

Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency  
Advisory Committee Meeting  
MEETING SUMMARY

Meeting date/time: April 9, 2018 | 3:00 pm – 5:30 pm

Location: City of Santa Rosa Utility Field Office, 35 Stony Circle Drive, Santa Rosa, CA 95401

Contact: Ann DuBay, Sonoma County Water Agency

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Sonoma County Groundwater Website: <http://sonomacountygroundwater.org>

## MEETING RECAP

- Rich Wilson, facilitator with the Center for Collaborative Policy, opened the meeting, reviewed the agenda and provided an initial opportunity for public comments.
- Ann DuBay, Public Information Officer with the Sonoma County Water Agency (Interim Administrator), updated the Advisory Committee on the Community Meeting which took place March 21<sup>st</sup>, provided an overview of pros and cons of each potential rate/fee option and summarized discussions and next steps.
- Marcus Trotta, Sonoma County Water Agency hydrogeologist, provided an orientation to GSP requirements and iterative steps and work plan to prepare the Santa Rosa Plain GSA Plan.
- Ann DuBay provided the Advisory Committee with relevant updates.

## Summary of Action Items

<i>Action Item</i>	<i>Responsible Party</i>	<i>Deadline</i>
Provide input to Ann DuBay on proposed Advisory Committee Charter language regarding use of Alternates	Advisory Committee Members	Friday, May 4, 2018

**Next Meeting:** May 7, 2018, 3:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m., City of Santa Rosa’s Utility Field Office (UFO), 35 Stony Circle Drive

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## MEETING SUMMARY

### Welcome, Introductions and Agenda Review

Rich Wilson, facilitator with the Center for Collaborative Policy, opened the meeting, suggested a round of introductions, then followed with an overview of the meeting’s agenda and ground rules. He then opened the floor for public comment:

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Lee, from company WellIntell – mentioned that his business tracks wells and water levels and develops groundwater level monitoring networks. Lee had informational flyers available for the public at the meeting.

Charlene Stone, rural residential well user from West Santa Rosa, questioned who is advising the Board on how much water can be used by the cannabis industry.

Duane De Witt, rural residential well user Roseland - mentioned that “the word is not out” that the small well user will not be punished with large fees.

No other public comments were put forward.

### **Rate and Fee Study Discussion**

Ann DuBay provided an update on the March 21 Community Workshop, the pros and cons of each potential rate/fee option and summarized discussions and next steps. Some common themes from different groups at the meeting included 1) use more/pay more, 2) everyone should pay, 3) tiered or hybrid option that everyone pays something and those who use more, pay more 4) re-charge and conservation. We have learned from our attorneys what fees are and what taxes are and are now aware there are strict legal parameters. We know more now than at the outset of our research, and we are more constricted. Nothing has been determined yet. Options have been narrowed down to four selections.

- Question – do we still have the latitude to enforce a fee on de-minimus users?
  - Answer – SGMA defines de-minimus groundwater users as using less than 2-acre feet per year (about 1,700-1,800 gallons a day). For domestic use, metering is not required, and fees can be assessed if well owners are regulated. Regulation could be a simple well registration program.
- Question – Will the discussion today be reported back to the Board? Or will there be more discussion time before that happens?
  - Answer – Rue Furch will report this meeting’s feedback to the Board on Thursday, April 12. The Board will also get a report from Sally Van Etten (Raftelis), Jay Jasperse (Sonoma County Water Agency) and Ann DuBay with current options outlined for Board feedback. Sally will be at the Advisory Committee meeting in May. Options may have been narrowed down further by that time, and there may be the possibility to weigh in again.
- Question – Could you expand on the recent court decisions on how the GSA can apply fees.
  - Answer – CA Supreme Court decided that Proposition 218 fee process can’t be used for groundwater as it isn’t distributed through the municipal system.

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The Advisory Committee members were asked to split into four breakout groups representing diverse interests to discuss the following options: Prop 26 Regulatory Fee – Pure extraction-based methodology; Prop 26 Regulator Fee - Hybrid methodology; Parcel tax; and State Intervention. Following their meetings, they were to report their findings to the entire audience. Public attendees simultaneously met and discussed the various options in breakout groups.

**Advisory Committee group 1:**

Doug Beretta (Rural residential), Mary Grace Pawson (City of Rohnert Park), Carolyn Dixon (Sonoma County Water Agency), Sebastian Bertsch (Environmental)

**Advisory Committee group 2:**

Chris Bates (Independent Water Systems), David Long (Agriculture), Jennifer Burke (City of Santa Rosa)

**Advisory Committee group 3:**

Marlene Soiland (Rural residential), Wayne Haydon (Sonoma RCD), Rue Furch (Environmental), Bob Anderson (Agriculture)

**Advisory Committee group 4:**

Henry Mikus (City of Sebastopol), Joe Gaffney (Business), Maureen Geary (Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria), Sandi Potter (Town of Windsor)

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**Option 1: Pure Extraction Methodology**

