



December 3, 2018

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

Subject: Santa Clara Valley Water District Open Space Credit Policy; SUPPORT of Dec 5 staff recommendation to limit rates to 6% for Williamson Act or conservation easement properties

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

On behalf of the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority, we appreciate the opportunity to submit this letter of comment on the Santa Clara Valley Water District's Open Space Credit Policy. At the invitation of the Santa Clara Valley Water District, the Authority served on the District's Open Space Credit Policy Working Group back in 2013 to provide recommendations on potential changes to the District's current agricultural water rate structure. At that time, the District's Resolution 99-21 set the agricultural groundwater charge at less than 10 percent of the Municipal and Industrial (M & I) charge to encourage the continuance of agricultural land use and preservation of open space, a goal shared by the Authority.

The Open Space Authority is in strong support of the staff proposal to limit agricultural ground water rates to 6% of the Municipal and Industrial charge for properties registered under the Williamson Act or that hold conservation easements. Maintaining a lower agricultural ground water rate for properties that have these types of land use protections – intended to prevent conversion to other uses and keep them in agricultural production - is in close alignment with the Authority's mission to help preserve farmland and open space in the Santa Clara Valley. It is also in alignment with the recently adopted Santa Clara Valley Agricultural Plan, which includes a recommendation for expansion of the Open Space Credit Program to provide additional incentives to agricultural landowners for taking conservation measures.

Given the economic burden that an increase to 10 percent of M&I will present to owners of agricultural land NOT under Williamson Act or conservation easement - per the Water District's current policy - and the Authority's desire to minimize its impact to those agricultural landowners, the Authority respectfully requests that this increase be made as slowly as possible, suggesting perhaps it be instated gradually over a period of 10 years.

We would anticipate that the rate limit for owners of agricultural land under Williamson Act or conservation easement, if adopted, would provide an important incentive for more land owners to seek conservation easements, further protecting the precious farmland in our County that provides such significant economic and natural infrastructure benefits to all of its residents.

NOTED
DEC 05 2018



Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Andrea Mackenzie". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Andrea Mackenzie
General Manager

Cc: Board of Directors, Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority
Citizens Advisory Committee, Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority