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July 8, 2024

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

Subject: Valley Water Board of Directors Meeting July 9, 2024
Item - 3.5: Adopt the Proposed Water Resources Protection Zones Ordinance

Honorable Valley Water Board of Directors:

The purpose of this letter is to provide support for and encourage the approval of the proposed ordinance establishing prohibitions within water resources protection zones.

The City of Morgan Hill is deeply concerned about the condition of the waterways near the Llagas Creek, immediately north of Edes Court in Morgan Hill. The most recent communication to Valley Water shared pictures (attached) of the encampment filled with debris/biohazards, the waterways being obstructed, embankments altered with steps and dams for bathing, and trees being cut down for bonfires.

Establishing “water resources protection zones” will protect the riparian habitat and support our most precious ecological resource, our water. This work should be paramount for Valley Water and supersede other policy considerations. This effort will not only protect our natural resources and environment but will also protect and support Valley Water staff and City staff and the community at large that often encounter dangerous conditions when approaching the creeks that are overrun with encampments.

We understand the challenge of providing water management and water protection while struggling with the unhoused community that lives along our waterways. We recognize that we need to provide housing resources to our unhoused community and that Valley Water needs partners in order to successfully execute the proposed ordinance.

The City is willing to partner with Valley Water and assist with the coordination and outreach necessary to connect people to housing or temporary lodging. Morgan Hill has an Unhoused Specialist, who is a full-time social worker dedicated to building trust with our unhoused residents through outreach and engagement. The City of Morgan Hill’s multi-disciplinary approach to supporting the unhoused community leads with empathy, respect, and dignity for the unhoused residents, while at the same time ensuring our community remains clean and safe. We hold ourselves, our private property owners, and our agency partners accountable to the same standard.

The City of Morgan Hill is a small community with limited resources. It is essential that we do not let encampments grow to a point where these become a public nuisance. In the case of the Llagas Creek encampment, as stated in previous letters to Valley Water, we received hundreds of calls for patrol checks, trespassing, disturbances, welfare checks, and fires within a few months. These calls for service were not simply people complaining about the unhoused. A recent report from the Morgan Hill Police Department (MHPD) identified that the occupants at this location were creating disproportionate number of calls for service and crime negatively impacting public safety services. MHPD found that several individuals at this location have an extensive history of narcotics (fentanyl) abuse, robberies, acts of vandalism, trespassing, acts of violence, setting fires, and other similar activities. These conditions and patterns of behavior have led to an overdose death of one unhoused person at this encampment within the last two months. People cannot live under these conditions. It is not safe.

We do not want to criminalize being unhoused and we need to address the safety concerns of the unhoused community who are often unable to care for themselves or others - victimizing each other at times. They need safety and protection. As government employers we have a responsibility to protect them and our staff that work to support the unhoused, provide public services and public safety. We need safer places for them to live and for our staff to work while providing services. We need to protect our community and must ensure everyone has safe access to our creeks and trails.

The City of Morgan Hill encourages the establishment of water resources protection zones and any other related actions that help clean encampments and protect our water ways. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Christina Turner
City Manager

Cc: Rick L. Callender, Esq., Valley Water Chief Executive Officer











