

Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency Advisory Committee Meeting

Monday, September 11, 2023 | Meeting Summary

Contact: Andy Rodgers, Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA), Administrator
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MEETING SUMMARY

Welcome and Call to Order

Andy Rodgers, Administrator, opened the meeting at 3:01p.m. and Bob Anderson, Chair, welcomed the group.

General Public Comments

Rue Furch asked how the public can provide comment to meeting packets.
Rodgers – Email, phone call, etc.

Agenda Review, Approval of Previous Meeting Summary

Objective: Confirm agenda and approve May 22, 2023 meeting summary.

Andy Rodgers provided an overview of the meeting agenda. No changes were requested to the previous meeting summary; it will be posted as written.

No public comment.

City of Santa Rosa Water Supply Planning Update

Objective: Share updates on City's water supply planning process

Colin Close, City of Santa Rosa, gave an update on the City's water supply planning process. There has been a 45% decrease in water use between 2005 and 2020. It is estimated that there will be a 48% increase of residents between 2005 and 2045, using just 9% more water than in 2005, given newer water efficiencies.

The City of Santa Rosa's Water Supply Resiliency Goal is to diversify and increase city supplies, and to reduce dependence on Sonoma Water, particularly during supply shortages or disruption in delivery. To look at alternatives, a team of water engineers and operations personnel was formed.

Initial assessment included 18 supply options. Five options were removed during a pre-screening process and another six options were removed during the screening process leaving seven for further analysis:

1. Groundwater 1: Add Extraction Wells
2. Groundwater 2: Convert Emergency Wells to Production Wells
3. Groundwater 3: Add Aquifer Storage & Recovery Wells

4. Purified Recycled Water 2: Satellite Direct Potable Reuse
5. Purified Recycled Water 4: Regional Direct Potable Reuse at Laguna Treatment Plant
6. Surface/Stormwater 1: Stormwater Storage in Aquifer
7. Efficiency 1: Efficiency Programs

Criteria and weights were then applied for evaluation and qualitative scoring. Portfolios were created with four main areas of focus: 1. Least cost; 2. Fastest to implement; 3. Most water capacity; and 4. Most adaptive/flexible. The public draft plan of best resulting options should be available by October 1. Colin Close will forward the plan to GSA staff.

Questions/Comments

Maureen Soiland – Why don't you increase the operating burden? Is it too difficult to estimate?

Close – There is a small increase; operating costs do go up a little bit. Our capital investment is huge, and our operating costs are low. We are looking at the full financial impact. The goal is to produce 30% of our demand which is about 7,500 acre-feet.

David Noren – What does Santa Rosa do to change behavior? Luxurious lawns and lush landscaping seem out of place. Do you change behavior with a rate structure or incentives? How does the city approach it?

Close – Santa Rosa has fully funded water-use efficiency programs for over 30 years, that is the incentive-based approach. We think half of the decrease in water use is based on incentives. The other 50% is building codes, plumbing codes, and landscaping ordinances. You can't install a lawn like you could in the past. There is a water budget for landscaping. It means increasing rebates with a business incentive. We have a rate structure based on water use indoors (based on winter months usage). If you had a catastrophic event, water use efficiency isn't sufficient to address emergency demand. There are two pieces to the issue, the city needs the ability to create its own water supply above what it has today.

Bob Anderson – What do you need to do to make the existing emergency wells usable today?

Close – They need to meet primary water quality standards – clean enough so they do not violate any health and safety standards. The facilities need to be expanded to include green sand, so the wells can remove manganese, iron, and arsenic. The emergency wells can only be used 15 days in a year. We need to do tests and check other wells in the proximity.

Matt O'Connor – What do you think the potential conflicts are between Santa Rosa Plain GSA's Plan and how do you foresee interacting with the larger City of Santa Rosa's plan?

Close – Ensuring all Santa Rosa Plain users are responsible users. The groundwater basin in the Plan shows a small deficit every year. Pumping more water without keeping that in mind, isn't enough. We need to look at balancing additional water extraction with additional recharge.

Sarah Davis – What is the progress on composting toilets?

Close – Re-composting toilets are mandated by state health, not city. We don't have control over that.

Davis – Given people are drought responsive, is there anything that can be done to encourage the Board of Supervisors to put in place mandatory reporting of water use and pumping?

Close – The City of Santa Rosa doesn't report to the County Board of Supervisors. In the City of Santa Rosa, we know exactly how much water is being used, all customers are metered. We can identify silent leaks and request correction/repairs.

Rue Furch – If you drill new wells or convert emergency wells to production wells, and you are attempting to do aquifer injection, how do you make sure the deeper wells don't impact the aquifer for everyone? It is important, there isn't any withdrawal that affects everyone, without mitigation. All jurisdictions report to the county.

Close – City policy is to do environmental review (CEQA process) on major projects. If you look at one well at a time, you aren't looking at the whole picture. A programmatic document probably would be our best bet.

Furch – CEQA is an analysis, but it doesn't guarantee there is no impact.

Peter Martin – There is a global idea of what is going on with the GSA.

