

Tabletop Discussions Notes
Santa Rosa Plain Funding Options Community Workshop

General Notes, Comments, Ideas, Questions

Common themes

USE MORE-PAY MORE:

- Businesses making money and using water should be paying more/a significant amount (i.e. wineries and casino)
- Want municipalities, user agencies to pay
- Metering better over long term – gather data about how everything works together, usage
- Stay away from per-well fee until more information is gathered
- If only well owners are paying, they should stop paying for other water supply projects (WSD)

EVERYONE PAYS

- Find a way to extend fees to entire county/watershed, because it's not fair that it's just the basin
- Only fair way is to charge all users - goal to get everyone who uses to pay
- Keep simple to avoid bureaucracy.
- Should keep Phase I mechanism simple
- Russian River users should pay – doesn't that affect things?
- Per-parcel fee is the least expensive, easiest way to get it done. Does parcel fee have to go to a vote?

TIERED SYSTEM

- Tiered system that allows everyone to pay something, but includes a charge for amount of water used.
- "If I get charged \$20 a year, I won't be upset, but I would be if a big user were charged the same"
- Parcel tax combined with use type/user class
- Need to apply an algebraic equation...

RECHARGE/CONSERVATION

- Metering will help with conservation – both
- Consider recharge! Septic, landscape – already returning water to land! Why should I pay? Also, recharge areas blocked by development, buildings
- Should have credits/incentives for recharge, greywater, stormwater catching
- Cities should be required to capture rainwater to recharge aquifer

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THINGS TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT FOR ANY STRUCTURE

- Account for open space and recharge!
- Note impact of water used for purification systems
- Wineries waste water washing equipment
- What would be exempt from any of these options? (ies. government, business.....)
- Who is missed by this structure?
- Cheaper to pay now than to pay for subsidence, repair later
- Many people thought the budget numbers were high
- Homeowners sometimes barely have enough water – what happens to home prices if they run out?
- It was mentioned that residential wells wouldn't be charged? What is a residential well?
- How to safeguard low-income users?
- Cap on costs, both amount and lifetime, will make people feel more secure
- Can there be a lifetime cap on annual charge? i.e. 50 years
- Change board/Advisory Committee times to allow people to attend
- Check 35% ag water statistic – they think it's propaganda by the industry
- Must educate everyone so they understand fees – non-well owners are NOT familiar with SGMA but must be if they will be charged
- Need education on water use
- People want to know metrics on big wells vs small wells, etc.
- Meeting timing and available information are limiting factors in decision making at this time
- Final option needs to be easy to understand

OTHER FUNDING IDEAS

- Take from Sonoma County general fund (some other tax raised)
- Hotel tax – popular
- Charge businesses in basins making money, using lots of water
- Tiered system
- Water suppliers should pay and distribute costs to ratepayers
- Should be exemption for basic use level if usage based

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- 5-cent charge on every bottle of wine!
- Sonoma County wine growers - fundraisers
- Find more grants
- Increase sales tax by 1/1000th (or very small amount)
- Add \$1 per night per tourist (bed tax) - or recent increase
- Adjust property taxes to be more fair
- Increase fees on new wells

OUTSIDE COUNTY/BASIN

- This basin sends water to other counties – Marin – export fee per volume with a profit
- Should not be able to send groundwater outside of basin – tax anyone who does
- Need to think about use outside of basin

Tabletop Discussions Notes
 Santa Rosa Plain Funding Options Community Workshop

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the pros and cons of distributing costs to all land owners in the groundwater basin on a per-parcel basis?

PROS	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General support from multiple tables - favored • Cheap • If you don't use GW now, you may one day • Fair to use whole area, not only wells • Manageable, simpler → lower admin cost • Everyone bears cost – cheaper for each person • Equitable – entire county, a lot of people drawing water from WSD/SCWA; also, groundwater affects everybody • Larger parcels contribute more recharge • Most affordable – most people won't feel a small hit • Preferable to well owners – affordable • Preferred over per-acre • Could add user charge to balance out cons • City lots should be charged to spread costs further • Properties that don't use water still benefit from GW • No metering cost • City users don't necessarily recharge water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People pay in cities but don't use much – double charge • City users pay for Lake Sonoma, but well users don't pay (?) • Needs 2/3 vote – unlikely, and expensive process - Non-well owners may vote against even a \$5 charge • May not indicate water use - Different sizes and uses of properties – variables include bedrooms, people, sq ft, acreage, vacant or unused land, different types of land use, etc. What about the guy in a shack vs. guy in a mansion? • Doesn't encourage water conservation • Owners with multiple parcels have to pay more – not fair • What if a parcel is sold? • Doesn't account for commercial vs residential/money made • There could be 5 parcels on one well, paying 5x for one well • Miss people who live in the basin but don't own parcels – who else are you missing? • Confusion about who is designated a property owner • “If I get charged \$20 a year, I won't be upset, but I would be if a big user were charged the same”

a) We acknowledge that dropping the parcel charge may not cover all costs, but do the pros/cons change if the parcel charge is under \$20 a year? \$10 or less per year?

- General agreement that under \$20 is fine, not worth complaining about, but more is not ok. Some say less than \$10 makes a difference.
- No change in opinion for some people
- Also – want a base rate set – need to know potential cost range say over 20 years

Tabletop Discussions Notes
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2. What are the pros and cons of distributing costs to all landowners in the basin on a per-acre basis?

