

# Regional Oversight Committee

## Meeting Minutes



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Wednesday, February 12, 2025

1:00 pm – 4:30 pm

LA County Public Works Headquarters, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor (Courtyard) Conference Rooms A&B  
900 S. Fremont Ave, Alhambra, CA 91803

Zoom Meeting

### Committee Members Present:

Maria Mehranian, Cordoba/Former LA Regional Water Quality Control Board Chair

Barbara Romero, City of Los Angeles

Kristine Guerrero, League of Cities

Belinda Faustinos, Retired NGO & State Agency Executive, Chair

Lauren Ahkiam, LAANE

Charles Trevino, Upper San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District

Mark Gold, Natural Resources Defense Council

Diana Mahmud, Former City Councilmember, City of South Pasadena

Carl Blum, LA County Flood Control District (non-voting member)

Norma Camacho, LA Regional Water Quality Control Board Chair (non-voting member)

### Committee Members Not Present:

Diana Tang, Long Beach Water Department, Vice-Chair

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### **Meeting Summary:**

At the February 12, 2025 Regional Oversight Committee (ROC) meeting, Committee Members received a detailed update on numerous adaptive management efforts, including those from the 2023 Biennial Report, and heard from the Chair(s) of each Watershed Area Steering Committee (WASC) and Scoring Committee regarding Committee updates, key themes, and recommendations for the 2025 Biennial Report.

### **Key Action Items:**

- Public Works Watershed Planning will reconvene the two recent ROC Working Groups to reevaluate previous recommendations considering the recent devastating wildfires in Los Angeles County.
  - Public Works will engage County Counsel to report back about the SCW Program's ability to reallocate Regional Program funding in responses to the wildfires.
  - Public Works has directed Regional Coordination to inventory projects that are facing challenges with US Army Corps permitting or those reliant on federal funding for completion.
  - Public Works will share an update about the Community Engagement and Education Grants Program during the March meeting.
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### **1) Welcome and Attendee Instructions**

Belinda Faustinos, Chair of the Safe Clean Water (SCW) Program ROC, welcomed Committee Members and called the meeting to order.

### **2) Roll Call**

The Executive Clerk conducted roll call and confirmed that a quorum was present.

### **3) Agenda Review and Meeting Purpose**

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Los Angeles County Public Works (Public Works) staff provided a statement addressing the recent wildfires in Los Angeles County, sharing that the County of Los Angeles is committed to helping communities impacted by wildfires recover with resiliency and equity, and are partnering with regional, State, and Federal partners. Public Works staff is assessing fire impacts on SCW Program funded projects and schedules, and will provide updates as these challenges are navigated. Public Works is also evaluating lessons and findings from this series of events for integration into the Initial Watershed Plans. Individuals who would like to engage with the process or share about how to help Watershed Planning incorporate resilient strategies to prepare for, recover from, and/or mitigate disasters should contact Public Works staff. The County Water Plan has multiple ties to emergency response and recovery, and Public Works will continue to collaborate with interested parties on the implementation of the County Water Plan and a new wildfire working group.

Chair Faustinos reviewed the agenda and noted that the discussion on ROC Working Groups' recommendations will be postponed. Chair Faustinos added that previous recommendations will be revisited given the recent wildfires, and Working Groups will reconvene to discuss how to connect recommendations with ways to address the devastating impacts of the recent fires.

Member Norma Camacho added that, in the spirit of adaptive management, the ROC Water Quality Working Group should step back and see how these recent events will affect Watershed Planning efforts. Member Camacho suggested that data may be key in helping to better understand the needs of impacted areas. Member Mark Gold concurred and commended Public Works' recent efforts on coastal and ocean response work. Member Gold asked if there is any flexibility in modifying targets in the impacted areas.

Member Diana Mahmud asked to what extent of the stormwater system within the wildfire footprint is still functional. Public Works staff responded that stormwater infrastructure below ground has not been adversely impacted by extreme fire temperatures, though that may be true of some drinking water infrastructure.

#### **4) Ex Parte Communication Disclosures**

There were no ex parte communication disclosures.

#### **5) Approval of December 11, 2024 Meeting Minutes**

Member Kristine Guerrero motioned to approve the meeting minutes, seconded by Member Mahmud. The Committee voted to approve the December 11, 2024, meeting minutes with 6 votes in favor, 0 opposed, 1 in abstention, and 1 absent at the time of voting (approved, see vote tracking sheet).

#### **6) Public Comment Period**

One public comment card was received by 5:00pm the day before the meeting and can be found on the [SCW Program website](#). Participants on the Spanish translation line and call-in users were also invited to provide public comment. There were no other public comments.

#### **7) Discussion Items:**

##### **a. Update on Adaptive Management**

Public Works staff presented an update on Adaptive Management. Presentation slides can be found on the [SCW Program website](#).

Member Camacho suggested a delay in setting Water Quality targets within the Initial Watershed Plans and recommended that Public Works staff work collaboratively with WASCs to design projects needed in fire impacted areas. Member Camacho proposed the SCW Program consider skipping the next Call for Projects and instead use a collaborative group within WASCs to design projects and propose them to receive approval from the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Board) to begin construction. Member

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Camacho additionally suggested trying to incorporate fire resilience as a quantifiable multi-benefit. Member Camacho commented that the rebuilding process is a timely opportunity to insert Water Quality measures into future projects to mitigate fire impacts in the future.

Member Gold requested more details in future presentations to better assess the efficacy of adaptive management efforts. Member Gold additionally highlighted the public comment submitted, which offers suggestions to improve SCW Program project applications and provides adaptive management strategies. Member Gold additionally emphasized the importance of climate resilience in areas extending beyond burned area boundaries, reflecting that communities impacted by the recent fires were farther out from the Wildlife-Urban Interface than expected. Member Gold expressed the need to develop a mechanism for projects to reduce pollutant loads within impacted watersheds. Member Gold also shared that the recent fires have underscored the importance of developing hyperlocal water supplies for fire suppression and expressed interest in a future discussion on this topic.

Upon inquiry, Public Works staff confirmed that, given recent feedback, the Watershed Planning process will include extra engagement sessions with the ROC and WASCs, in addition to a 30-day public comment period.

Member Mahmud reiterated a proposal to have a 30-to-60-day timeline for project developers to submit financial reports and added that this reporting is necessary for WASCs to be aware of financial statuses. Member Mahmud also highlighted the potential uncertainty of federal funding disbursements and expressed concern about how project developers may be adversely impacted.

Member Carl Blum acknowledged County and Public Works staff capacity given recovery efforts from the recent wildfires and suggested that the Adaptive Management timelines presented should align with current staff capacity.

Chair Faustinos summarized the broad issues conveyed by Committee Members, including convening the ROC Water Quality Working Group and the Community Investment Benefit and Benefit Ratios Working Group to revisit recommendations related to wildfire issues and discuss how to facilitate long-term planning in highly impacted areas. Additionally, Chair Faustinos asked to hear from Public Works staff and ROC Working Groups in the next 30 days to learn more about the wildfire impacts and what possible steps could be taken to address both time sensitive issues and long-term issues.

Public Works staff introduced Tiffani Shin as the SCW Program's new County Counsel representative. Member Gold asked if there is any flexibility in the SCW Program ordinance for the ROC to initiate rapid-response efforts and implement projects that would benefit fire-impacted communities.

Member Camacho asked how recycled water projects could support firefighting capacity, given that the facilities must incorporate storage into their plans, and suggested this is a potential idea a County Water Plan Task Force could investigate.

Member Lauren Ahkiam commented that the topic of hyperlocal water supply relates to Watershed Planning, and the need to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach as each Watershed Plans vary based on Watershed Area characteristics. Member Ahkiam also expressed interest in a future discussion about separate project application requirements based on project phase. Chair Faustinos shared a similar interest in receiving an update about segmenting the application process for O&M projects.

Member Blum noted that parks and schools in impacted areas are going to be rebuilt from the ground-up and suggested having early conversations with school districts to encourage incorporating stormwater elements into new plans.

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Member Maria Mehranian noted that Watershed Plans are a good opportunity to address consistent themes, such as hyperlocal water supply, wildfire resilience policies and building code considerations, and regulatory relief for impacted areas.

The ROC also discussed whether legal flexibility exists to adjust the revenue allocations between the Municipal and Regional Programs, as well as alternative strategies such as Watershed Areas borrowing from one another, or bonding against future revenue. Public Works staff and County Counsel will provide more information about the Regional Program funding allocations at a future meeting.

Chair Faustinos announced that the ROC Community Investment Benefits Working Group will reconvene to identify additional recommendations given the recent fires.

### **8) Ten Minute Break**

### **9) Discussion Items (continued):**

#### **a. Watershed Area Steering Committees & Scoring Committee Updates and Biennial Report Recommendations**

Chairs from all nine Watershed Area Steering Committees (WASCs) and the Scoring Committee were invited to provide updates. Presentation slides are available on the [SCW Program Website](#).

#### **i. Scoring Committee**

Scoring Committee Chair Bruce Reznik reported that the Committee has reviewed 213 projects across five rounds of Infrastructure Program Call for Projects. Of these, 139 projects were ultimately approved for funding, though some later withdrew. Reznik noted that the number of applications has declined over time. Reznik shared that, each year, the Scoring Committee has issued memoranda identifying recurring challenges. Reznik encouraged individuals to review these memoranda, which were submitted as a public comment attachment. Key takeaways include the challenge of scoring projects at different phases given that the rubric is tailored primarily for construction projects, making it less applicable to design-phase projects that may lack geotechnical studies. More precise metrics and definitions improve project evaluation. Reznik commented that Water Quality metrics are well-defined, while Water Supply, Community Investment Benefits, and Nature-based Solutions are less clear. Reznik added that the lack of watershed-specific criteria presents difficulties, as project suitability varies by watershed. Cost-related issues, particularly around Operations and Maintenance (O&M) and cost-effectiveness also require ongoing attention. While cost-effectiveness is easier to assess for Water Quality and Water Supply benefits, it remains challenging for Community Investment Benefits. Reznik shared that the Scoring Committee continues to refine adaptive management strategies to improve evaluation.

#### **ii. Central Santa Monica Bay WASC**

Central Santa Monica Bay (CSMB) WASC Co-Chair Susie Santilena emphasized the CSMB WASC's regional and community focused approach. The CSMB WASC has demonstrated strong investment in disadvantaged communities, committing nearly \$37.2 million, almost double the required funding ratio. The region has also made strides in dry weather multi-benefit projects. Santilena highlighted regulatory deadlines and emphasized the importance of flexibility in scoring Water Supply Benefits. Santilena shared that the CSMB WASC also supports programmatic solutions to address inflationary pressures and leveraging external funding, as they anticipate a significant number of projects returning for O&M funding. Santilena noted that the CSMB WASC encouraged increased collaboration in the Technical Resources Program (TRP) and Scientific Studies (SS) process and stressed the need for streamlined implementation and improved communication and project benefits, both quantitative and qualitative.

#### **iii. Lower Los Angeles River WASC**

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Lower Los Angeles River (LLAR) WASC Chair Madeline Chen shared that Watershed Planning engagement discussions with the WASC revealed themes such as brownfield repurposing, school site projects, and water recycling. Chen shared that the LLAR Watershed Coordinator remains active in outreach, engaging youth groups and delivering presentations at schools. The LLAR Watershed Coordinator has also assisted in connecting and supporting potential SCW Program project proponents.

#### **iv. Lower San Gabriel River WASC**

Lower San Gabriel River (LSGR) WASC Co-Chair Dan Mueller emphasized the Committee's structured deliberations and robust outreach efforts. Mueller shared that the LSGR Watershed Coordinator's public engagement at community events and partnerships with larger agencies, such as the Water Replenishment District (WRD), have been effective. The LSGR Watershed Coordinator also has an exhibit trailer which has been a successful tool to connect with youth and community members. The LSGR WASC has identified recurring themes through the Watershed Planning engagement session, including the scarcity of land for large project sites and municipal challenges with stormwater compliance. Mueller shared that cost escalations remain a concern for the LSGR WASC, prompting a focus on leveraging additional funding sources. Mueller shared that the Committee has also developed a prioritization criteria to assess Infrastructure Program projects of varying sizes.

#### **v. North Santa Monica Bay WASC**

North Santa Monica Bay (NSMB) WASC Chair Jessica Forte described the Watershed Area's unique challenges, including its canyon geography, absence of groundwater basins, and limited impermeable surface areas. Forte shared that the NSMB WASC's concerns include the feasibility of wet weather storage projects and bacteria removal from receiving waters. Forte commented that, given the Watershed Area's low tax revenue, strategic investments must be made. Forte shared that the NSMB WASC is collaborating with the Las Virgenes Municipal Water District (LVMWD) on dry weather diversion programs for water reuse. Forte shared that Biennial Report recommendations from the NSMB WASC include: 1) Reevaluating the weight of infiltration in Scoring Criteria, especially where infiltration is infeasible, 2) Establishing set-asides for dry weather projects, 3) Developing diversion standard plan sheets for pipe sizes and flows, 4) Expediting interagency permit processes for dry weather diversion, 5) Emphasizing iterative adaptation and expanded natural habitats, and 6) Encouraging the SCW Program to develop guidance to identify Nature-based Solutions to combat extreme heat.

#### **vi. Rio Hondo WASC**

Rio Hondo (RH) WASC Vice-Chair Tom Love, represented by RH Watershed Coordinator Richard Watson who provided the update on the Vice-Chair's behalf, highlighted multilingual outreach efforts and successful engagement with community-based organizations, the San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments (SGVCOG), and Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG). The RH Watershed Coordinator has also hosted a successful tour of the SCW Program funded, and completed, Plymouth Elementary School with Project Proponent Amigos de Los Rios. Love noted that the RH WASC has prioritized diverse wet and dry weather projects and initiated an opportunity planning process for future initiatives. Love shared that the RH WASC is concerned about potential delays if Infrastructure Program projects are accepted biennially rather than annually, as smaller cities may require additional time to develop proposals. Watson added that, given imminent MS4 compliance deadlines, postponements could lead to penalties.

#### **vii. Santa Clara River WASC**

Santa Clara River (SCR) WASC Vice-Chair Darin Seegmiller highlighted the SCR as one of the last remaining natural river systems in Southern California, offering unique opportunities for infiltration and sustainable water management. The SCR WASC is composed of representatives from the City of Santa Clarita and unincorporated areas, such as Acton and Agua Dulce, which present distinct rural water management challenges. Seegmiller shared that the SCR WASC has prioritized projects that work towards



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MS4 compliance, remove invasive species like *Arundo*, and improve ecological health. Given the region's limited urban development, there is a strong emphasis on preserving open spaces and leveraging natural hydrology for stormwater capture. Seegmiller shared that the SCR WASC continues to explore innovative approaches for balancing MS4 compliance with ecosystem restoration and Community Investment Benefits.

### **viii. South Santa Monica Bay WASC**

South Santa Monica Bay (SSMB) WASC Chair Craig Cadwallader shared that the Watershed Area spans three separate Enhanced Watershed Management Programs (EWMPs), the Beach Cities, Peninsula, and Dominguez Channel EWMPs, which introduces competing priorities for compliance and TMDLs. Cadwallader shared that infiltration is not applicable in parts of the SSMB Watershed Area, with some areas implementing dewatering wells in response to landslides. The Watershed Area is challenged in achieving Water Supply benefits due to diverse geography and hydrological conditions. Cadwallader also shared the WASC's strong push to prioritize smaller scale projects now, with more direct equitable distribution of resources that maximize Community Investment Benefits especially given limited funding. Cadwallader recommended more clear definitions of Community Investment Benefits, including Disadvantaged Community Benefits and Nature-Based Solutions. Cadwallader recommended that the Biennial Report focus on local water supply augmentation and prioritizing smaller scale projects to distribute resources more equitably.

### **ix. Upper Los Angeles River WASC**

Upper Los Angeles River (ULAR) WASC Chair Teresa Villegas shared that in Rounds 1-5 of the SCW Program, the WASC approved projects that annually will capture an estimated 34,346 acre-feet of stormwater from 21,000 acres. The most recent SIP represents over \$150 million committed to projects that benefit disadvantaged communities, over double the Watershed Area's target. Villegas noted that the Watershed Area has numerous dry weather bacterial TMDL requirements. The ULAR Watershed Coordinators in the area have reached over 5,000 people, engaged 42 projects, and led 5 school greening tours to foster collaboration with school districts. Villegas highlighted the ULAR WASC's recurring themes and interests including: 1) Competitive, limited funding, 2) Disadvantaged Community Benefits, 3) Water Supply versus Water Quality management, and linking with MS4 compliance and groundwater recharge, 4) Aligning with County Water Plan targets, strategies, and actions.

Recommendations include: 1) A funding set-aside for future O&M demands, 2) A funding set-aside for 5-10-year long projects, 3) More precise numeric targets for Water Supply and Water Quality Benefits, 4) Regular interactions with Watermasters to improve communication and types of projects moving forward, 5) Regular communication with school districts and the Greater Los Angeles County Vector Control District.

### **x. Upper San Gabriel River WASC**

Upper San Gabriel River (USGR) WASC Chair Julie Carver shared historical and ongoing challenges to fill community stakeholder seats on the WASC, which minimizes the input received from community partners. Carver noted that the USGR Watershed Coordinator has done a great job of engaging the community and getting community feedback. Carver noted that Round 1 projects are nearing the construction stage and noted long timelines due to CEQA. Carver additionally highlighted challenges with staff turnover at small cities, and that some municipal applicants are struggling with feasibility study requirements and upcoming MS4 compliance deadlines. Carver shared that the timeline between the Call For Projects and final Board approval can create another barrier that continues to delay projects, in addition to challenges with permitting and burdensome reporting processes, which are long and require significant effort, especially for under resourced cities. Carver suggested that Scientific Studies could be better directed by bringing in subject matter experts. Carver noted that the USGR WASC did not have any Biennial Report recommendations.

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Following presentations from Committee Chairs, Chair Faustinos welcomed questions and further discussion.

Member Mahmud asked if other WASC Chairs had experienced challenges due to staff turnover at smaller cities, such as those cited by Carver. Member Mahmud inquired about suggestions to better equip and position smaller cities to submit project applications. Villegas reflected that the ULAR WASC includes 12 cities, and that the WASC tries to ensure that the SIP is representative with projects and studies from different municipalities. Villegas noted that the ULAR Watershed Coordinators have worked closely with smaller cities to assist in preparing TRP applications. Villegas agreed that the turnover of city staff members, in addition to WASC Members, is also apparent in the ULAR WASC. Villegas commented that it is imperative that the WASCs make sure projects presented in their SIP are representative of the entire Watershed Area. Carver added that smaller city staff members often wear many hats and that some cities do not have an engineering staff and must rely on consultants for technical expertise. Carver stressed the need for cross-city support and collaboration to help projects move forward efficiently.

Reznik agreed that staff turnover is likely a widespread challenge, not just within smaller cities, but also among WASC Members and Watershed Coordinators. Reznik commented that larger entities can better navigate the complexities of the SCW Program and highlighted successful partnerships between a larger and smaller entity, such as with the City of Los Angeles and Culver City. Reznik suggested increasing investment in TRPs and requiring less rigorous applications for smaller projects.

Member Trevino concurred, noting that regulatory requirements are often more challenging for smaller cities. Member Trevino emphasized the need for regulatory agencies to consider a more equitable playing field. Member Trevino suggested looking at regulatory requirements given the recent fires to ensure that rebuilding efforts are expedited, efficient, and done correctly. Member Camacho asked WASC Chairs what needs to be done within the impacted Watershed Areas to help communities utilize funding to make substantial impacts to Water Supply and Water Quality.

Forte shared that the NSMB WASC has not convened recently and will follow up once next steps are better understood. Forte commented on the number of homes which have been destroyed and shared that, despite the magnitude of the disaster, the region's water systems maintained pressure.

Santilena emphasized the importance of understanding the full extent of damage and ensuring that rebuilding efforts focus on restoration and improvement rather than simply replacing lost infrastructure. Santilena emphasized the importance of Nature-Based Solutions, which have served to abate climate impacts like carbon sequestration and improve water quality. Santilena underlined the importance of protection, implementation, and proper design to restore areas. Santilena commented that data collected from the disaster can better inform stormwater design that considers future climate catastrophes. Member Camacho encouraged WASCs to have these discussions quickly, as rebuilding efforts are already underway.