Close – Santa Rosa is very committed to the GSA's Groundwater Sustainability Plan. The good thing about the plan, is that it is a strategy approach and studies need to be done.

Public Question/Comments

None.

Policy Options Study

Objective: Receive AC feedback on design of policy options study, including the following questions:

- *Do the phasing categories and groupings seem reasonable?*
- *Do you agree that options under Continue or Initiate Implementation be considered at the October GSA Board meeting?*
- *Do you have a recommended priority for the options grouped under Further Evaluate?*
- *Do the recommended next steps seem appropriate?*

One of the management actions included in the GSP is GSA Board consideration of potential policy and program options to implement near-term or sometime in the future. This management action focuses on advancing programs and actions to help achieve and maintain sustainable groundwater conditions within the Subbasin. The GSA is studying and planning both demand side and supply side measures such as large-scale recharge or recycled water projects, to help achieve and maintain sustainability.

Bob Anderson thanked members for their input until now. At this meeting he was looking to get additional AC feedback but thought there might not be sufficient time to come up with final recommendations in time for the upcoming Board meeting. Staff will seek input from the Board at their October meeting.

Marcus Trotta provided an overview of recommended categorization and phasing of implementation of options. He highlighted Study Policies concurrent with other GSP projects and actions and gave an overview of Advisory Committee input policies. The recommended approach to the Planning and Implementing Policy and Program Options is a phased and "condition-based" approach. Proposed categorization is:

1. Continue or Initiate Planning/Implementation
2. Further Evaluate – Further evaluation is ongoing and includes continued information compilation, evaluation of potential benefits and impacts, and coordination with other agencies and interested parties.
3. Place On-hold – Continue assessment and monitoring of statewide or other similar efforts being undertaken elsewhere. Update recommended status on a minimum bi-annual basis or as new information indicates more focused planning should be conducted.

Questions/Comments

Furch – Can you define ‘groundwater allocation framework’.

Trotta – Groundwater allocation framework relies on a good estimate of sustainable yield in the basin, which is how much groundwater can be pumped without producing undesirable results, and good information on parcel-specific groundwater use. The groundwater allocation would be taking the sustainable yield and dividing it up amongst all the groundwater users within the basin. There are different ways to come up with an allocation. Essentially, it is the amount of water each well owner would be allocated.

Furch – We are looking forward to a couple years of good rain; one of the priorities should be that we know everything we need to know/do and are prepared before the next drought.

Trotta – Some of the activities included here such as conservation will help with that. An area identified in our grant application is to do a more focused evaluation of well depths; it is part of a related study the county is required to do by Senate Bill 582. The GSA is engaged in that process, there are lots of opportunities to work with the county and identify future risks.

Furch – Filling in data gaps won’t solve problems; it will only identify questions.

David Long – The GSA is an agency charged with collecting data, but the agency doesn’t have power. We are going to collect data and educate people; we need to focus on projects and policies.

Trotta – The GSA does have the authority to build capital projects and limit extractions.

Long – True, but you won’t build them in a vacuum.

Trotta – Yes, partnerships are key to that.

Davis – I don’t understand why a mandatory metering program for non-de minimis users is on hold. With the new well ordinance, there will be some new wells for big users. We are required to deal with things in an equitable way. This seems like low hanging fruit; I don’t agree it is on hold.

Trotta – Our recommendation on this is to collect data on how a program like that would work so the GSA can decide whether and how to move forward with a mandatory metering program.

Martin – Thank you for taking my feedback. I think the projects listed are right and probably will score well for additional grant funding. As a priority, I like the conditions-based approach. I am comfortable with what has been put together. I want to make sure there is no requirement under SGMA re “policies”.

Trotta – There is no mandate from SGMA on specific policies.

Anderson – On the Voluntary Water Use Efficiency Program, what is included/not included in tools and incentives?

Trotta – We have made good progress on water efficiency programs in the region. We are leveraging tools to decide which are the ones best suited for well owners.

Anderson – \$600,000 – is that for acquiring toilets?

Trotta – We haven’t developed a budget for specific tools; we need to evaluate what tools might be best.

Anderson – What is the timeframe?

Trotta – We will be working on the assessment the early part of next year to kick it off. If we are successful with the getting the grant funding, the pilot program would need to be completed by early 2026.

Close – In terms of the assessment, it would be great if we would look at the most cost saving benefits for the least amount of money – toilets, washing machines, etc. requiring the least amount of behavioral change. People can come to the city with water saving ideas and receive rebates. It would be great if the same could be done for de-minimis well users.

O'Connor – From a statewide perspective it seems our basin doesn't have very serious problems. I think your list is appropriate. I feel a little uncomfortable that we aren't asking the Board to think about how they will go about it when tough decisions are needed.

Trotta – We definitely want to share 'further evaluate' and 'place on hold' policies with the Board so they know what things are on the radar, as well as to get some direction from the Board on which items, they feel might be most appropriate to move forward.

Shirley Johnson – Do you look at leakage in tanks?

Close – We do in Santa Rosa. We offer free toilet flappers and free leak detectors. We reach people through billing!

