



# Santa Clara Valley Water District

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**File No.:** 17-0319

**Agenda Date:** 6/13/2017

**Item No.:** 7.1.

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## 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 (District) Communications and Community Engagement Program;
- B. Provide input on current and future challenges, goals and accomplishments since the last presentation to the Board; and
- C. Accept staff report on Transparency Compliance Audit recommendations dealing with District-wide civic engagement plan.

### **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 September 13, 2016.

This update gives the Board an opportunity to receive further information and provide input on how staff can better enable them to act as 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.

### **IMPROVEMENTS IN COORDINATION**

Following the previous presentation to the Board, the District Communications and Community Engagement Program has been restructured. The unit is now under the direction of Chief of External Affairs, Rick Callender, who also oversees the District's Office of Government Relations. This joining of the two units under one manager has improved coordination between Communications and

## Government Relations.

The joining of Communications with Government Relations has resulted in the sharing of resources and employees, for instance, with Communications helping produce talking points when needed, and Government Relations providing more people to draw upon for emergency communications. That has been especially important during this winter, when heavy rains and flooding called for increased visibility and media access.

Coordination continues every day with morning staff meetings to share information and work priorities. Connection between the two units has increased, allowing a better understanding of each unit's activities and the opportunity to synchronize strategies and tasks.

## ACTIVITIES AND PLANS

Improved coordination has also allowed the units to provide better support for the Board of Directors through increased awareness of activities throughout the county. While the education and volunteer programs have remained under a separate manager, they are expected to reunite with Communications and Government Relations under the new Chief of External Affairs, providing a more cohesive, one-stop-shop for Board members to reach their constituents and to hear from the people in their districts.

We continue to develop the Speakers Bureau program, recruiting more staff to give presentations about the District to community groups. Before offering the speaking opportunity to staff, however, we offer it to Board members. We plan to increase outreach for this program this year.

Other actions the unit has taken in the last six months and that are planned for the near future will continue to offer the Board members support in creative and useful ways. Those will be discussed throughout this document, under each activity.

## Branding

Image and reputation are important to an organization's ability to accomplish its work. A positive view of the District by the public makes it easier for the District to obtain funding as well as community and stakeholder support for various projects to protect water quality and supply and to provide flood protection.

With that in mind, the District needs to consider what image it wishes the public to conjure at the mention of its name. Beyond the vision and mission of the District, and more than a slogan, the Santa Clara Valley Water District's brand needs to convey our purpose and our value to the public. A strong brand also allows the *District*, especially the Directors, as they conduct outreach in their districts, to set the tone and impression through consistent messaging, rather than passively allowing others to describe us and by default set our brand for us.

The District will promote the brand through a variety of means, including providing on-message materials such as talking points, presentations and publications to Board members, an ad campaign, blog posts relating to the brand theme, videos, pitches to the media, and more.

This effort will take careful planning and thought, and will start with an assessment of the current image of the District among the public. The next step is to identify the District's desired brand image. For a branding initiative to be successful, the desired brand must reflect attributes that accurately describe the District. For example, if our desired brand image is one of "fiscal responsibility," we must demonstrate our fiscal responsibility.

Staff will return to the Board in the fall with branding options that incorporate the results of an upcoming public opinion survey. Once a brand identity is identified, it should be reflected in a wide array of communications efforts.

### **Reputation and trust campaign**

Informing the branding effort will be a year-long campaign (July 2017-July 2018) to improve the public's perception of the District.

This effort has begun with a poll, due in June, which will help us understand what people think about the District and what messages resonate with the public. The campaign will involve the Board of Directors and the entire organization working through an internal working group. The working group will help determine what strategies to use, particularly for an external campaign. The Board's leadership will be valuable in shaping a message-driven District and connecting with the community. Results will be shared with the organization along with messages to be incorporated in all external communications.

### **Water Truck**

In addition to branding, staff is working on designs for the water truck that was included in the FY 17 budget and will be delivered in early fall. There are a few choices including the District's Value of Water campaign images; images from the Value of Water Coalition's campaign, a resource provided by the U.S. Water Alliance to build will for investment in water infrastructure and resources; and images promoting the District's high-quality water.

Staff will bring the design options to the Board as a separate agenda item in early summer for a decision. In the interim, the unit will seek employee input on the design in order to provide input for the Board's consideration.

### **Redesign of Website**

The District has finalized a contract with a vendor to redesign the external website, to modernize it, organize information better and make it more user-friendly for the public. The District's website is an extensive repository for information that can help the public and employees, and the redesign will make that information more accessible, as well as showcase the District's stories.

As an example, in response to Board members' requests, we are working with other units to make it easier for the public to find flood information on the website, including real-time data during storms, and to ensure that that information is understandable by the public.

Staff will present an update on the redesign at the next communications update to the Board.

**Media Relations**

Since the last report to the Board, our process for dealing with media inquiries has changed. Whereas previously staff coordinated subject matter experts to respond to inquiries, whenever feasible, we now offer the opportunity to the Board chair, and in each district, we offer the Director for that district the opportunity to speak to the media and answer their questions. Staff continues to coordinate subject matter experts in addition to offering media opportunities to the Board, but the Directors will get “first right of refusal” for all interviews when feasible.

We also support the Board with a monthly guest column for their use, as well as producing letters to the editor and op-eds.

This winter has been a particularly busy one for media. The issue with the spillway at Oroville Dam focused media attention on all dams, including significant interest in Anderson Dam as well as in its seismic stability.

Flooding in San Jose along Coyote Creek heightened that interest, and the intense volume of media inquiries caused by the floods led the District to retain Singer Associates, a crisis communications firm, to assist in managing media inquiries and getting the District’s message out to the community about the District’s role in assessing and preventing flooding to the extent possible.

The transition from the drought to flooding has been intense, and the resulting media scrutiny has mirrored that intensity. The joining of Communications and Government Relations has helped provide a deeper bench of people available to disseminate important messages, and the change in procedure to offer opportunities to Board members has allowed the District to provide higher-level information to reporters.

Reaching all the people in the county is a priority for the District, and our working relationships with ethnic media outlets help us to expand the communities we touch. We will continue to work with these partners, and offer opportunities to the Board members to work with them as they arise.

While the recent winter has dramatically improved the current water supply outlook, the District remains focused on long-term water conservation needs and the promotion of water conservation as California’s way of life. The 2016 Value Our Water campaign will continue in 2017 with additional elements to promote an on-going commitment to using water wisely.

**Flood awareness**

As part of its annual effort to raise awareness about the potential for flooding in Santa Clara County, the District conducted a flood awareness campaign that included radio and online ads, print ads in ethnic media, mall and transit shelter posters, billboard messages, Nextdoor messages, and boosted Facebook posts. There were also three targeted e-mail messages delivered to homeowners in floodplains on behalf of Chair Varela.

At the time of this agenda memo, the media buyer had not yet provided a final campaign report. Preliminary results of the paid media portion of the campaign indicate a total of 28 million

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impressions, or appearances in people's social media feeds, up from the 24 million reported last year. The campaign launched the first week of January, with radio alerts timed to coincide with stormy weather, and ran through April 2017, with the heaviest messaging during the months of January through March.

This winter's flooding and extensive rains have prompted us to devise new ways of reaching more people with our flood preparedness message. We anticipate taking a more grassroots approach to flood awareness, especially in areas impacted by flooding. For example, we plan to set up informational tables at busy neighborhood spots to get out the message about flood risks and family preparation. We will roll out our next flood awareness campaign beginning in November.

### **Annual report/calendar**

To streamline the District's publications and to make the best use of District resources while reaching the public more effectively, Communications combined the annual report with the countywide mailer and calendar last year. The countywide mailer is sent to every household in Santa Clara County - almost 700,000 homes. The annual report had not been produced for some time, and the calendar has proven popular every year.

The resulting publication highlighted the District's accomplishments and looked ahead to upcoming projects. However, instead of mailing the calendar out to every home in the county, staff mailed a postcard inviting people to view the annual report online - an effort to reach people where they are more likely to go - and to sign up to receive the calendar in the mail. The calendar contained the annual report information, and we mailed it to 4,467 interested community members.

