



# Santa Clara Valley Water District

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**File No.:** 18-0270

**Agenda Date:** 6/12/2018

**Item No.:** 7.1.

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## BOARD AGENDA MEMORANDUM

### **SUBJECT:**

Office of Communications Update.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

- A. Receive update responding to Board member requests and questions about Office of Communications activities;
- B. Receive information on the Office's accomplishments and planned activities; and
- C. Provide input on current and future challenges, goals and accomplishments since the last presentation to the Board.

### **SUMMARY:**

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.

Since January 2012, staff has presented the Board with semi-annual updates on the District's communications and community engagement activities.

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

The Office of Communications continues its ongoing efforts to publicize Santa Clara Valley Water District activities and bring more awareness about our commitment to provide Santa Clara County residents with safe, clean water for a healthy life, environment, and economy.

In response to the Board of Directors' comments and request on March 13, 2018, regarding the status of Directors' monthly guest columns in local newspapers, staff modified the approach with such submissions in September 2017. This was following input from an editor of major community newspapers in Santa Clara County. The editor indicated guest columns under individual Board

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members' names would not be publishable unless they were unique to each Board member; claiming it would appear disingenuous to run similar columns under different bylines.

As a result, staff established a board editorial calendar identifying topics that will be the content for individual Board members' column submission, each month. Staff is able to support the writing of these unique monthly guest columns by creating two columns for each Board member per year, tailored to each Board member's district and interests. The columns are promoted through a District blog post, which is supported via social media and our monthly e-newsletter, which reaches more than 28,000 subscribers.

In addition, when the opportunity arises, staff provides relevant letters to the editors on District matters that pertain to a specific Board member. The results, thus far, have been encouraging. Since January 2018, guest columns have been published in Gilroy Dispatch (Director Varela), Santa Clara Weekly (Director Keegan and Chair Santos), Almaden Times (Director LeZotte and Chair Santos), Metro Silicon Valley (Directors Keegan, Santos and Estremera), and Morgan Hill Times (Director Varela and Chair Santos). As the newspaper industry evolves, the editorial staff and number of community papers continue to contract, providing fewer outlets for District guest columns and letters to the editors. Staff continually adjusts to these changes to ensure public awareness about the District and Board's activities.

To further enhance the Board's public engagement outreach, the board editorial calendar includes scheduled Next Door messages regarding District efforts from each Board member, drafted and posted monthly to the Next Door community (approximately 400,883 members). A monthly Facebook message from the Board Chair to highlight District activities is also included.

In response to Director's commentary regarding establishing ways to emphasize the District's commitment to maintaining infrastructure, a one-minute video discussing this topic was produced during Infrastructure Week (May 14 - May 21) and included information about the District's landmark status as recognized by the American Society of Civil Engineers in 1976. Staff continues to create info-graphics that are visually appealing and easy to understand since infrastructure is usually below ground, making maintenance work difficult to see and reference.

Throughout the year, staff remains mindful of the following requests from the Board of Directors:

- Be more proactive with publicizing the District's work through our various communications with the public and the media (WaterFix, Anderson Dam operations, Pacheco Expansion, etc.)
- Host media events that highlight the District's actions in the months following the Coyote Creek flooding, specifically related to invasive plant removal among other efforts to reduce flood risks for impacted residents, in addition to those living in Santa Clara County.
- Connect the Board of Directors with media and continue to provide opportunities for interviews on District matters.
- Develop a more robust branding for the District-staff is working on the branding approach and will provide a detailed presentation on branding in an upcoming Board meeting.

Since June of 2017, staff has spearheaded media and community outreach events focused on

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highlighting District accomplishments, milestones and progress. The California WaterFix and the proposed expansion of the Pacheco Reservoir are among the key issues we highlighted. There has also been extensive outreach work with neighbors near District projects like Permanente Creek, Almaden Valley Pipeline repairs, Anderson Dam, Lake Cunningham, Berryessa Creek, San Francisquito Creek, Main/Madrone pipeline, Wolfe Road recycled water pipeline and the annual stream maintenance program. We held open house events for the Guadalupe Seismic Retrofit project and the water rates; with plans for an open house at the Rinconada Water Treatment Plant underway. Over the past year, the Board Chair and several Board members have participated in numerous interviews related to this outreach work.

Of note is staff work that occurred in the months following the Coyote Creek flooding in San Jose. The District emphasized the importance of flood protection and staff contributed to various efforts that included collaborative community meetings with city officials to inform residents about resources, the District's action plans and next steps. These meetings occurred in the fall of 2017, along with a successful media event on October 4, 2017 that highlighted the District's work to remove the invasive Arundo Donax plants from a mobile home park neighborhood near Coyote Creek. Earlier this year, the ongoing outreach included a multi-lingual flood awareness guide, mailed to approximately 55,000 residents. In addition, a media event held in February 2018, acknowledging the one-year anniversary of the flooding, generated extensive press coverage on the District's progress and commitment to collaborating with other agency partners to identify additional funding for ongoing flood protection efforts.

There were many accomplishments to highlight this year, including the launch of the new District website. Staff was also responsible for launching a public education campaign this year, which includes a robust radio and digital advertisement effort aimed at educating the community about our commitment to protecting the environment and focus on water quality. Staff continued to promote water conservation as a way of life in California through our Value Our Water (VOW) campaign. Those ads have launched on radio, digital platforms and print ads.

Moving forward, staff will continue to highlight the Board of Directors activities by providing more opportunities to connect with the local media through promotional opportunities and other milestone District events.

**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.

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**ATTACHMENTS:**

Attachment 1: PowerPoint

**UNCLASSIFIED MANAGER:**

Rick Callender, 408-630-2017