

Santa Clara River Watershed Area Steering Committee (WASC) Meeting Minutes



Thursday, March 3rd, 2022
3:00pm - 5:00 pm
WebEx Meeting

Committee Members Present:

Julian Juarez, LA County Flood Control District (Agency)
Dirk Marks, Santa Clarita Valley Water Agency (Agency)
Steve Cole, Santa Clarita Valley Groundwater Sustainability Agency (Agency)
*Christopher Lapaz, LA County Sanitation Districts (Agency)
Janine Prado, City of Santa Clarita Recreation & Community Services (Agency)
Hunt Braly, Poole & Shaffery (Community)
Mary Johnson, Agua Dulce Town Council (Community)
Sandra Cattell, Sierra Club (Community)
Ivan Volschenk, Evolve Business Strategies (Community)
Dianne Erskine-Hellrigel, Santa Clarita Valley Community Hiking Club (Community)
*Allen Ma, Los Angeles County (Municipal)
Jason Gibbs and Alternate Darin Seegmiller, Santa Clarita (Municipal), Chair
Heather Merenda, Santa Clarita (Municipal)
Mike Hennawy, Santa Clarita (Municipal)
Tom Cole, Santa Clarita (Municipal), Vice Chair
*Amanda Begley, TreePeople (Watershed Coordinator, non-voting member)

*Committee Member Alternate

There were no Committee Members absent.
See attached sign-in sheet for full list of attendees.

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Los Angeles County Flood District (District) staff facilitated the roll call of Committee Members. All Committee Members made self-introductions and a quorum was established.

Jason Gibbs, Chair of the Santa Clara River (SCR) WASC, welcomed Committee Members and gave a brief WebEx tutorial, then called the meeting to order.

2. Approval of Meeting Minutes from January 6, 2022

District Staff presented the meeting minutes from the previous meeting. Motion to approve meeting minutes by Member Steve Cole, seconded by Member Sandra Cattell. The Committee voted to approve the January 6, 2022 meeting minutes (approved, see vote tracking sheet).

3. Committee Member and District Updates

There were no Committee Member updates.

District Staff provided an update, noting:

- On March 1, 2022, the Board of Supervisors voted to continue meeting virtually, acting under the authority of Assembly Bill 361 which authorizes public committees to meet without complying with

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all the teleconferencing requirements of the Brown Act when the situation warrants it. The Board is reviewing its position every 30 days.

- The District is continuing to process Transfer Agreement Addendums for Year 1 projects and initial Transfer Agreements for Year 2 projects. District staff requested the Project Developers to submit all required documents to safecleanwaterla@pw.lacounty.gov and to reach out to the District directly for any status updates.
- Projects approved for funding in year 1 (FY 20-21 Stormwater Investment Plan), Q2 2021 Quarterly Report for the Regional Program were due on February 15, 2022. For projects approved for funding in year 2 (FY 21-22 Stormwater Investment Plan) and projects receiving their first disbursement, their first quarterly report will be due on May 15, 2022. The May 15, 2022 quarterly report shall capture all expenditures through March 2022.
- The District will add a functionality to the existing Municipal Program Reporting Module to streamline the Annual Plan Process. The District will hold an informational session in early March and encouraged all municipalities to sign up for the Reporting Module to receive future notices. Annual Plans are due April 1, 2022.
- Public Review for the Safe Clean Water Program (SCWP) Guidance is now available on the website. The 30-day public review period is from February 16th to March 17th. Details on how to provide comments were sent via email.
- The District reminded the committee members that it is important for the WASC and the work of the Regional Program to remain transparent and fair. These principles are built into the SCWP and are represented by the ex parte disclosures on each agenda. WASC members whose job connects them to specific projects should ask colleagues or consultants to attend WASC meetings to share about or advocate for those projects during Stormwater Investment Plan deliberations and should avoid using their position as WASC members to advocate for projects from their home entities. Not all projects are connected to a WASC member's outside job, and those that aren't must advocate for their inclusion during the managed opportunities (the application itself, presentation(s), questions from the WASC, and the public comment period). Ensuring that each project gets treated fairly during discussion and voting agenda items and that all proponents have equal access to engage the WASC discussion needs to be part of how the WASC manages itself.
- Reminder that the intent of the SCWP is to ensure project completion so that benefits claimed can be realized. Partial funding in phases without secured funds and a clear pathway to completion is highly discouraged. Whether it be structured accordingly with the initial request or a consideration by the WASC during the SIP development, the messaging will be that if the WASC decides to consider partial funding in phases such that future phases are dependent on subsequent SCWP funding requests, the WASC must consider and anticipate the future costs during SIP deliberation even if it is not formally earmarked or shown in the projections for planning purposes.
- For future SIP transmittals to the Regional Oversight Committee (ROC), the District will also include a discussion of anticipated future costs, including O&M and phases beyond design. Inclusion of those anticipated costs will better inform the ROC and Board for decision-making.

4. Watershed Coordinator Updates

a. Watershed Coordinator Quarterly Report

Watershed Coordinator Amanda Begley provided updates for January and February. Most work related to the Rural Water Supply Reliability project of Acton and Agua Dulce; the Arundo mapping and removal project; and Chronic flooding in Acton.

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Watershed Coordinator Begley's work was completed in coordination with the Water Talks program, which is providing design and engineering resources in 2022. Watershed Coordinator Begley focused on two projects, as they are eligible for special drought relief funding from the state, with applications being submitted April 1st. Watershed Coordinator Begley engaged with several entities to support these projects, including the Antelope Valley Resource Conservation District, Santa Clara Conservancy, and other members of the Santa Invasive Feed Task Force. Watershed Coordinator Begley also engaged the Steelhead Trout Coalition in one of their meetings and was introduced to multiple organizations involved in the health of the Santa Clara River.

5. Ex Parte Communication Disclosures

Members Heather Merenda, Mary Johnson, and Cattell disclosed that they had visited the Pico Canyon project sites and discussed the SIP.

6. Public Comment Period

The District received a letter from Agua Dulce Town Council requesting recordings of the WASC meetings be made available to the public. District Staff has considered this request in other WASCs and indicated that the recordings can be shared upon request. The District does not plan to post the meeting recordings online, citing a desire to encourage active participation by the public during meetings. Mike Antos (Stantec, Regional Coordination) noted that an email response to the Aqua Dulce Town Council was sent just prior to this meeting.

Member Cattell requested a copy of the recording for use by the Sierra Club and voiced support for publicly posting meeting recordings, since many constituents of the Watershed Area are interested in attending these meetings but must work at the time they are held, thus precluding them from attending.

Member Johnson and Member Hunt Braly also agreed that publicly posting the meeting recordings would be more convenient than instructing each interested community member submit a public records request.

District staff discussed the option of only posting the SCR WASC meeting recordings to the SCWP website, but ultimately maintained that video recordings will still only be shared upon request. Member Cattell requested that District staff ask their administration to reconsider.

Antos noted that in the future, when WASC meetings are held in-person, recordings will not be as easily available. Antos encouraged WASC members to consider how providing meeting recordings for the public may set the expectation that they will continue to be made available later.

Member Johnson confirmed with District staff that participants could record in-person WASC meetings and reasoned that virtual meetings should promote an equivalent level of transparency by publicly posting the video recordings. Staff suggested District staff will take these points of discussion to their administration and provide an update at the next WASC meeting.

Public member Jackie Ayer (Acton Town Council) commented about transparency and voiced appreciation that their preference is for members of the public to attend live meetings. Ayer prefers to participate live rather than watching the recording afterwards, but pointed out that many WASC members are paid to attend the meeting as part of their job, whereas public participants frequently are not.

Public member Ayer also requested information about the total amount of stormwater capture from the projects that have been approved. District staff said they would connect Ayer with staff who could provide an answer and instructed Ayer to follow-up with them via email.

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A public comment from Josafat Flores (Los Angeles Public Works) was received. The comment related to conversation from previous meeting, regarding the impact of oak trees in Pico Canyon Park. Attachments can be found on the website.

7. Discussion Items

- a. **Santa Clara River (SCR) Project Selection Discussion for populating the Fiscal Year 2022-2023 Stormwater Investment Plan ([SCW Portal](#) & [Project Presentations](#))**
 - i. Infrastructure Program (IP)
 - [Pico Canyon Park Stormwater Improvements Project](#)
 - ii. Technical Resources Program (TRP)
 - [Jake Kuredjian Park Stormwater Improvements Project](#)
 - iii. Scientific Studies Program (SS)
 - [Regional Pathogen Reduction Study](#)

District staff displayed the Stormwater Investment Plan (SIP) tool, showing the current allocations for projects and facilitated discussion for members to deliberate on the projects.

Member Cattell commented on the SIP Preview, noting that next year, 79% of the funding is already allocated and expressed concern over using funding from future years to fund current projects because the WASC should save enough money to fund projects proposed in future years. Member Cattell would prefer project applicants find additional outside funding.

District staff offered context how other WASCs handle their allocation. They shared that some WASCs are faced with funding requests in excess of a 100% allocation, so the SCR WASC is doing well by comparison. District staff also reminded the committee that funds can be moved around within the five year SIP tool if both the committee and the project applicant agree to the arrangement.

Member S. Cole requested a mathematical walkthrough from District staff using the SIP tool. District staff explained that Row B includes rollover budget plus annual budget, the first row of Row C shows the current three projects, the second row of Row C shows what was approved from previous SIPs, and Row D shows the remaining balance given both the current and previous SIP.

Member Cattell clarified with District staff that the Newhall Park Infiltration Project is the only one using funding under the Infrastructure Program.

Member Johnson requested clarification on the City of Santa Clarita's yearly funding allocation. Darin Seegmiller (Santa Clarita) explained that the City shifted their funding allocation from FY 21-22 and 22-23 to FY 23-24. They added that this was discussed at a previous WASC meeting and is a result of construction delays.

Member Johnson asked whether a project applicant for the Regional Pathogen Reduction Study was present to answer if their study is contingent on a minimum number of participating Watershed Areas. Member Johnson noted that the SCR WASC is one of the smaller WASC and thus has a smaller budget. No project representative was available to comment, but District staff mentioned that in the previous year's SIP, only two WASCs voted to approve funding for the study, which was not enough for the applicant to conduct the study. Thus, they applied again this year. District staff does not know the minimum amount of funding that would be required for the study to take place. District staff clarified that if there is not enough support from other WASCs, the SCR WASC can hold another meeting to reconfigure their SIP to exclude the pathogen study, as was done in the previous year. Member Braly voiced support

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for funding the pathogen study, since the WASC can reconfigure the SIP if it does not adequately support by other WASCs. Chair Gibbs agreed.

Member Cattell agreed that a pathogen study would be beneficial but is concerned about why the pathogen study wasn't supported by other WASCs last year. Member Cattell is also concerned about grouping the SCR WASC with nearby WASCs under the study, stating it would be better for the region to have their own pathogen study due to the watershed area's geographic isolation.

Member Cattell expressed concern about the two Pico Canyon projects (Pico Canyon Park Stormwater Improvements Project and Jake Kuredjian Park Stormwater Improvements Project) because of their close physical proximity and questioned the need for both projects. Member Cattell added that there is already a large water retention basin and not enough focus on water cleanup. Member Cattell requested more information on which contaminants exist in this area, noting that if it is an issue that can be solved with community education (i.e., pet fecal matter or litter), then the funding should go towards community education instead.

Member Johnson expressed doubt that the differing elevations and project development stages of the two Pico Canyon projects would prevent their combination, since the flow from one project seems to drain to the other. Alberto Graieda (Los Angeles Public Works, Project Applicant) explained that the projects are in two different sub-watersheds, so their storm drains are not properly connected. Further, the projects have different milestones in terms of project completion. Member Johnson asked the project applicant if the idea of combining these two projects has ever been considered. Member Allen Ma brought attention to the amount of space available in each project, and that if the projects were to be combined that a separate location would need to be identified, which would require a separate feasibility study. Such a study could take years to complete. The project applicants emphasized that carrying out both projects would bring benefits to two separate parks, in the form of nature-based solutions, community benefits and water quality improvements.

Member Cattell requested details on the community benefits and suggested that the WASC members visit the project site, noting that the soft-bottomed creek and basin may already be facilitating infiltration. Member Cattell expressed a preference to conduct a pathogen study in the area.

Graieda (Los Angeles Public Works, Project Applicant) explained that the basin is a debris basin used purely for flood control, not infiltration or water treatment. Graieda noted that a spillway and drain carries untreated water. In response to the Member's request for a pathogen study, Graieda explained that there are contaminants other than bacteria that are being treated by the proposed projects, such as nutrients, chlorides, and trash. In response to the request for details on community benefits, the project applicant explained that because the projects are in the conceptual and planning phases, specific details on community benefits are not yet available.

Graieda (Los Angeles Public Works, Project Applicant) also responded to the public comment made earlier, regarding oak tree protection. Graieda relayed that the County values the protection of all the oak trees in the area and they are taking protective measures. The geotechnical division for the project will conduct a liquefaction study and an arborist will be conducting an arborist report. The findings of both will be sent to the design team, who will design the BMP accordingly.

Member Cattell requested that before voting on the two Pico Canyon projects, WASC members and interested members of the public conduct a field visit to the two Pico Canyon sites. Member Cattell wants to receive concrete details on the projects' community benefits and the exact location of the water treatment facility. Member Cattell strongly recommends the WASC hold a conversation on site, to avoid further confusion.

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Antos (Stantec, Regional Coordination) noted that field visits may be difficult to coordinate, but not impossible. Antos asked members of the WASC to consider that doing so would set a precedent for visiting project sites before voting. Antos also mentioned that project presentations are available on the website that include site drawings and detail planned community benefits.

Member Johnson reiterated a request from previous WASC meetings for data on baseline contaminant reduction. Member Johnson has not yet received this information and believes it to be necessary to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of the projects.

Chair Gibbs closed the discussion and opened the period again for public comments.

Chair Gibbs left the meeting and was replaced by Alternate Darin Seegmiller. Vice Chair Tom Cole presided over the remainder of the meeting.

8. Public Comment Period

Lynne Plambeck (Santa Clarita Organization for Planning and the Environment) voiced appreciation that an oak study was provided. They mentioned, however, that oak studies often find that a tree is not at risk. Plambeck observed that the marker oak in front of Pico Canyon was found to be not at risk from a different project and now appears to be in poor shape. Plambeck mentioned two prior liquefaction studies that had been conducted in Pico Canyon Park—one by Southern Oaks and one by a library in the vicinity. Both studies found that oaks would be adversely impacted. Plambeck offered to share these studies with the project applicant and questioned whether conducting another study in the area was appropriate.

Plambeck further expressed concern about the projects moving forward without performing a pathogen study specific to the location. They noted that even though the debris basin was originally meant for flood control, it may also serve to recharge water. In terms of collecting debris, Plambeck questioned the cost effectiveness of the project since there are only approximately 300 homes upstream of the debris basin. Plambeck noted that in the project presentations provided, the community benefits promised may not be worth the expenses and also pointed out that known water quality issues exist downstream of the project at a large stormdrain which will not be captured and treated. Plambeck also reiterated that fertilizer runoff and trash debris may better be addressed through public education rather than nature-based solutions, and suggested that water recharge is the priority, and that more studies specific to the creek must be conducted in order to address the issues in a way that uses funding efficiently. Plambeck also mentioned that Regional Planning frequently organizes site visits so there are ways for a Brown Act body to conduct site visits.

