning & Development and Division of Agriculture, we are writing to recommend that the District maintain its Open Space Credit policy as is, without a requirement for an easement or Williamson Act contract. We believe that the Staff policy change recommendation to increase water rates for all farmers who are not farming on land under conservation will disproportionately burden the most vulnerable farmers—those who do not own the land they farm, and whose tenure is not long enough for the property owner to take advantage of the Williamson Act’s significant tax savings.

We believe that adoption of the policy change recommendation would put the working lands most at risk of conversion to development at even greater risk. For example, if a property owner is considering development of their agricultural land, has therefore elected not to collect Williamson Act tax benefits, and their tenant farmer is no longer able to operate an economically viable business, then the land will fallow, the property owner will lose agricultural lease income, and will be more likely to develop.

With the passage of the Santa Clara Valley Agricultural Plan, the County has begun to take concrete steps toward providing property owners and farmers with economically viable alternatives to development, namely through the creation of an agricultural conservation easement program and a Farmland Security Zone program (which establishes Williamson Act contracts with longer commitments and greater tax benefits). While we are optimistic that alternatives to development will prove effective in curbing sprawl and conversion of our remaining agricultural soils, these efforts to sustain Santa Clara Valley’s working lands will be in vain if the economic viability of tenant farmers is compromised.

The District’s materials indicate that the Open Space Credit policy has been re-opened for proposed revision in part due to the 2017 Presidents’ Day flooding and the need for funding flood mitigation projects. We urge the District to consider the Open Space Credit as a flood mitigation project unto itself, as farmers’ work, the management of working lands and open space, ameliorates flooding.

We support any policy that further incentivizes agricultural property owners to enroll in a Williamson Act contract, Farmland Security Zone contract, or record an agricultural conservation easement – but not at the expense of compromising the economic viability of farmers who do not lease a property already under conservation, or do not own the property they manage and therefore cannot participate in such financial incentives.

It is our belief that the Open Space Credit delivers the best public value when it works to *prevent the conversion* of open space to development – not only as a benefit to those farming lands that are already under conservation.

In summary, we strongly encourage you to avoid any substantial increase in groundwater rates that could have a negative effect on long term agriculture in Santa Clara County. Please see the attached, April 18, 2018, letter from County Supervisors Wasserman and Cortese, which echoes this recommendation.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

AD0368294CE042B...
Rob Eastwood
Planning Manager
Department of Planning and Development

DocuSigned by:

DB81FBA44AE4CE...
Joseph Deviney
Agricultural Commissioner
Division of Agriculture

Cc: Board of Supervisors, County of Santa Clara



**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF SANTA CLARA**

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April 18, 2018

Santa Clara Valley Water District Board of Directors
Santa Clara Valley Water District
5750 Almaden Expressway
San Jose, CA 95118

RE: Santa Clara Valley Open Space Credit Policy

Dear Santa Clara Valley Water District Board Members,

It is our understanding that the Santa Clara Valley Water District Board of Directors is currently considering changes to its groundwater rates. We are writing to strongly recommend that the Santa Clara Valley Water District maintain its Open Space Credit Policy, and retain groundwater production rates that support the economic vitality of Santa Clara County's farmland and its farmers.

On Jan 9 2018, the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors adopted the Santa Clara Valley Agricultural Plan which presents a regional strategic approach for supporting and growing a farming economy in Santa Clara County. The Plan identifies the valuable importance of our agricultural working lands to the region, not only as a critical food source, but also as a key to long term sustainability and health of the County, providing ecosystem co-benefits such food security, groundwater protection, and carbon sequestration.

The Plan recognizes the critical importance of maintaining low groundwater rates to support the ongoing sustainability of Santa Clara County agriculture. As identified in the Plan, Santa Clara County has already lost 45 percent of its prime farmland to development over the last twenty years and many factors continue to present a challenge to farming, including land speculation, urban/rural interface, and access to farm labor. Ensuring our agriculturalists have continued access to groundwater at rates that make farming financially sustainable is critical to ensuring that our agricultural working lands continue to be farmed.

In summary, we strongly encourage you to avoid any substantial increase in groundwater rates that could have a negative effect on long term agriculture in Santa Clara County.

Supervisor Mike Wasserman
Supervisorial District 1,
Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors

Supervisor Dave Cortese
Supervisorial District 3,
Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors

