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SANTA CRUZ MID-COUNTY GROUNDWATER AGENCY
Board of Directors Meeting
Thursday, September 21, 2023

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 by Chair Kennedy.

2. Roll Call

Directors present: Curt Abramson, David Baskin, Zach Friend (remote), Jon Kennedy, Jim Kerr, Manu Koenig, and Marco Romanini; Alternate Directors Doug Engfer and Frances Basich Whitney.

Directors absent: Carla Christensen, Fred Keeley, Tom LaHue, and Rob Marani.

Staff present: Ralph Bracamonte, Rosemary Menard, and Sierra Ryan.

Consultants present: Tim Carson, Rob Swartz, and Laura Partch (Regional Water Management Foundation (RWMF)).

Others: Bryce Matsumura (Department of Water Resources (DWR)) and three members of the public.

3. Oral Communications Related to Items Not on the Agenda

Becky Steinbruner requested information on a public hearing and the State AEM helicopter survey.

4. Consent Agenda

4.1 Approve June 15, 2023 Meeting Minutes

MOTION: Director Baskin; Second, Director Koenig. To approve the consent agenda. Motion passed unanimously; Director Whitney abstained.

5. General Business

5.1 Receive Information on the Development of the Groundwater Extraction Metering Program for Non-De Minimis Users

Staff provided background on the Groundwater Extraction Metering Program for Non-De Minimis Users (Metering Program), described proposed next steps, and responded to questions from the Board. The Board discussed registration for existing wells, status of permitting, notice to parcels that may be subject to the Metering Program, administrative costs, ownership of meters, authorities of Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) under the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), and the intent to obtain legal counsel with expertise in SGMA implementation related issues moving forward.

Public Comment: Becky Steinbruner appreciated issues raised in the Board discussion and encouraged the MGA to gain the trust of private well owners through informational meetings. Ms. Steinbruner inquired about the availability of the MGA Metering Plan.

Staff responded that the Metering Plan was posted on the MGA website, and noted that the MGA has funding in the SGMI grant that may support efforts related to well registration and metering.

No Board action was required or taken.

5.2 Consider the Temporary Board Committee Recommendations and Appoint the Private Well Owner Representative Director and Alternate Director

At the June 15, 2023 meeting, the Board established a temporary Board committee for the appointment of a Private Well Owner (PWO) Director and Alternate Director. Following the work of the committee in finalizing the application and conducting outreach, seven applications were received.

All applicants were interviewed by the committee. Not all of the applicants were familiar with Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, the MGA, or the GSP. As a result, the subcommittee recommended that during the next solicitation for PWO Director(s), the MGA offer information sessions and online resources to educate potential applicants. Other ideas were discussed by the Board, including a one-page summary of the roles and responsibilities of PWO Director and more user-friendly information on the website.

The committee used a ranked-choice voting process and recommended the reappointment of Jim Kerr as Director and Robert Schultz as Alternate Director. The appointments will come back to the Board in December for approval of the term effective date by Board resolution as required in the Bylaws.

Public Comment: Becky Steinbruner appreciated the process, the new appointments, and encouraged the Board and PWO representatives to engage in outreach to the community.

MOTION: Director Romanini; Second, Director Baskin to reappoint Jim Kerr as Director and Robert Schultz as Alternate Director as representatives of Private Well Owners. Motion passed unanimously by roll call vote of Member Agency Directors.

6. Informational Updates

6.1 Treasurer’s Report

No comments or questions.

6.2 Staff Reports

- GSP Implementation Status Update

Trout Unlimited continued with dry season stream monitoring which started last year, and with groundwater monitoring which is being conducted on a quarterly basis. It is anticipated that a remaining data gap identified in the 2020 GSP will be addressed by the installation of a shallow groundwater monitoring well located along Olive Springs Road. Construction of this monitoring well will be funded by the Sustainable Groundwater Management Implementation grant (SGMI Grant). Montgomery and Associates are moving forward with gathering and evaluating data for the annual GSP report for Water Year 2023 and will be reporting to the Board at the December meeting.

- Sustainable Groundwater Planning Grant Update

The MGA’s Sustainable Groundwater Planning grant (2018 – 2023) from DWR was recently completed. This grant provided funding for the GSP development, the GSP advisory committee, stakeholder engagement, the groundwater model, data management system, monitoring, and the initial work on the groundwater extraction metering plan. The total grant award for Round 2 of the grant was \$1.5 million with a 50% local cost share, and Round 3 contributed another \$500,000 with \$170,000 local cost share.

- SGMI Grant Update

This grant includes five components and while work is underway, some of the components have had more activity than others. Staff provided a brief update regarding the recent activity. Staff will be providing updates at each Board meeting. Staff requested input from the Board on the degree of detail to provide to the Board in the future.

A Board member expressed interest in updates on issues that may impact project completion under the grant.

6.3 Legal Counsel on SGMA Implementation Actions

Staff will be moving forward with obtaining specialized SGMA legal counsel and expects to have more information on that at the December Board meeting. Staff noted that the MGA also has new legal counsel within the County Counsel’s office.

Public Comment: Becky Steinbruner sought clarification regarding the new legal counsel. Staff clarified that Santa Cruz County still serves as the MGA’s general counsel but the primary individual assigned to support the MGA within the County Counsel’s Office recently changed.

7. Future Agenda Items

- Follow up on the lack of a response from KISTERS to the letter sent regarding the data breach.
- For long-term planning purposes, provide an assessment of projects that do not have grant funding and how they will be handled.
 - Staff responded that these projects will be addressed as part of the 5-Year GSP Evaluation. The Periodic Evaluation of the GSP will be discussed at the December meeting.

8. Written Communications and Submitted Materials

8.1 Letter of Support Small GSA Coalition Update

This issue was raised by staff at a previous Board meeting; the letter is now provided to the Board. No updates were reported.

9. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:20 by Chair Kennedy.

Next Board Meeting: December 14, 2023