Jackie Ayers (Acton Town Council) expressed concern that the project applicants did not provide data on how the proposed project demonstrates analyte reduction. Ayers mentioned the known water quality issues downstream of the project location, but lack of data demonstrating water quality issues upstream of the project. Ayers requested the project applicants provide clarification on this. Graieda (Los Angeles Public Works, Project Applicant) addressed these comments by explaining that baseline monitoring data had been collected for the Hasley Canyon Park project, which is an area similar to the project location. That study demonstrated exceedances for contaminants like chloride and trash, as well as bacteria. Graieda explained that their modeling system indicates that the water upstream of the project should be treated. Doing so would prevent the polluted, untreated water from being transported into regulated streams.

Plambeck reiterated concern because the polluted water downstream of the project will remain untreated. Ayers mentioned that they had not received the analyte data for the Hasley Canyon project despite requesting it in the past. Ayers also noted the applicant still needs to demonstrate why the Pico Canyon project site should be treated.

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9. Voting Items

- a. **Approve the Fiscal Year 2022-2023 Stormwater Investment Plan funding recommendations for the SCR Watershed Area and approve submission to the Regional Oversight Committee for review**

Member Cattell motioned to postpone the vote to the next meeting and to encourage members of the WASC to visit the project site. Member Diane Hellrigel seconded.

Member Cattell requested that the project applicant for the Pico Canyon and Jake Kuredjian Park projects call their office to discuss further.

Member Braly voiced support for visiting the Pico Canyon Park and Jake Kuredjian Park project sites. Member Braly suggested the applicants should be present onsite to explain the projects to the WASC members. Member Braly also inquired about the WASC's options, should they decide against funding either project.

Member Seegmiller noted that the project applicants have experience in stormwater compliance and modeling. Both projects exemplify the types projects that voters had in mind when originally voted to pass Measure W. Chair Seeg voiced support for the projects, as he believes they achieve the goals of the SCWP.

Member Ma observed that both projects have multiple community meetings planned, to which Member Johnson responded that community input needs to be received prior to approving project funding. Member Cattell requested that additional information about the planned community meetings be shared with the WASC.

Member Dirk Marks asked District staff if delaying the vote to approve the projects would have an adverse effect on the SIP timeline. District staff said the month of May is the last month the WASC could approve the SIP while staying on schedule. There would be no adverse effects if they postpone the vote to the next WASC meeting. Alberto Graieda (Los Angeles Public Works) added that the projects are requesting design funds, so there would be no large, adverse effect to their schedule.

District staff facilitated a vote on the motion. The committee failed to pass this motion with a final vote of 8-9 (failed, see vote tracking sheet).

Member Seegmiller motioned to approve the SIP as it was presented, which was seconded by Member Mike Hennawy.

Member S. Cole spoke to the value of feasibility studies in demonstrating infrastructure project potential prior to funding construction. Antos (Stantec, Regional Coordination) highlighted that one of the projects has applied for design funding and one has applied for TRP funding. Antos explained that approving the TRP project would initiate a feasibility study. On the other hand, the infrastructure project is only requesting design funds, so the applicants would need to reapply to compete for construction funds.

The committee voted to approve the SIP, with a final vote of 9-8 (approved, see vote tracking sheet).

10. Items for Next Agenda

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 7, 2022, 3:00 PM – 5:00 PM. See the SCWP website for details.

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District staff will add an agenda item to further discuss the use of recordings made of the webex WASC meetings.

