



SANTA CRUZ MID-COUNTY GROUNDWATER AGENCY
Board of Directors Remote-Access Meeting
Thursday, December 16, 2021 7:00 p.m.

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chair LaHue.

2. Roll Call

Directors present: Curt Abramson (late arrival), Bruce Jaffe, Manu Koenig (late arrival), Jim Kerr, Jon Kennedy, Tom LaHue, Marco Romanini, and Alternate Directors John Benich, Doug Engfer, and Allyson Violante.

Directors absent: David Baskin, Justin Cummings, Zach Friend, and Rob Marani.

Staff present: Ralph Bracamonte, Ron Duncan, Heidi Luckenbach, Sierra Ryan, Leslie Strohm, Tim Carson, and Laura Partch.

Others present: Chelsea Bokman of Geosyntec, and Bryant Platt, Department of Water Resources (DWR) Point of Contact for the Santa Cruz Mid-County Groundwater Basin (Basin).

3. Oral Communications Related to Items Not on the Agenda

Issues within the purview of the Santa Cruz Mid-County Groundwater Agency (MGA). Guidelines attached.

None.

4. Consent Agenda

- 4.1 Approve September 9, 2021 Board Meeting Minutes (no memo)
- 4.2 Accept Audited 2020/2021 Financial Statements
- 4.3 Approve 2022 MGA Board Meeting Schedule

No public comment or Board discussion.

MOTION: Director Kerr; Second, Director Romanini. To approve the consent agenda. Motion passed unanimously by roll call vote; Director Kennedy and Alternate Directors Benich and Engfer abstained on Agenda Item 4.1.

Directors Koenig and Abramson arrived.

5. General Business

5.1 Adopt Board Resolution No. 21-03 Authorizing Remote Meetings in Compliance with AB 361

Staff reviewed the requirements of AB 361 as set out in the Board memo. The Board found conditions existed for the next Board meeting to be conducted by remote access, and, consistent with the practice of other local agency boards that meet quarterly, opted to consider subsequent resolutions pursuant to AB 361 at each Board meeting.

No public comment.

MOTION: Director Kerr; Second, Director Romanini. To adopt, in accordance with Government Code § 54953(e), Board Resolution 21-03, authorizing the Board to meet virtually at its next meeting, and to adopt subsequent Board Resolutions at each Board meeting. Motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

5.2 Approve Creation of a Temporary Board Committee to Develop the Strategy and Complete Recruitment Process for Administrative and Planning Services

Staff proposed the formation of a Temporary Board Committee to assist with an evaluation of MGA administrative needs, the development a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a contract to begin July 1, 2022, and the selection of a consultant. To increase efficiencies and reduce overhead, staff noted the potential interest in hiring a consultant to provide services for both the MGA and the Santa Margarita Groundwater Agency (SMGWA).

Board members did not see a need for the proposed committee. The consensus among the Board is that staff could proceed and return to the Board with a recommendation on the consultant selection for the Board to consider.

No motion was made. Executive Staff will return to the Board in March with an update on the process and, as needed, get input from Board.

No public comment.

5.3 Approve Creation of a Temporary Board Committee to Evaluate and Select Projects for Upcoming Sustainable Groundwater Management Program Grant Opportunity

Staff reported on the opportunity for the MGA to pursue up to \$7.6 million in funding from DWR's Sustainable Groundwater Management (SGM) Grant Program for a broad range of Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) implementation activities. No local cost share is required on this grant. In response to the draft Guidelines and a Proposal Solicitation Package, the MGA submitted a comment letter, included in the Board packet, requesting flexibility with regard to certain grant requirements. The application deadline is January 31, 2022, but that deadline may be extended.

The draft DWR documents outline an application process that includes the creation of a committee to evaluate and prioritize possible projects using a scoring criteria table. Under this process, the GSP will drive the selection of projects included in the application, most likely Group 1 and 2 projects and management actions.

Staff has requested that the Board create a Temporary Board Committee, with representation from each Member Agency and the Private Well Owner Directors, which would likely meet twice to support the development of the application. Staff has already been working to identify projects for the Board committee to evaluate and consider.

No public comment.

MOTION: Director Koenig; Second, Director Jaffe. To approve the creation of a Temporary Board Committee authorized to carry out the charge detailed in the Board memo for the Sustainable Groundwater Management Program Grant proposal, and to appoint Directors Kennedy, Koenig, LaHue, Romanini, and alternate Director Engfer to the Temporary Board Committee. Motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

5.4 Approve Resolution to Apply for the 2021 Sustainable Groundwater Management Grant Program Implementation – Planning and Projects Grant

Staff reported that a Board resolution is required for the submission of an application for the grant discussed under Agenda Item 5.3.

No public comment

MOTION: Director Kennedy; Second, Director Jaffe. To approve Board Resolution No. 21-04 authorizing the submittal of an application for the 2021 SGM Implementation Planning and Projects Grant. Motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

5.5 Approve Definition of Priority Areas and Overall Approach for Metering Program Plan Participant Inclusion

At the September Board meeting, staff provided an update on the metering program and its parameters. The Board directed staff and the Temporary Board Committee on the Metering Program to consider the definition of priority areas and return to the Board with recommendations.

Staff provided recommendations from the Temporary Committee, and requested Board approval of the definition of “priority areas” as well as the overall approach for inclusion in the Metering Program.

Chelsea Bokman of Geosyntec, the consultant leading on the project, reported that the Basin GSP requires metering for any parcel using more than an estimated 5 acre-feet per year. This criteria includes 30 parcels (26 owners), and captures 85% of all parcels being considered for metering under the program. The GSP also requires inclusion of parcels located in priority areas that pump greater than an estimated 2 acre-feet per year. Priority areas are those with a high risk for undesirable impacts due to pumping, such as interconnected surface waterways and coastal areas at risk for seawater intrusion. Also considered are the depth of wells and persistent pumping depressions on a regional scale. To future-proof the priority areas, also included were those areas identified in the GSP as being at risk for negative impacts from groundwater pumping.

The proposed criteria for priority areas, as well as process-oriented considerations, are set forth in the Board memo. Using these criteria, Geosyntec identified nine pumpers in the Basin with water use of greater than 2-acre feet per year and within a 1,000 foot buffer of interconnected surface waterways or with groundwater elevation below 50 feet relative to Mean Sea Level.

The Metering Program will be adaptable over the long term. The criteria will be updated every five years when the GSP is updated to include new data, and will include a disclaimer allowing the MGA to address case-by-case situations that could not be anticipated but are consistent with the spirit of the program.

During Board discussion, staff noted that all of the main depressions from 2005 fell within the 50-foot elevation line. Staff confirmed that, since the Program is parcel-by-parcel, the MGA may find participation in the Metering Program is warranted for unique circumstances, such as adjacent parcels with similar pumping and each with an estimated use of less than 2 acre-feet per year.

No public comment.

MOTION: Director Koenig; Second, Director Kerr. To approve Definition of Priority Areas and Overall Approach for Metering Program Plan Participant Inclusion. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

5.6 Approve Board Meeting Start Times and Break Policy

Following discussion, the Board changed the start time to 6:00 p.m. for both in-person and remote meetings. Instead of creating a break policy, the Board encouraged any Director, as needed, request that the Chair provide a break during a meeting.

MOTION: Director Romanini, Second, Director Koenig. To approve beginning MGA Board meetings at 6:00 p.m. Motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

6. Informational Updates

6.1 Treasurer's Report

MGA Treasurer Leslie Strohm was available for questions.

No Board discussion or public comment.

6.2 Oral Reports

The Santa Margarita Groundwater Agency (SMGWA) approved its GSP, which will be submitted to DWR by the end of December. Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency recently submitted the 5-year update to its alternate GSP.

The vendor for the Data Management System (DMS), KISTERS, was subject to a ransomware attack. While it did not impact the work for the MGA and SMGWA, it has slowed the process. Staff will provide an update on the DMS in March.

A Director requested that the MGA get a security compliance audit from a third party to certify the impacted vendor.

- Staff agreed that follow-up on this issue and some type of assurance is appropriate.

Balance Hydrologics has identified the locations for the monitoring network wells, and has completed the well specifications. Staff will be working with Balance Hydrologics on issuing an RFP. The locations of some wells were moved as no acceptable agreement could be reached with the property owners. All the wells will likely be located in the County right of way, and a notice of exemption filed under CEQA.

Staff provided an update on California Senate Bill 552, drought-planning legislation intended to push resiliency among water suppliers not currently subject regulations for urban water management plans and water shortage contingency plans. The County Water Advisory Commission has agreed to take responsibility for implementing SB 552. Beginning January 2022, the Commission will create an advisory subcommittee to develop an approach to implementation. The legislation recommends the inclusion of groundwater sustainability agencies within the affected area. Staff will be providing additional information on this at the March Board meeting.

Bryant Platt was introduced as the new DWR SGM Program Point of Contact for the Basin.

MGA will be switching to utilize the Zoom platform for future virtual meetings.

6.3 Annual Status Report on Board FPPC Compliance

For information only, required by the First Amended Bylaws.

7. Future Agenda Items

A request for an informational update on Basin conditions and any modeling done using the data from the recent water years. .

- The GSP Annual Report will come to the Board for approval in March. Staff will work with Montgomery & Associates and Board members so that the requested updates are provided.

8. Written Communications and Submitted Materials

None submitted.

Thanks to all who attended the recent groundbreaking ceremony for the Soquel Creek Water District's Pure Water Soquel Project.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:22 p.m.

Next Board Meeting: March 17, 2022