



Santa Clara Valley Water District

File No.: 16-0664

Agenda Date: 9/13/2016

Item No.: 7.1.

BOARD AGENDA MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT:

Santa Clara Valley Water District Communications and Community Engagement Program Update.

RECOMMENDATION:

- A. Receive update on the Santa Clara Valley Water District Communications and Community Engagement Program; and
- B. Provide input on current and future challenges, goals and accomplishments since the last presentation to the Board.

SUMMARY:

Since January 2012, staff has presented the Board with semi-annual updates on the District's Communications and Community Engagement Program. The last update was presented on March 23, 2016.

This update gives the Board an opportunity to receive further information and provide input on how staff can better enable them to provide a key linkage between the District and the community in order to accomplish Board Policy GP-3.1.

BACKGROUND

Per Ends Policy 1.2, the District's communications goal is to communicate the District's programs, projects and challenges to the community, effectively and transparently, in order to foster public engagement.

BOARD COMMUNICATIONS SUPPORT

The District Communications Unit supports the Board's linkage with the community. Members of the public have increasing expectations for public sector information-sharing, accessibility, and transparency.

Since our last update, staff has posted numerous stories and posts to social media and encouraged Board members to share these stories with their constituents through their own social media networks. In addition, staff has assisted with the scheduling of meetings between Board members

and editors of local newspapers, and can continue this practice with other newspapers that reach District residents.

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Drought outreach

Since March 2016, our advertising efforts have focused on promoting the Water Wise House Calls program, which had experienced a drop in participation since last summer.

We also initiated plans for a summer water conservation campaign, which was reported to the Board on July 26, as part of the Update on 2016 Water Supply and Drought Response.

Publications

To meet the preferences of the public and of the District as well, staff is proposing changes to certain publications to streamline work while producing publications that are relevant, in-demand, understandable and useful to the public and to the District.

These changes involve employing the industry best practice of Create Once, Publish Everywhere (*COPE*), and will involve combining some publications, such as the Annual Report, Countywide Mailer, and Calendar, to produce one piece of content that will satisfy a number of needs.

The shift to an online focus is reflected in a change to the Board newsletter. Now, instead of an annual publication that goes out-of-date quickly, staff will produce a steady stream of content to appear on the Valley Water News blog (discussed below). Board members can share content with their constituents by sending links that we will continue to provide in periodic media updates, or by sharing content through their own social media accounts and individual constituent e-newsletters (discussed below). This will allow the Board members to keep their constituents up-to-date on the District's work.

Website

The District's website is a tremendous resource for information about the full range of water resource management policies, programs and projects.

Site page views for the first half of 2016 totaled 606,468, with more than 14,000 visits to the Water Wise House Calls request page, and nearly 10,000 to the Landscape Rebate Program page.

Valley Water News blog

In June 2016, staff launched ValleyWaterNews.org, the official online news web page that serves as the hub of the District's electronic content. Valley Water News streamlines our communications efforts, helping to free up resources to create more original and compelling content, which will in turn drive engagement and connection with the public.

Increasing our community engagement in this way also provides a benefit in terms of reaching a larger number of people when responding to misinformation. As a forum to tell the District's stories, this mobile-responsive news webpage will further establish the District as an authority in the industry.

Response so far has been good, with almost 2,900 visitors to the site in the first 45 days of operation.

Social Media

We continue to broaden our use of social media to disseminate messages and engage with the community. We have increased the use of paid advertising to reach users outside of our existing network. Facebook has been an effective way to promote creek clean up events, tours of the Silicon Valley Advanced Water Purification Center, our monthly e-newsletter, and the Water Wise House Calls program.

E-Newsletters

In May, the District's electronic monthly newsletter was given a makeover. The new template is now mobile responsive, which is vital, since a growing number of subscribers read e-mail on a mobile device. The new template has a headline and a brief introduction to each story, inviting readers to click to read more detail on our Valley Water News blog.