While this streamlining served us well last year, this year, we plan to take advantage of increased opportunities provided by the mailer's extensive reach to disseminate educational materials on flooding. With flooding fresh in people's minds, we believe they will be more receptive to messages about preparing for potential floods and how to protect themselves, their loved ones and their homes and businesses. An expanded mailer should allow us to maintain or even increase the number of points we acquire through the Community Rating System from the federal government, which benefits those who must purchase flood insurance.

This will also tie into our efforts to strengthen our connection to the community and to ensure that the community sees the District as a valuable resource and neighbor. This is connected to our branding effort's perception poll, scheduled for June. Understanding how the community sees us will help us assist the Board in further developing strong relationships with the community.

### **News monitors**

New technology and better use of existing technology is helping us reach more people internally and externally. One example of a way that we are reaching more employees is through monitors installed in the Headquarters and Administration building cafeterias, and the Crest Building Workforce Development entry way. These monitors display an internal informational network that features employee news messages, photos and video, and provides another way to promote internal communications. We are planning to get more formal feedback from employees on the monitors to

determine their effectiveness.

### **Smartphone app**

Reading what's on our intranet, [aqua.gov](http://aqua.gov) <<http://aqua.gov>>, can be difficult for those who work out in the field or who are away from their desks, as the site can only be accessed from within the firewall.

To allow employees more access to critical employee information, we are developing a smartphone app so employees can stay abreast of what is happening in the organization. The app will also allow Communications to send push notifications for emergency notices. The app began internal beta testing on March 31, and is expected to roll out District-wide in May.

Community outreach and engagement activities allow Board members and the District to be visible in the community and make direct contact with members of the public. Since the joining of the Communications and Community Outreach unit with the Office of Government Relations, opportunities for the Board members to engage with their constituencies are better coordinated and aligned with the priorities of the Board of Directors in serving their districts.

The use of technology and other outreach tools increase the options for the public in how they receive information and engage with the District.

### **Nextdoor**

In September 2016, the District became one of the government agencies allowed to post to Nextdoor, a neighborhood-based social media platform. We are sending all-county messages as appropriate, high-priority flood messages and project-specific messages targeted to specific neighborhoods. The Nextdoor messages have been an opportunity for Board members to directly communicate with the areas they represent.

The ability to target our audience in Nextdoor means that people are receiving timely messages appropriate for their neighborhood. It is an effective outreach tool in our community engagement toolbox and supplements the important work that our engagement specialists do.

This is in addition to the use of Facebook and Twitter to get our messages out, as well as the Valleywaternews.org blog and the eNewsletter, which now reaches more than 26,000 subscribers. Through the media update, sent to Board members when there has been media interest in the District, we encourage Directors to post the stories and tweets from our accounts to their own social media networks, thus broadening the number of people who receive District messages.

### **Live-streaming meetings**

We have begun live-streaming key Board and community events on Facebook Live to increase our accessibility and provide greater opportunities for residents to engage with and learn about District projects and issues.

We launched the service at the beginning of this year with the appointment of Chair Varela, and we live-streamed the March 22, 2017, Anderson Dam Seismic Retrofit Community Update and two of the Coyote Creek Flood Response public meetings. The live-streamed meetings netted over 1,300

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viewers with several questions submitted. This effort is still in the pilot stage while we further refine its use and effectiveness in supporting District projects and initiatives.

### **Project map**

This summer we expect to launch a project map tool using GIS that allows the public to search for District projects in their respective neighborhoods. The map will include interactive, mobile-friendly features including direct links to project information, project webpages and a form to sign up to receive project information via e-mail. We expect this tool to make us more accessible to the public and to increase public awareness of the benefits of District investments in water quality, flood protection, and stream stewardship.

### **Events and meeting calendar**

The District hosts public meetings on projects, as well as water conservation workshops, and sponsors and attends various community festivals and events throughout the year. Event and meeting publicity is done through mailed notices, social media posts, newspaper and online advertisements, stakeholder collaboration, e-mail lists and partnerships, and Nextdoor. A public events and meeting calendar will consolidate all information on these events and meetings, providing the public with a single District source for obtaining pertinent information on them. We expect to have the calendar on the District's website by the end of summer.