Furch – That is why education is so important. Planning is essential before we have another drought. There are things we need to do with data collection but there are also preventive things that need to happen.

Anderson – When Senator McGuire was supervising, there was money available for people in rural areas to swap out their toilets. How much money was available and how much was spent?

Trotta – I don't have the exact numbers but there was money made available to well owners. We had challenges related to outreach for that program.

Rodgers – When the GSA promoted that, it was a brand-new incentive. Our database outreach is much more complete and better now.

Rodgers – This will be the first time the Board hears this. We are in search of a more 'mature' version of existing input – the current list, what we heard today, and any verbal or written input received by September 25. Please email or call Marcus Trotta or Indigo Bannister with additional input/responses to the questions.

O'Connor – I don't have any heartburn regarding the list, but I am unsure we achieved consensus today.

Rodgers – Rather than reach a consensus, we are wanting to capture a range of input and direction.

Davis – Since we are in a climate emergency that is probably not going to end soon, advising 'dramatic action' would be more appropriate. I like what we laid out so far, but it doesn't flash emergency.

Rodgers – Good input. We need to emphasize the importance of this.

Public Questions/Comments

None.

Standing Item: GSP Implementation Updates

Objective: Provide AC with progress updates on GSP implementation

The Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) was submitted on January 29, 2022 by the Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) and implementation activities began upon submission of the GSP. On January 26, 2023, DWR issued its approval of the GSP for the Subbasin. Marcus Trotta provided an update of in-progress and near-term planned activities for the following implementation components: addressing data gaps for interconnected surface water, GDEs, and groundwater levels, and initial planning for projects and management actions.

- *Voluntary Monitoring Program – Monitoring Subcommittee Update*
- *ISW/GDE Data Gap Program – Seepage Run Program Update*
- *Sonoma Water's Santa Rosa Plain Drought Resiliency Program Update*

- *General Statewide SGMA Updates*

Questions/Comments

O'Connor – When the subcommittees meet, is there an email sent out so interested people can attend?

Trotta – Yes.

Long – The Occidental Road well could do with a little 'beautification!'

Noren – The Occidental well could be a great teachable moment; some outreach would be great.

Trotta – Pamela van Halsema sent out a letter very recently.

Craig Scott – Is the Permit Sonoma report back on the drought order?

Trotta – Recent changes at Permit Sonoma have been related to the Governor's Executive Order. We have been coordinating very closely with them. They also amended their well ordinance recently to address public trust resources. They will update the Board of Supervisors on that at some time soon.

Peter Martin – What is DWR's end goal with well permitting? Is there potential for legislation or regulation later?

Trotta – Part of it is to look at how the coordination is working. In a response to legislation, it would be to make that requirement permanent. DWR is issuing guidance that would then go to inform future legislative proposals.

Public Questions/Comments

None.

Standing Item: GSA Operational Updates

Objective: Provide progress updates on GSA administration and operations

Andy Rodgers gave an update on GSA administration and operations. The SRP GSA has been awarded full funding of \$5,383,730 from DWR under the SGM Implementation Grant program. The GSA needs to be ready to move as soon as they execute a grant contract with DWR. In preparation of the funding, the Sonoma County GSAs released a Request for Qualifications for GSP Implementation services. GSA and member agency staff are currently reviewing and scoring submissions. We expect the final list of qualified firms by October.

Other grants being pursued include CA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, Restoration Grant and WaterSMART, Drought Response Grant Program.

No questions or comments.

Meeting Wrap Up and Closing

Bob Anderson noted that when we meet again, we will be five months into the new water year.

Andy Rodgers thanked everyone for their attendance and input and closed the meeting at 5:28 p.m.

The next Board meeting will take place Thursday, October 12, 1:00 – 3:30 pm and the next Advisory Committee will be Monday, February 26, 2024 from 3:00 pm – 5:30 pm.

Attendees:

Advisory Committee Members (present)

Agricultural representative, Bob Anderson
Agricultural representative, David Long
City of Cotati, Craig Scott
City of Santa Rosa appointee, Peter Martin
City of Sebastopol, Ryan Crawford
Environmental representative, Shirley Johnson
Environmental representative, Rue Furch
Gold Ridge RCD appointee, Matt O'Connor
Independent Water Systems appointee, Sarah Davis (arrived 3:10 pm)
Rural Residential representative, David Noren
Rural Residential representative, Marlene Soiland
Sonoma RCD appointee, Wayne Haydon
Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria representative, Christy Siojo, replacing Maureen Geary

Advisory Committee Members (absent and/or excused)

Business representative, Arthur Deicke
County of Sonoma appointee, Mark Grismer
Town of Windsor appointee, Elizabeth Cargay
City of Rohnert Park appointee, Justin Brandt

Staff/Presenters

Andy Rodgers, GSA Administrator
Marcus Trotta, Plan Manager
Indigo Bannister, GSA staff
Pamela van Halsema, Outreach
Simone Peters, GSA staff, *recording meeting summary*

Other Attendees

1 member of public