Santa Clara Valley Water District

File No.: 20-0935

Agenda Date: 11/24/2020
Item No.: 8.1.

BOARD AGENDA MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT:
Office of Civic Engagement Annual Board Update 2020.

RECOMMENDATION:
Receive information and updates on the programs and activities in the Office of Civic Engagement.

SUMMARY:
Staff is providing the Board with the annual update for the Office of Civic Engagement. This report covers the period from December 2019 through October 2020.

The Office of Civic Engagement manages the following program areas:

- Water Supply Outreach & Volunteer Stewardship
- Community Benefits
- Watershed Outreach & Education
- Youth Commission

All programs are designed to educate, engage, and make positive impacts in the community through partnerships and collaborations in support of Santa Clara Valley Water District's (Valley Water) goals and mission.

This year, due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, many of the community engagement and outreach programs and activities were temporarily impacted early on. All in-person tours, classroom presentations, and large volunteer cleanup events were postponed or cancelled altogether. Despite shelter-in-place orders staff pivoted quickly to continue engagements through virtual platforms and developed social distancing guidelines to adhere to public health orders. Within weeks of the countywide shelter-in-place order, most programs were back up and available to the public through virtual platforms.

Water Supply Outreach and Volunteer Stewardship Program
The Water Supply Outreach and Volunteer Stewardship Program is responsible for educating the community on Valley Water's comprehensive water supply system, including recycled and purified water and various infrastructure projects. The program area is also responsible for the implementation of community volunteer programs, such as the Water 101 Academy and Creek

Stewardship.

The **Water Supply Outreach** program hosted educational tours of Valley Water's various infrastructure projects, flood protection projects, water treatment plants, as well as the Silicon Valley Advanced Water Purification Center. The comprehensive tour launched earlier this year as a bus tour. In February, over 35 community members boarded the first bus tour that took them from Anderson Dam to the Penitencia Water Treatment Plant, then through the Downtown Guadalupe Flood Protection Project and over to the Silicon Valley Advanced Water Purification Center. Soon after the launch of the bus tour, the Santa Clara County Public Health Department announced the shelter-in-place order in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff immediately began developing a virtual tour program to continue engaging the community.

The virtual tour takes the bus tour and breaks it down to a four-part series that includes: Water Supply; Water Treatment & Water Quality; Flood Protection & Safe, Clean Water; and Purified Water & Water Reuse. The comprehensive tour series allows attendees to pick and choose different stops or to sign up for all four. This year, staff hosted 62 tours, reaching over 1,300 attendees despite the pandemic. Of the 62 tours, 51 were virtual tours. Prior to the shelter-in-place order, staff provided over 110 taste tests of bottled purified water during the in-person purification center tours. Staff also launched a Spanish language tour of the purification center to increase engagement in more diverse communities. Staff reached over 60 Spanish speaking community members in its inception tour. Staff will continue to offer Spanish tours for the community. Staff is also looking into providing self-guided tours in other languages.

Under the agency wide Volunteer Program is the **Water 101 Academy,** which has graduated two cohorts of water ambassadors. The second academy launched in February with the first session taking place in person before the shelter-in-place order was issued. Staff delivered the remaining five sessions via zoom and graduated 20 of the 21 ambassadors. Staff continues to engage the ambassadors through working groups to develop potential volunteer projects and quarterly newsletters to share regular information and keep all ambassadors engaged within the network. Staff is preparing to launch the third Water 101 Academy this coming spring 2021.