PROS	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone participates • Keep cost down for smaller landowners • General agreement that this would only work in combination with land use – not a lot of pros, NONE at one table 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No one at table likes this (multiple tables) - worse than per-parcel • Should be based on usage (agreement) – unirrigated pasture vs. brewery, 100 acre of wild land and a small house vs. 100 acre vineyard • Big acreage but no well – why pay? • Wildlife/natural areas would pay too much – discourages voluntary open spaces being maintained • Burden on large land owners – too costly • Doesn't account for water use, disconnected from impact on GW use • Doesn't distinguish between gw well/municipal supply • Doesn't encourage conservation • Double billing for municipal customers • Size of land not related to water use • Doesn't account for recharge, particularly as larger parcels recharge more • How to account for apartments/population density?

a) Acknowledging that not all costs may be covered, do the pros/cons change if the charge is less than \$10 per acre? NO

Tabletop Discussions Notes
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3. What are the pros and cons of distributing costs to all landowners in the basin on a per-acre basis taking into account how they use their land as it relates to groundwater use (e.g. residents, farms, businesses)?

PROS	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More equitable than just by size • Simple, more fair than per acre (#2) • More detail is probably more fair • Has to be by water use • Favors residential users • County probably already has ideas about who is using water for different users/Sonoma veg map – use to decide how much people pay based on usage • May keep people using a lot of water (winery, cattle, distillery) accountable • Account for big vineyards sucking up water when others have low quality wells • More responsive, and city wells pay the same as “us” • Good if accounting for land use change over time • Land use using large amounts of water should be charged their fair share • Good for Phase II (equitable) too complex for Phase I (general agreement) • Should use numerical valuation of property use, base charges on valuation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we trust who makes the assumption? • What if landscape is low water? • Likely that wineries, cattle, distilleries will get exemptions due to political power; 5 acres of winery can use 5 million/year – will be political cutouts for industry • “how much water people are allowed to use” is a challenging question; how will use type be determined? • Complicated administration, too time consuming, too much money; difficulty accurately establishing land use; Would need to account for many types – dry farming, frost management • Residential users on city water are already paying • Large acreage charges could be unfair • Political challenges from large land owners/ag • How to address change in land use over time • Could target people who are benefiting our community and not making much money – farmers, etc. • Account for crop water use vs. profit margins • Inequities within use classes could exist • Home inspections? • Based on zoning? Could be mistakes • Responsible vs. irresponsible practices (i.e. at vineyards) • Would need to account for monthly variation (e.g. wineries may use water at one time of year)

Tabletop Discussions Notes
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4. What are the pros and cons of distributing costs to all well owners in the basin?

PROS	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General agreement – only good with monitoring/usage base • Could shift administrative cost for urban users to utilities • “No pros here” • Most city users don’t have wells • Needs to include all wells - cities, water agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not fair (agreement from multiple tables) • Well owners already pay (electricity and maintenance) • Not only well users benefit from groundwater • Need to consider wells not being used, old wells, collapsed/dry/etc. • Shallow vs. deep wells, different capacities – would need metering to be fair • Region-wide issue falls on a few people - should be spread out more - not fair to rural residential well owners - only ~5% of the parcels, roughly, would pay 100% of cost • Huge fee vs parcel tax • Doesn’t address beer or vineyards • Bigger users should pay more • Everyone pays for WSD, so everyone should pay for this • Doesn’t encourage conservation • Accurate well count difficult, expensive • Cost of enforcement • Well owners aren’t only users • Water Agency wells outside basin? Aquifers connected to surface water – depletion/less recharge due to surface water use? • Some city users do have wells • Loses “all in it together” feeling • Well owners are already conscientious about how much water they use • Well owners might sell their water (needs to be usage based) • Well owners might want to be on city water

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a) Do the pros and cons change if we charge all well owners in the basin for the amount of water they pump?

PROS	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, it changes things • Equitable – same amount per user class per acre foot • Reasonable approach • Encourages conservation • Only equitable way to charge wells • Metering is good long term – saves water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not equitable to whole basin • Cost of metering could be prohibitive (to owners) • Conservation → more expensive rates? • Not enough time for metering for Phase I • May depend on whether same rate is charged for all users

b) Cities and water districts use groundwater, and have large wells. If we charge cities or water districts, what are the pros and cons of them passing those costs on to residents as part of their water bills?

PROS	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cities use wells for emergency supply – they should pay for that use • More equitable – people pay for usage • Discourage over pumping, promote conservation • Everyone should pay! • People are used to paying for water, wouldn't balk • Don't have to own it, just use it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wouldn't pay enough for how much they pump (if not usage-based) • Administrative burden to municipal water systems • Low income is a hardship – better for Phase II

5. Is there a combination of options that you believe would be fair and equitable?

- Pay partial fee by parcel (all), and then pay additional by how much you use (de minimis exempt from per-gallon fee)
- Well owners based on pumpage
- Tiered well owner usage based fee – same rate per user class per acre-foot
- Every well owner pays a small progressive well fee (base on size of pump?), plus AF/year charge – preferred by many
- Combo is NECESSARY to be fair – everyone needs to pay
- Combo for Phase II only
- Can parcel tax be divided by class of use?

Tabletop Discussions Notes
Santa Rosa Plain Funding Options Community Workshop

- Divide usage between essential (life supporting, ag that is food source, drinking water) and non-essential
- Per parcel + per acre fee
- Small per parcel fee + tiered charges by water use type “class of use” – percentages determined through a study
- Minimum base charge per residence plus per acre charge

a) Is there one option or combination of options that you prefer?

- One table – 6/11 want per parcel, 2/11 want per acre-foot, 3/11 don’t support any option
- Per parcel – least complicated, most equitable for Phase I (popular opinion)
- Usage-based for Phase II – use is important, depending on how complicated and costly to determine
- Parcel tax/fee for limited time – 2 years