As a new service, we are prepared to develop a process to support individual e-newsletters for any interested Board members. Each month (or at a less frequent interval if a Board member chooses), a customized newsletter would be sent to an e-mail list of individuals who subscribe to a newsletter from a specific Board district.

At the top of each newsletter would be a customized section to be written by or for each Board member. The newsletter could also include links to stories that have been published on the Valley Water News blog that are of interest to each particular district.

Video

Staff has produced several short video stories on topics ranging from the droughts effects on trees to the Safe, Clean Water program's Senior Parcel Tax Exemption.

EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS

The Communications Unit is responsible for staffing the role of PIO for the District. This spring, several communications staff participated in tabletop and functional exercises related to a potential seismic event at Anderson Dam.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community outreach and engagement activities allow the District to be visible in the community and make direct contact with members of the public. Stakeholder engagement efforts are even more targeted to produce specific partnership outcomes. They are discussed below by increasing level of involvement.

Speakers Bureau

So far, six presentations have been given in FY 2016-17, with at least three more planned for the next few months. A total of 45 presentations were given over the course of FY 2015-16, reaching well over 1,100 members of the public.

Volunteer Cleanup Events

The Adopt-A-Creek (AAC) program is a successful volunteer program that began in 1994. This fall, the District will host an event for AAC partners and site coordinators to recognize their contributions to maintaining clean and healthy creeks and to recruit new AAC adopters from the pool of National River and Coastal cleanup day site coordinators. The program has 125 adopted sites, an increase of 12 sites from the previous year.

Purified Water Outreach and Communications

Significant progress has been made in expanding recycled and purified water outreach which resulted in being awarded the 2016 California WaterReuse Association Award for "Best Recycled Water Public Education & Community Outreach Program," which was presented to Board Chair Keegan and Director LeZotte at the annual conference on March 14.

Several key milestones contributed to winning the award, including hosting a highly successful Community Open House in October with over 900 attendees and other special taste test events throughout the year such as serving purified water to legislators at a California State Assembly Select Committee on Water Consumption and Alternative Sources hearing, and serving purified water at the 2016 WaterReuse California Annual Conference in March.

In addition to extensive community outreach and internal employee outreach events, the District has focused on increasing key stakeholder outreach through the development of a key stakeholder outreach plan presented to the Recycled Water Committee in May.

The tour program of the Silicon Valley Advanced Water Purification Center has also continued to grow and expand this year with a record 112 tours and nearly 2,560 people of all ages and backgrounds visiting during FY 2015-16. In addition, the District developed new youth tour curriculum and held two youth tours in April and May. Looking forward, the efforts for FY17 include significantly increasing ethnic outreach and tours in other languages.

Customer Relations

The purpose of this program is to inform and engage direct customers, well owners, residents and businesses adjacent to or near District facilities or active project sites.

Proactive Outreach and Collaboration

Twenty-six capital projects are being supported with active communications and engagement plans to guide public information and engagement. The following tools have been added to the toolbox used to inform and engage customers and stakeholders:

- Partnership with mobile traffic app WAZE to inform commuters of street impacts related to our projects.
- Project e-mail updates to subscribers informing them of upcoming meetings, construction schedule changes, or the latest neighborhood work notice.

- Wider distribution of project information through the valleywaternews.org blog.
- Nextdoor public agency account to communicate with customers. The Office of Government Relations obtained the account.

Collaborating with community stakeholders and organizations is critical to relaying information on board actions and District. Recent collaborations include:

- Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition is sharing information related to maintenance work near trails and their temporary closure when necessary.
- Neighborhood and school collaboration along Lower Silver Creek in the area surrounding Dobern Bridge in East San Jose resulted in information about the District's actions to address a gap in flood walls in anticipation of winter storms.
- Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District and Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation communication and information sharing on the planned work that will take place at Rancho San Antonio County Park as part of the Permanente Creek Flood Protection Project. Both organizations utilized their social media platforms to address false project information that was being distributed at the park.
- Well owner outreach on the groundwater production charge rate setting process. In addition to this year's mailers and two public hearings, a District presentation was made to the San Martin Neighborhood Alliance along with South County newspaper ads detailing benefits received by rate payers and District allocation of the funds.