Member Ahkiam expressed interest in discussing the barriers associated with school greening projects and the efforts underway across areas of the SCW Program to promote school greening. Public Works staff can come back to the ROC with a comprehensive description at a future meeting.

Member Ahkiam asked for more clarification on the definitions of Community Investments Benefits and Disadvantaged Community Benefits. Public Works staff noted that the ongoing Watershed Planning efforts will guide these definitions.

Member Mahmud commented that there may be a timely opportunity to address the delayed timeline for obtaining permits from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers while there is increased staff in the area.

Upon inquiry, Chair Faustinos clarified that a memo will be generated that summarizes recommendations and key themes from the WASCs and the Scoring Committee presentations.

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Member Gold summarized common themes heard from the WASC and Scoring Committee, including: 1) easily accessible technical support, 2) less burdensome Feasibility Studies, 3) streamlined and clear application process, 4) site-specific Water Quality and Water Supply targets, 5) simplified Reporting Requirements, 6) modifying the Scoring Criteria accordingly with site-specific criteria of varying weights, depending on Watershed Area.

Member Gold also emphasized the importance of strengthening local ordinances to support water-efficient landscapes in rebuilding communities. Member Gold suggested that recovery efforts should prioritize climate-resilient vegetation and fire-resistant native plant species.

Member Romero highlighted key points from the adaptive management presentation, emphasizing the importance of refining metrics, definitions, and Scoring Criteria to align with Program goals. Member Romero emphasized the need for having different applications for different project types, such as planning versus construction projects, and the importance of the TRP projects.

Member Camacho asked about the role of Scientific Studies in the Watershed Planning process, and if Water Supply information from Scientific Studies is being incorporated into Watershed Plans.

Member Mahmud noted that the RH, USGR and ULAR WASCs funded the Fire Effects Study, which examines the relationship between fires and water quality. Villegas noted that the study is still in progress, but agreed that it would be beneficial for Project Proponent SGVCOG to share preliminary information.

ROC Members discussed the rebuilding efforts underway, and Member Romero shared that the City of Los Angeles is developing “a one-stop-shop” for property owners and consultants to receive comprehensive information about rebuilding requirements. Member Mehranian expressed a desire for a more structured framework for resilient rebuilding efforts within the SCW Program.

### **10) Voting Items**

There were no voting items.

### **11) ROC Member Updates**

Member Mark Gold shared that the Natural Resources Defense Council introduced Assembly Bill 638 on stormwater capture for irrigation use.

Member Mahmud requested that Public Works staff provide a report on the Public Education and Community Engagement Grants that have been awarded.

Member Camacho shared that the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board meeting on February 27 has been cancelled. The upcoming meeting will be on March 27.

### **12) Program Administration Updates**

Public Works staff provided an update, including an update on the Watershed Planning timeline. Presentation slides can be found on the [SCW Program website](#).

Public Works staff provided an update, noting:

- The Public Education and Community Engagement Grants Program, in partnership with the Water Foundation, officially launched on September 24, 2024. The first application deadline was November 8, with 15 projects identified for potential funding totaling \$3 million. The second application period closed on January 31, receiving 30 submissions, including four carried over from



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Round 1. The third deadline is set for April 4, followed by the final submission period, which will close on May 31. A summary document with these updates can be provided to the ROC..

- A Credit Trading Program is currently in development and held a Stakeholder Workshop on October 30. The procedures and guidelines document was available for a 30-day public comment period until November 18. The Credit Trading Program is expected to launch in 2025, with a tentative application deadline in September 2025.
- The Fiscal Year 2025-26 Low-Income Senior-Owned Exemptions and General Income-Based Tax Reductions Claim Forms are due May 1.
- The deadline for the Safe Clean Water Municipal Program Annual Plans is April 1, 2025.

### **13) Items for Next Agenda / 6-Month Look Ahead**

Public Works staff shared a 6-month look ahead. Presentation slides can be found on the [SCW Program website](#).

Public Works staff added that, based on discussions, the schedule may be revised to include additional items of interest on the agenda, such as a dedicated item on fire and flexibility options and how schools and Watershed Plans fit into existing efforts.

### **14) Meeting Adjourned**

Chair Faustinos thanked ROC Members and the public and adjourned the meeting at 4:23 pm.