Member Braly requested that the meeting minutes reflect how the vote to approve the SIP only passed with one vote, and to also note that one member represented three of those votes, due to the way the WASC is represented. Member Braly also requested that the project applicants for the Pico Canyon projects still provide more information on their projects and/or organize field visits for members of the WASC.

11. Adjournment

Vice Chair T. Cole thanked the WASC members and the public for their attendance and participation and adjourned the meeting.

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		Quorum Present				Voting Items		
Member Type	Position	Member	Voting/ Present?	Alternate	Voting/ Present?	Approve 1-6-2022 Meeting Minutes	Postpone the vote for the final Fiscal Year 2022-23 Stormwater Investment Plan; encourage all WASC members to visit Pico and Jake project sites	Approve the final Fiscal Year 2022-23 Stormwater Investment Plan;
Agency	District	Julian Juarez	X	Ramy Gindi		Y	N	Y
Agency	Santa Clarita Valley Water Agency	Dirk Marks	X	Mike Alvord		Y	Y	N
Agency	Santa Clarita Valley Groundwater Sustainability Agency	Steve Cole	X	Rick Viergutz		Y	Y	N
Agency	LA County Sanitation Districts	Kristen Ruffell		Christopher Lapaz	X	Y	Y	N
Agency	Santa Clarita Recreation & Community Services	Janine Prado	X	Amy Seyerle		Y	N	Y
Community Stakeholder	Poole & Shaffery	Hunt Braly	X			Y	Y	N
Community Stakeholder	Agua Dulce Town Council	Mary Johnson	X			Y	Y	N
Community Stakeholder	Santa Clarita Sierra Club	Sandra Cattell	X	Diane Trautman		Y	Y	N
Community Stakeholder	Evolve Business Strategies	Ivan Volschenk	X			Y	Y	N
Community Stakeholder	St. Francis Dam Disaster National Memorial Foundation	Dianne Erskine-Hellrigel	X	Heidi Webber		Y	Y	N
Municipal Members	LA County Public Works	Bruce Hamamoto		Allen Ma	X	Y	N	Y
Municipal Members	LA County Public Works	Bruce Hamamoto		Allen Ma	X	Y	N	Y
Municipal Members	LA County Public Works	Bruce Hamamoto		Allen Ma	X	Y	N	Y
Municipal Members	Santa Clarita	Jason Gibbs	X	Darin Seegmiller		Y	N	Y
Municipal Members	Santa Clarita	Heather Merenda	X	Oliver Cramer		Y	N	Y
Municipal Members	Santa Clarita	Mike Hennawy	X	Jerrid McKenna		Y	N	Y
Municipal Members	Santa Clarita	Tom Cole	X	David Peterson		Y	N	Y
Watershed Coordinator								
Non-Voting Member	TreePeople, Inc.	Peter Massey		Amanda Begley	X			
Total Non-Vacant Seats		17				Yes (Y) 17	8	9
Total Voting Members Present		17				No (N) 0	9	8
Agency		5				Abstain (A) 0	0	0
Community Stakeholder		5				Total 17	17	17
Municipal Members		7				Approved	Not Approved	Approved

Attendees
Santa Clara River WASC Meeting
March 3, 2022

David Peterson	Dirk Marks	Jason Gibbs	Mike Hennawy
Tom Cole	Alberto Grajeda	Darin Seegmiller	Roland Pacheco
Heather Merenda	Diane Trautman	Lynne Plambeck	Uriel Cobian - LACFCD
Agua Dulce Town Council Johnson	enrique baul	Kirk Allen	Amanda Begley
Allen Ma - LA County Public Works	CJ Caluag - LACFCD	Serena Zhu	Mike Antos (Regional Coord.)
City of Santa Clarita Cramer	The Acton Town Council Ayer	Ivan Volschenk	Julian Juarez
SCVWA Cole	Hunt Braly	Kathye Armitage	
Jerrid Mckenna	Janine Prado	Kayla Kilgo	
Dianne Hellrigel	Chris Lapaz	Sandra Cattell	