Customer Satisfaction Index and Relationship Management

Throughout the year, the District surveys various neighborhoods adjacent to and near District projects. Nearly 3,900 surveys were collected for FY16. Our customer satisfaction rating for those responses that rated us as "excellent" or "good" was 87 out of 100, which is in the superior performance category.

Access Valley Water (AVW) is the District's online and mobile customer service tool. An enhanced mobile app was launched with GIS capability to pinpoint the location of the issue, includes an improved user interface, and is more intuitive and visually appealing.

In FY 2015-16, we received a total of 5,000 external cases with an average District-wide response time of 2.6 days. Of the total inquiries received, 3,275 were specifically related to water waste or drought with a 2.1-day response rate from the time the report was received to site inspection and customer response with the action taken.

Strategic Partnerships

Water to Go Stations Program

For the past three years the District has partnered with FIRST 5 Santa Clara County and Santa Clara

County Public Health to provide grant funds to public schools for permanent drinking fountain and bottle-filling stations, called Water to Go stations.

In accordance with the funding measure, the District will invest \$250,000 to install 50 Water to Go stations. In FY 2015-16 nine of the 12 remaining grants were allocated. Once the final three grants are allocated, a celebration/media event recognizing the District's achievement in completing one of many voter approved projects from the measure will be planned in the fall.

Water Resources Education

This program provides youth and teachers with meaningful lessons about water resources. In FY16, the program reached a total of 24,039 people; 16,264 students, 821 teachers, 552 classes and tours, and 6,954 mixed public contacts through festivals and open houses. Six training workshops were held to provide teachers with additional environmental education tools through Project WET (Water Education for Teachers), Education and the Environment Initiative (EEI), and teacher checkout kits.

Program enhancements

- Reaching new schools in underserved areas
- Maximizing outreach efforts to reach more students per school visit
- Expanding programming and outreach efforts to include public libraries
- Increasing online access to resources
- Automating teacher registration
- Strategically reaching out to schools in District project areas
- Increasing the use of outdoor classrooms
- Reestablished the Youth Commission

Next Generation Science Standards are being implemented, with a completion date set for 2017.

EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATIONS

Internal communications includes twice-weekly News You Can Use all-user emails, the Aqua.gov intranet site, profiles and highlights of employee-related news and events, and videotaped clips of external guest speakers and People Behind Your Water interviews.

LOOKING FORWARD

Expectations for communications and engagement continuously evolve. The following are just some of the opportunities for improvement that are underway or being explored.

- Building a database of project e-mail subscribers, community organizations and neighborhood associations, and AAC and cleanup event volunteers, to enable more effective neighborhood outreach in support of flood protection, water supply and other program areas.
- Hosting an open house at the Penitencia Water Treatment Plant with tour and informational fair on District activities and projects.
- Continuing outreach to South County customers to promote understanding of District activities

and rate increases for well users.

- Developing effective fluoride awareness messaging strategy and communications program.
- Building awareness and support for the Purified Water program, including multi-cultural outreach campaigns, youth tours, and meeting the demand for taste test opportunities, as well as actively promoting a focused speakers bureau program.
- Updating and mailing the “Creekwise” mailer to creek side property owners to encourage pollution prevention and reduce encroachment issues.
- Finalizing and launching a modernized external website to improve the user experience and generate greater interaction with the public.
- Continuing to strengthen and build the water resources education program to better meet the demands of our growing population.
- Researching cost and feasibility of developing a new Education Center at Alamos Outdoor Classroom.
- Supporting implementation of a regional plan for public involvement to support flood protection awareness.
- Launching a countywide tour program for community leaders and interested residents to learn about watersheds and water supply.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There is no financial impact associated with this item.

CEQA:

The recommended action does not constitute a project under CEQA because it does not have a potential for resulting in direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1: PowerPoint
Handout 7.1-A, Education Outreach

UNCLASSIFIED MANAGER:

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