The **Creek Stewardship Program** provides opportunities for the community to engage in cleanup activities, such as volunteering for National River Cleanup Day or Coastal Cleanup Day and through participating in the Adopt-A-Creek Program, which allows the community to adopt sections of creek on Valley Water property and commit to cleaning them at least twice a year. This year, due to the pandemic, National River Cleanup Day was cancelled and the Adopt-A-Creek program was put on hold temporarily. Staff utilized the opportunity to develop and expand safety guidelines that would allow volunteers to continue engaging in creek cleanups, but in accordance with public health orders. The Adopt-A-Creek program was reopened in August with new social distancing protocols. In September, in partnership with the California Coastal Commission and the Creek Connections Action Group, staff launched a modified Coastal Cleanup event that called on volunteers to take action every Saturday in September, declaring all four Saturdays "Coastal Cleanup Days." Volunteers were encouraged to clean up around their neighborhoods and community, within their own households or social bubbles. Over 1,240 volunteers participated and cleaned 336 miles throughout the county, removing 47,272 pounds of trash in the modified Coastal Cleanup event.

This year, in total, the Creek Stewardship Program mobilized 1,266 volunteers to remove over 47,798 pounds of trash along 338 miles of creek.

Community Benefits Program

The Community Benefits Program is responsible for the management and oversight of the following programs: Safe, Clean Water and Natural Flood Protection (Safe, Clean Water) Grants & Partnerships and Public Arts & Signage.

Safe, Clean Water Grants & Partnerships Program is responsible for reinvesting over $30 million in funding back into the community through grants & partnerships. Funds are used to support projects in the areas of water conservation, pollution prevention, volunteer outreach and education, wildlife restoration, and trails and open space. This year, the program awarded over $1.1 million through 20 grant projects:

- 12 Restore Wildlife Habitat mini-grants ($57,914)
- 1 Water Conservation mini-grant ($5,000)
- 5 Pollution Prevention grants ($478,969)
- 2 Restore Wildlife Habitat standard grants ($580,531)

The program also released over $1 million in funding this past September for the FY21 grant cycle and will be bringing funding recommendations to the Board in early spring 2021. Staff is also continuing to build out the grants management system with the vendor, Grantbook, to increase the functionalities of the system to better meet the needs of the program for staff and grantees. Additionally, the grants program is undergoing a grants management performance audit to address challenges and concerns to deliver a more effective and efficient program that meets best practices of a publicly funded grants program and the needs of the wider community.

The **Public Arts & Signage Program** provides Valley Water the opportunity to be visible throughout the community and inform the public about important messages, such as public safety, stewardship, and identifying markers for key facilities.

This year, in an effort to increase the inventory of identified and documented Valley Water signage, staff worked with the Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition to expand on the success of the pilot sign scavenger hunt in fall 2019 and launched the Great Sign Hunt 2020. The countywide sign hunt was slated to take place in April 2020, however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the scavenger hunt was delayed until June when the County Public Health Order allowed for more outdoor activities. The Great Sign Hunt called on community members to ride bikes or walk trails around the county and take photos of Valley Water signs. Participants then uploaded the photos to a GIS app on their mobile devices that logged the signs into Valley Water’s signage database. Participants were entered into monthly raffle drawings for prizes to incentivize and encourage more participation. The scavenger hunt was opened for four months and led to over 10,000 signs inventoried, of those approximately 4,500 signs were unique (not duplicates).

Additionally, staff continued working with the Youth Commission to pilot the Adopt-A-Bench Project.

Designs for the seven benches were approved by their respective city's art commissions or city administration. The Youth Commission assisted the local artist, Paul J. Gonzales with painting the artwork on the tiles. Staff has identified an installer to begin installing the art tiles on all seven benches. Depending on weather for the upcoming winter season, staff anticipates all seven benches to have their artwork installed by summer 2021.

Watershed Outreach and Education

The **Watershed Outreach and Education** program oversees the Community Rating System and the Education Outreach program.

The **Community Rating System** (CRS) is a program under the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) that allows communities to earn flood insurance premium discounts for their residents and businesses. As the lead agency providing flood protection for Santa Clara County, Valley Water's participation as a fictitious agency, results in credits for specific flood risk-reduction activities. The credits are then transferred to participating communities in the county, which translates to discounts for flood insurance policyholders' premiums within their respective cities/jurisdictions.