### **Project outreach and engagement**

We provide strategic outreach, communications, and community relations support for 24 large capital projects and five small capital projects. These projects are in various stages from planning to construction and require public input or awareness on the impacts to the neighborhood.

As the District moves forward with critical seismic and reliability, flood protection and stream stewardship projects, Santa Clara County residents will benefit from the new tools listed above. In identifying public meeting dates, Directors are consulted as these projects are in the communities they represent and their engagement is integral to all District project outreach and engagement efforts.

### **Public engagement**

Open house events allow the District to educate the public on the various projects, programs, and services we provide. More than 230 residents visited the Penitencia Water Treatment Plant at an open house held in August 2016. Ninety-nine percent of attendees rated the event as informative and 100 percent stated that it "boosted their understanding of how drinking water is treated." The next open house will be at the Santa Teresa Water Treatment Plant in the fall.

### **Customer and relationship management**

Access Valley Water is the District's online and mobile customer service tool to submit inquiries or report issues to the District. The system allows staff to track cases and collaborate on answering customer questions.

In the first half of FY 2016-17, we received a total of 1,409 cases from the public with an average District-wide response time of 3.2 days. Of the total inquiries received, 638 were specifically related

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to water waste or drought and had a 2.8-day response rate measured from the time the report was received to the time of site inspection and a response given to the customer stating the action taken. Since the start of the drought, water waste reports continue to be the bulk of the inquiries received.

## **RECYCLED AND PURIFIED WATER OUTREACH**

To secure support for a locally sustainable and drought-resistant water supply, we must continually promote public awareness of the District's potable reuse plans. To achieve that, we are building a widespread support base of key stakeholders and local community leaders who will provide active support for purified water and the Expedited Purified Water Program. The Directors will play a significant role in this strategy through specific engagement opportunities, particularly in the communities they represent.

### **Surveys**

In January, the District used a research firm to measure the public's acceptance for recycled water and its potential use as a future source for drinking water. The firm conducted a phone survey of 800 randomly chosen Santa Clara County voters in English, Chinese, Spanish and Vietnamese. Although the survey revealed useful information specifically related to the Asian community, concern over the framing of questions and definition of terms were raised, leading to calls for a new survey that better defines the terms of direct and indirect potable reuse. The new survey is targeted for the summer and results will help further define the District's outreach strategy with key messaging and identify specific focus areas.

We are also compiling data from monthly surveys collected from Silicon Valley Advanced Water Purification Center visitors. In February, feedback from 56 individuals revealed at least 85 percent support for the potable reuse of recycled purified water.

### **Tour program**

The Silicon Valley Advanced Water Purification Center continues to draw a wide variety of stakeholders for tours, including those from educational institutions, neighboring cities and public agencies.

### **Ethnic outreach**

The communities served by the District are ethnically and culturally diverse. The outreach for purified water programs is reflective of this diversity by including ethnic-focused events. In 2016, we held a Latino Community Day to reach a multicultural audience, specifically families from the nonprofit Somos Mayfair organization.

To address skepticism from the Asian community for recycled water usage, as revealed in the January 2017 telephone survey, a community engagement plan developed specifically for the Asian community emphasizes partnerships with community- and faith-based organizations, and promotes speaking and traditional and social media engagements for the District's Board and staff. Program staff are updating collateral materials to reflect these communities in a manner that promotes the message that the water is pure and new. On July 15, we will hold an Asian Community Day at the Purification Center.



**Social media**

Program staff consistently rely on social media channels, such as the District's Facebook page, to connect on a weekly basis with users to promote the Recycled Water Program and ongoing tours at the Purification Center. We will continue to broaden our use of social media by increasing paid advertisements to reach users beyond the existing network. Facebook has effectively assisted in boosting the level of interest in tours at the center.

**Employee engagement**

In addition to our external audiences, we are emphasizing outreach to our employees, believing that employee understanding of recycled and purified water is crucial to winning public support.

