



Santa Clara Valley Water District

File No.: 21-0452

Agenda Date: 4/27/2021
Item No.: *4.7.

BOARD AGENDA MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT:

Consider the Agricultural Water Advisory Committee's Recommendation and Associated Staff Analysis from the Committee's April 5, 2021 Meeting.

RECOMMENDATION:

Consider accepting the Agricultural Water Advisory Committee's recommendation to support the requests stated in the Santa Clara County Farm Bureau's April 5, 2021, letter.

SUMMARY:

At the Agricultural Water Advisory Committee's meeting on April 5, 2021, the Committee took the following action:

The Committee voted unanimously to support the Santa Clara County Farm Bureau's requests stated in its April 5, 2021, letter (Attachment 1) as follows:

- 1) Santa Clara Valley Water District (Valley Water) freeze agricultural groundwater rates for the next 15 years, and
- 2) Valley Water work affirmatively and actively with farmers going forward to increase the aquifer recharge done on farmlands over and above what farmlands have done routinely in years past.

Staff Analysis of Farm Bureau's requests

Staff can carry out the recommendation to freeze agricultural groundwater rates for future years upon full Board direction to do so. Freezing agricultural groundwater rates for future years would cause an increase to the open space credit funds needed to offset lost agricultural charge revenue in those future years. Also, public affairs staff can emphasize the positive contributions of agriculture toward water management in the county where appropriate.

At the January 4, 2021, Committee meeting, staff provided a presentation on a partnership with University of California researchers to conduct a preliminary feasibility study for Flood-Managed Aquifer Recharge (Flood-MAR) in Santa Clara County. Flood-MAR actively captures stormflows on open space and agricultural lands to recharge the groundwater basin. The feasibility study will help determine which open space and agricultural lands may be suitable for recharging groundwater with stormwater, evaluate where stormwater is available, and explore financial landowner incentives such

as credits. Staff will actively engage the Committee and other stakeholders as this study progresses.

The Santa Clara County Drainage Manual is intended to assist engineers in designing proper storm drainage systems and facilitate County review during land development. The manual presents methods to calculate expected runoff based on required flood protection levels, such as 10-year and 100-year storms. These storms occur less frequently but are used for design to ensure drainage systems can manage peak runoff generated during large storms, thereby preventing flooding.

The methods presented in the Drainage Manual do not quantify how much runoff infiltrates to groundwater. The amount of runoff and infiltration occurring on any given property each year is highly variable and depends on many factors. These factors include land use; vegetation; rainfall timing, volume, and intensity; evaporation and evapotranspiration; as well as soil type and condition. For these reasons, staff does not believe the Drainage Manual is an appropriate tool to assess the infiltration from any given property or to potentially determine credits. It should be noted that the Board's pricing policy and the District Act already acknowledge additional infiltration and benefits provided by agricultural lands. This is manifested through the existing open space credit. Through this credit, the current agricultural groundwater charge is less than 10% of what all other groundwater users pay.

Unlike many other areas of California, local groundwater basins are sustainably managed to fully support agriculture and other beneficial uses. Valley Water manages groundwater levels to be relatively high. This ensures groundwater is reliably available and reduces costs for agricultural and other pumpers by decreasing the distance that pumps need to lift the groundwater to the land surface. Local groundwater pumping far exceeds what is replenished naturally by rainfall. Because of this chronic imbalance, continued groundwater sustainability depends on Valley Water's activities, which are funded by groundwater charges paid by all well users in areas receiving benefit.

Valley Water will continue to carefully consider investments needed for water supply reliability and associated potential rate impacts to effectively serve Santa Clara County. Valley Water will continue to engage the Committee on related issues and partnership opportunities.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There is no financial impact associated with this item. There may be a future financial impact pending the result of the negotiation.

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: 040521 SCC Farm Bureau' Letter

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