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**Merits:**

- Pay for use
- Encourages conservation
- Use metered data as available – good
- Using metered data will provide an accurate way for users to pay for what they use
  - o Based on # in households

**Cons:**

- Many wells not metered – cost to rural residential and agricultural users
- Many wells not identified (pre-1955)
- Estimates include assumptions and don't identify individual circumstances

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- May be difficult to set up this system
- Seems too hard, lack of data
- Difficulty measuring water use, especially rural residential
- Would require installation of meters

Additional comments/suggestions:

- Add mutual as a category and bill on metered usage if applicable
- Find percentage of impervious vs. pervious and provide recharge benefit for all categories based on calculation/percentage
- Consider incentives for metered data
- Will the number of people/users in a household be a consideration in rates charged?
- Credits for recharging groundwater with reclaimed water?
- Recycled water use for crops needs credit from per acre crop use charge
- Getting well owners registered could be quite a project and should be done *now*
- Need per parcel fee plus extraction fee
- How would a single owner apportion fee to multiple water users? (mobile home park)
- Land use categories to pay different rates – people who profit should pay more and we should protect rural residential
- Differentiate industrial users (waste goes to wastewater plant), agriculture (runoff infiltrates back to groundwater)
- Measuring at the wellhead is not equitable (spring water users)
- We will/should move to this as we get more data
- There will be a balance between more data and less cost, particularly in the short term

**Option 2: Hybrid Methodology**

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Merits:

- Pay for use
- Encourages conservation
- Everyone contributes a small amount if parcel fee is assessed
- Conservation encouraged with per gallon fee – 51% rural well owners; 32% agriculture
- More fair
- Easier to develop than pure extraction method

Cons:

- Many wells not metered – cost to rural residential and agricultural users
- Many wells not identified (pre-1955)

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- Doesn't allow credit for high water use.
- If less water is used, then possibly there won't be enough money to fund system.
- Estimates include assumptions and don't identify individual circumstances
- Estimates allocated to specific users is difficult
- Hard to measure the use of water

Additional comments/suggestions:

- Add mutual water companies as a category
- Not enough consideration for variables, i.e. soil type, crop variation
- Could be a template for future charges
- Needs to credit user for other water sources such as reclaimed water
- Apply per acre allocation to irrigated acreage only
- Need per parcel fee plus extraction fee
- Could make it more equitable by having a flat metered fee (for everyone) and by volume rate (tiered rates). Would need a "smart" meter.
- Whose responsibility is it to install, maintain, replace, and read the meter?
- Uses USGS values of usage by type (20, 30, 50)
- As a board, can we advocate for this method which has flaws
- It's fair to have a general use for residential (assume # people)
  - o Every household should get some reasonable flat budget
- Needs method for allowing people to petition for rate reduction (does this add admin cost?)
- "How many generalities can we afford in our first fee structure"
- What boundaries on maximum cost for hybrid?
- If people use less → income is less → funding issue (smaller use, higher rates)
  - o For example, if we assume people use 2-acre ft per house, then they meter and find usage is 0.5 acre ft, how do we make up the difference in funds?

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**Option 3: Parcel Tax**

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Merits:

- Easy to manage, simple
- Collection process handled with tax bill
- Most equitable
- Most feasible
- Cost effective - High number of parcels in basin equals lower fees

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Cons:

- Difficult to pass new tax measure - requires two-third majority vote, don't think voters will approve
- Cost to put on ballot is high
- Time involved is extensive
- Not necessarily fair system
- Do not think it is realistic
- No merit for GSA
- Risk to lose ballot measure makes it expensive, waste of time and money

Additional comments/questions:

- Would there be adjustment for water use?
- Need a way to recognize use of recycled water
- Surface water? Spring water users?
- "Everything about this is skewed"
- Easiest to start with if it can pass
- Equal, but not fair

**Option 4: State Intervention**

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Comments:

- Has no merit to meet goal of GSA
  - No, unless less expensive than our fees
  - Expensive
  - Lose local control
  - Adjudication should be avoided (takes too long, expensive)
  - Avoid state intervention – will be slow, cumbersome, and expensive
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General / Overall Comments from Advisory Committee:

- Consider disadvantaged communities with a program to assist low income / disadvantaged groundwater users (life line programs, reductions) – Required by SGMA
- Public outreach should focus on Phase I (next 3 years) and revisit after that
- Get rid of word "rural" (because it includes city well users)
- Make side by side comparison of local control fees vs. state
- Need to look at what can be done, pragmatic, easy, focus on managing
- Need to consider depth of wells

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- Need to focus attention on layers of water
- Needs to be a fee ceiling – any structure requires a max rate for legal compliance

Comments from members of the public:

- Did not like straight control
- Parcel tax → cost for ballot, challenges, getting passed
- 5<sup>th</sup> approach (from group)
  - Lack of understanding of process, people don't support agency, need to come together
  - Idea is to put off funding fees for a year / proposed options, have agencies foot bill until there's a better plan
- Scientist group (from outside basin)
  - Didn't like #3, 4
  - Hybrid method creates confusion/political battles amongst the three users (and within)
  - Collecting data for extraction based is doable
- Group: 4 Groundwater users, 1 rep from Town of Windsor, 1 hydrogeologist
  - Key concern: Lack of public understanding of how various approaches work
  - This leads to anxiety and concerns, some of which may be unfounded. These concerns will not be alleviated until more information is disseminated with realistic estimates of what different types of entities would pay. That will take time – so it is unrealistic to expect that a fee system could be implemented quickly.
  - Not enough information to choose between 1 and 2, but one of them is best presented here
  - 5<sup>th</sup> option: Alternative funding mechanism
    - To give time to develop community consensus on an acceptable fee system, we recommend continuing to have JPA member entities fund work of the Agency for an interim period.
    - If reimbursement is put off during the interim, and factoring in the \$1 million grant, the funding level for each JPA entity can be held to about \$24,000.
    - Even if this approach was continued for only a year, it could provide time to develop consensus on a fee system

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**The facilitator concluded the discussion by summarizing common responses heard across different breakout groups:**

- ❖ State intervention is not a good idea.
- ❖ Several groups lean towards options 1 and 2, though many noted that each still has pros and cons and thus need further refinement.
- ❖ Parcel tax is too difficult due to not enough time to put in place, cost and potential lack of political feasibility.
- ❖ Community outreach remains important.
- ❖ Needs to be a balance between more data and less cost.

Comments from Advisory Committee Members to Administrator:

- Agricultural – water usage needs to be calculated per cow – not per dairy.
- Residential use – needs to reflect reality rather than the assumption of 2,000 acre-feet per year

### **Groundwater Sustainability Plan Orientation**

Marcus Trotta, hydrogeologist with the Water Agency provided orientation on iterative steps and work plan to prepare the Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Plan.

The following bullets reflect a summary of questions or comments from individual committee members. Responses were provided by Marcus Trotta.

- Question: Expense chart presented at least meeting, is this budget more detailed than what was previously presented?
  - Response -Yes
- Question: USGS work done early on – how do costs compare with what will be in the future?
  - Response – Cost is about \$2m + groundwater management planning costs are about \$1m.
- Question: In the draft workplan, table 354.16 – how far back in time does the data go for groundwater systems? How far back is the GSA going?
  - Response – as far back as there is reliable data, SIGMA requires we set a base line, not super specific on what that will entail.
- Comment: Note that the voluntary plan that was created provided an enormous amount of data.
- Question: Page 24, Rohnert Park - hasn't recovered to what level? What was the base line?
  - Answer: varies from well to well, in general levels to pre-1980s.
- Question: (Public) Is Sonoma County Water agency responsible for this?

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- Answer: No. Nine-member board made up of elected officials with Joint Powers Agreement.

**Administrator Updates / Facilitator Update**

Ann DuBay mentioned that since the last Advisory Committee meeting, the GSA Board appointed an ad hoc committee for the funding options. The GSA Board will meet this Thursday to discuss Basin Boundary Modifications and get an update on the GSP workplan, the Fee and Rate Study, and future staffing as of July 1, 2018.

The facilitator mentioned that wording has been drafted for the Advisory Committee Charter language regarding Alternates. He noted that the optional language attempts to balance to range of perspectives offered to date on the alternates issue. Print-outs of the suggested wording were distributed to the members. Members were tasked to read through and send comments to Ann DuBay. The issue will be revisited briefly at the May advisory committee meeting.

**Meeting Attendees**

***Advisory Committee Members (present)***

Agriculture, David Long  
Agriculture, Bob Anderson  
Business, Joe Gaffney  
Environmental, Sebastian Bertsch  
Environmental, Rue Furch  
City of Rohnert Park, Mary Grace Pawson  
City of Santa Rosa, Jennifer Burke  
City of Sebastopol, Henry Mikus  
Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, Maureen Geary  
Independent Water Systems, Chris Bates  
Rural/residential, Doug Beretta  
Rural Residential, Marlene Soiland  
Sonoma County Water Agency, Carolyn Dixon  
Sonoma RCD, Wayne Haydon  
Town of Windsor, Sandi Potter

***Advisory Committee Members (absent)***

City of Cotati, Craig Scott  
County of Sonoma, Mark Grismer  
Gold Ridge RCD, Matt O'Connor

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***Staff***

Sonoma County Water Agency, Ann DuBay  
Sonoma County Water Agency, Marcus Trotta  
Center for Collaborative Policy (facilitator), Rich Wilson  
Gold Ridge RCD (meeting recorder), Simone Peters

***Public***

Santa Rosa, Charlene Stone  
Sebastopol, Harry Davitian  
Roseland, Duane De Witt  
Santa Rosa Water, Colin Close  
Sonoma County Water Agency, Lauren Dunlap  
Town of Windsor, Elizabeth Cargay  
Approximately 15 others, names unknown

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