**Community engagement**

Outreach for the Recycled Water Program will continue to evolve as the year progresses. Community outreach was key to the success of other communities introducing purified recycled water into their water supply portfolio. Board members have a key role in leading this charge through one-on-one conversations and presentations in the communities they represent. Additional tactics include:

- Increasing the number of speaker bureau opportunities for Directors to promote the program in their districts;
- Developing an employee ambassador program that empowers employees with a deep knowledge about recycled purified water so they may serve as key messengers in the community;
- Fostering stronger partnerships with regional public information officers to help promote purification center tours and speaker bureau engagements; and
- Launching a campaign of posters to be placed throughout District facilities that promote the recycled water message, as part of the internal outreach effort.

**TRANSPARENCY COMPLIANCE AUDIT**

In 2014, the Transparency Compliance Audit recommended certain actions regarding civic engagement. Through a variety of already-planned or executed activities, staff has addressed the recommendations, which were as follows:

Item 5: Develop a District-wide civic engagement plan (Includes Item 9: Develop a District-wide information engagement plan that includes criteria on displaying information and determining the usefulness of information from a customer perspective.)

1. Finalize the District's stakeholder engagement plan

Through the year-long reputation and trust campaign, we plan to improve not only the perception of the District among the public, but also to engage employees and the public through improved and focused messaging that resonates with the public.

2. Complete the Review of the District's Community Partnering Sponsorships program to identify and implement any desired refinements to that program.

The District sponsors activities with community partners, including civic, business, professional, and nonprofit groups that have a direct nexus with the work that the District does, as stated in Executive Limitation 5.5: Not allow for any sponsorships, contributions, or

memberships that do not have a nexus to the District's mission, vision or Board governance policies.

Applicants may request a sponsorship by completing an application that outlines the details of the event to be sponsored, the potential nexus of the event to the District, and the benefits the District would receive for the sponsorship.

Staff thoroughly analyzes sponsorship applications to evaluate whether: 1) the request complies with established board policies governing sponsorships, and 2) the request meets most of the following criteria below:

- Strengthening partnerships with stakeholders;
- Enhancing credibility with various "publics";
- Enhancing the District's public image and reputation;
- Focusing on the local community's participation around regional water policy issues;
- Clearly communicating regional water policy issues to key constituent groups;
- Providing opportunities for participation and collaboration with the District's member agencies;
- Diversifying channels of participation in the community;
- Building a bank of good will;
- Positively impacting the environment or watersheds;
- Supporting and ensuring stability for local non-profits which further the District's mission and vision and;
- Supporting employee community involvement.

Staff also negotiates with the applicant to maximize the benefits conferred to the District as part of a request for a sponsorship. Following the analysis, staff submits a recommendation to the Office of Government Relations Deputy Administrative Officer, and if approved, the request is then submitted to the Chief of External Affairs and then to the Chief Executive Officer for final approval.

3. Develop ethics and governance guidelines for employees who participate in these civic engagement activities.

The District has robust policies addressing employee ethics. These policies apply to employees when they are at work and any time they are out in the community representing the District. They include provisions about conflict of interest, gift restrictions, misuse and gift of public funds, bribery, Form 700 reporting requirements, the Brown Act and Public Records Act, common law bias, incompatible office, anti-nepotism, due process and fair contracting requirements. All employees are held to these ethics guidelines and certain designated

employees must undergo training on these topics every two years.

Item 13: Involve the public in budgeting by: (a) holding public discussions on budget priorities; (b) showing the public how to read budgets; and (c) coordinating informal discussions or meetings to discuss key issues, such as rate setting and how budget priorities are established.

Based on feedback from the public, staff simplified the Groundwater Production Charges mailer which explains what the charges are and how to protest them. An informational open house is held prior to the public hearing on the groundwater production charges where staff is available to answer questions from the public. For the last two years, informational newspaper ads explaining the use and allocation of the water rates collected have been published in local newspapers along with presentations to local groups.

**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

**UNCLASSIFIED MANAGER:**

Rick Callender, 408-630-2017