



Santa Clara Valley Water District

File No.: 17-0777

Agenda Date: 12/12/2017

Item No.: 7.2.

BOARD AGENDA MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT:

Update on a District Branding Initiative.

RECOMMENDATION:

Provide feedback on the proposed plan for developing a branding initiative for the District.

SUMMARY:

On August 8, 2017, the Board provided input on proposed messaging and a public education campaign. This effort is now underway with a series of key messages being disseminated to all employees to incorporate into all external communications, whenever feasible.

These key messages are intended to inform the community about who we are, what we do, and how to access District services. Now, staff is beginning to build on this effort with a branding initiative. When launched, the branding initiative will dovetail from the public education campaign. Beyond informing the community about who we are, the branding initiative will focus on communicating the value that people can count on from the District. The branding effort will clearly communicate the District's commitments to the community we serve.

Why establish a brand?

The following key branding concepts and reasons for proactively establishing a brand identity include:

Negative branding: When people have a negative perception of a water utility and trust is low, it makes it difficult for policy makers to secure the investments that the community needs and wants. People are willing to pay for goods and services they deem of high value. The price people are willing to pay is heavily influenced by the brand.

Value, uniqueness and relationships: Factors that affect a brand identity include perceived value of a product, the uniqueness of the product, and the relationships an organization maintains with its customers. Oftentimes, a water utility touts the low cost of its product rather than the unique value of municipal water service. This affects a utility's ability to secure the appropriate investments to provide a superior product, as it strives to keep rates low.

What's in a brand? A brand is the perceptions that people have about a product or organization. It's more than developing a slogan or designing a logo. A strong brand addresses the expectations that people have about a product.

Branding is who you are: Fulfilling the promises embodied in the brand requires focus and diligence. It could include advertising and communications, but it also requires internal alignment and commitment to reinforce the brand at every level of the organization. The brand is simply the meaningful value that people can count on from a product or organization.

A water utility brand defines the value that the utility provides to the community.

The branding process

The branding process involves defining the District's value for our customers, the commitments we make to them and an implementation plan to communicate those commitments.

While a branding initiative may include slogans, a well developed brand is richer than just a few select words. Our brand will be a statement of meaningful commitments and standards we adhere to which are valued by the communities we serve. These statements will not only be communicated to the public in numerous ways, but the initiative will help keep the District focused on those commitments that we know the public values and expects.

From the opinion poll presented to the Board in August, we have a good understanding of what the community values most about our work. We will strive to express commitments that are tied to the priorities that were most important to those surveyed. As a reminder, here are the top priorities from the survey, from most to least important:

1. Removing toxins from local creeks and reservoirs
2. Replacing old or seismically unsafe pipelines, dams, and original water infrastructure
3. Maintaining healthy creeks and streams
4. Promoting water conservation
5. Reducing the risk of flooding
6. Expanding the use of recycled water
7. Restoring watershed land and habitat for fish and other animals

Commitments and standards could be drawn from the Board's Ends Policies, our Quality/Environmental Management System (QEMS), the 2015 Urban Water Management Plan, the Safe, Clean Water and Natural Flood Protection Program or other existing plans.

Staff will facilitate a series of workshops for members of the District's Management Leadership Team (MLT), the Leadership Team and the Chiefs. Involving the Management Leadership Team will help

ensure that this effort is implemented at all levels of the District.

Management Leadership Team workshops

The workshop series will begin with presentations and discussions at three subsequent MLT meetings. The MLT meets monthly, and each workshop is expected to last about one hour.

Step 1: MLT workshop #1

In the first workshop, staff will present to the MLT the rationale for establishing a brand for the District. Key marketing principles and how the brand should be implemented will be discussed. Drawing from the Board's Ends Policies and other plans and standards, the MLT will discuss and outline how the District creates value for our customers. Participants will break into smaller discussion groups to identify key standards we strive to adhere to and a series of commitment statements. MLT members will be asked to discuss these commitment statements with their staff before the next workshop.

Step 2: MLT workshop #2

In the second workshop, the MLT will refine the commitment statements developed in the first module, incorporating input MLT members heard from their unit staff. The refined commitment statements will be simple and straightforward. They will be meaningful to the average person, influential stakeholders and policy makers.

Step 3: MLT workshop #3

The third workshop will focus on the ways the brand will be implemented. Specific strategies will be proposed that will ensure that all employees become familiar with the commitment statements and will communicate them at every opportunity using all possible communication mechanisms.

Step 4: Leadership Team workshop

The next step will be a meeting for members of the Leadership Team (chiefs and deputies) to review the results of the MLT's workshops. The Leadership Team will further refine the draft commitment statements and implementation plan.

Step 5: Employee input

Through an on-line questionnaire, all employees will be invited to provide comments on the draft commitment statements and implementation strategies.

Step 6: Chief's workshop

The next step will be a meeting for the Chiefs to review the results of the Leadership Team's workshop and the survey input from all employees. The Chiefs will refine the draft commitment statements and implementation plan.

Step 7: Board workshop

After the workshop, staff will return to the Board to present the draft commitment statements and the implementation plan, which will form our desired brand identity. We expect to bring this plan to the Board in the early summer 2018

Step 8: Implementation

Implementation can begin shortly after the Board's workshop.

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:

None.

UNCLASSIFIED MANAGER:

Rick Callender, 408-630-2017