Every five years, all participating agencies undergo a five-year verification process conducted by FEMA. Last August, Valley Water's CRS program underwent the process and the results were provided this past July. The verification visit determined that Valley Water earned a total of 1,846 credit points for all its activities resulting in an upgrade from a CRS Class 8 to a Class 7. The activity area where Valley Water was nearly perfect is in Activity 330 - Outreach Projects. Credits for this area is enhanced by developing a Program for Public Information (PPI) which helps to guide the outreach efforts. Valley Water is currently working on the next 5-year PPI with the other participating agencies in Santa Clara County. The updated 5-year PPI will be brought to the Board early next year for approval.

Staff is also working on developing a more robust regional coordinator model for the CRS program. Valley Water currently implements a facilitator model that provides some technical support and assistance for participating agencies in the county. However, a more robust regional model would allow Valley Water to centralize some of the creditable activities and potentially reduce cost for the participating agencies.

The **Education Outreach Program** focuses on engaging students throughout the county, ranging from K-12 and college, on issues pertaining to water conservation, environmental stewardship, and flood protection. This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all in-classroom presentations and in-person summer camp engagements were cancelled. Immediately after the shelter-in-place order, staff transitioned various lessons to distanced learning modules. The team offered various virtual lessons such as Hidden Water, Watershed Maps, and story time for the younger audiences. The team provided public programming that allowed for students and parents to sign up and engage via Zoom. The team also partnered with San Jose Public Library to offer several virtual summer programs.

This year, through in-person and virtual programs, the team hosted 144 presentations to schools and various organizations throughout the county, reaching over 12,000 students, 436 teachers, and over

900 community members. The team also launched a teacher newsletter and an expanded outreach and media plan to get the word out about the virtual programming.

Youth Commission

The **Youth Commission** is a Board Advisory Committee made up of 21-high school students throughout Santa Clara County that have been appointed by Valley Water's Board of Directors. The Youth Commission works to ensure that youth voice is heard and empowered at policy and decision-making levels.

This year, the Youth Commission hosted the annual Job Shadow Day in February, which drew in 42 high school students throughout the county from 20 different high schools. Eight seniors on the Youth Commission graduated from high school and staff hosted a virtual graduation in May. Staff spent the summer recruiting new commissioners. At the Youth Commission virtual meeting in August, new commissioners were sworn in and a new chair and vice chair were elected. Staff also hosted a virtual retreat in October to allow the new and returning commissioners to get to know each other better and to develop their workplan for the new year. The Youth Commission also decided to retain the same working groups as last year in order to continue some of the unfinished projects from the previous year. The working groups are: Mentorship/Career Shadowing, Creek Stewardship, Adopt-A-Bench, and Youth Citizens Science Network.

Looking Ahead

This past year challenged the team to be creative and resilient during a global public health crisis that shut down the entire world. In spite of the uncertainties of the pandemic, the team found creative and innovative ways to achieve its goals and continued engaging the community to provide a little sense of normalcy and virtual "togetherness." Community engagements and public presentations transitioned to the virtual world and volunteer creek cleanups adopted new safety protocols. As a result, new programs and activities were developed for the community to remain informed, engaged, and educated. Staff also enhanced outreach strategies to reach broader communities, including faith-based organizations and organizations serving ethnic specific groups.

Staff will continue to build relationships with the community through our existing programs and further enhance the virtual platforms in which the programs are delivered. Staff is currently in the planning stages of several programs, which will continue to take place in a virtual setting such as the third annual Water 101 Academy, the Youth Commission led Job Shadow Day for 2021, and the annual Volunteer Recognition event. Staff is also working on evaluating and recommending funding for up to $1 million in grant projects, planning and developing our public arts mural program, and the development of a regional CRS program. Additionally, staff will continue a more proactive outreach approach in the community to ensure equity in terms of engagement in all our programs, such as grant opportunities, educational programs, creek stewardship, and volunteerism.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

The recommended action does not have any financial impact on Valley Water.

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

ATTACHMENTS:
Attachment 1: PowerPoint

UNCLASSIFIED MANAGER:
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