

Petaluma Valley Groundwater Sustainability Agency Advisory Committee Meeting May 17, 2023 | Summary

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Welcome and Call to Order

Heidi Bauer, Chair, opened the meeting at 4:37 p.m. and welcomed the participants which included two new Advisory Committee members. AC members and staff introduced themselves.

General Public Comments

Mark Lewis – There were approximately eight wells in the City of Petaluma some years ago, (installed in the 70's). If we tapped into those wells, and given the recent wet period, what is the current groundwater status?

Trotta – We will address this in the upcoming presentation.

Monika Botta – I live in the basin. I own five acres with open space and a single residence. I already conserved water before the drought as I have always been concerned about water. At a recent meeting, we heard that a fee would be tabled for a year or two until it was decided how to charge for water. How did you come up with the number to charge me in December 2022? It says nothing on the tax bill about water. People don't even know about the charges, yet we are being charged.

Indigo Bannister offered to speak with Monika Botta and other attendees personally about the groundwater sustainability fee following the meeting. Members of public may relay recommendations for Outreach to Indigo Bannister during discussions.

Agenda Review, Approval of Previous Meeting Summary

Objective: Confirm agenda and approve February meeting summary

Sandi Potter gave a short overview of the day's agenda. She thanked Heidi Bauer for her time served on the Petaluma Valley Advisory Committee, and as chair. As this was Heidi Bauer's last meeting, Potter asked if anyone was interested in the Chair or Vice-Chair position moving forward.

Heidi Bauer nominated Rebecca Ng as Chair, the nomination was seconded by Gary Mickelson. All in favor, none opposed.

Rebecca Ng nominated Lindsey Strain as Vice-Chair, the nomination was seconded by Peter Kiel. All in favor, none opposed.

Jordan Mahrt asked why the ad hoc committees had decided against consolidating the three GSAs at this time (mentioned in the previous meeting summary). Sandi Potter said she would discuss with Jordan Mahrt one-on-one to update him.

Sandi Potter then asked if there were any requested changes to the February meeting summary. No changes were called for, so it will be posted as written.

No public comment.

Spring Monitoring Update

Objective: Share initial data from Spring 2023 monitoring

Mitch Buttress, Technical staff, provided an update on the current groundwater levels as measured from the voluntary and dedicated multi-level monitoring wells this spring in the Petaluma Valley basin. Levels are higher than in recent years and higher than typical spring levels. Total rainfall received in Sonoma Valley* for Water Year 2022 (October 1 to present) is about 39 inches compared to 25 inches in Water Year 2022 and 10 inches in Water Year 2021. (*City of Sonoma rain gauge data used due to under-reporting issues with Petaluma Airport gauge).

Questions/Comments

Lindsey Strain – In one sentence, what is the status of the wells?

Buttress – Generally stable.

Bertsch – Slides 9 and 10. Groundwater levels are at or above the estimate of the base of the channel – what does that say in terms of output? Do we have that type of data for most of the creeks? And what does it say about the efficacy of recharge strategies in one creek versus another?

Buttress – They are almost always gaining situations. There is limited actual physical data.

Trotta – It is one of our main data gaps. There is potential for recharge to occur depending on the types of soils in between.

Public Comment

Mark Lewis – What about saltwater intrusion? Has it increased? Decreased? Remain unchanged?

Buttress – The data we have seen haven't shown much saltwater intrusion. There is also a lack of data. We are hoping to expand the volunteer monitoring program in the south end of the basin.

Heid Bauer – Have we tapped into the City of Petaluma wells this year?

Trotta – They pumped more from their wells the past two summers during the drought. They don't plan on pumping as much this year as the last two years.

Ryan Dunbar, City of Petaluma, will find out the information and respond to the group.

Clayton Engstrom – Why are they putting in wells?

Trotta – They are interested to bolster their backup supply, diversify their well fields, and evaluate aquifer storage.

Becky Ng – All wells being installed are on the west side of the city, not on the east.

Sebastian Bertsch – There are known infrastructure challenges to transfer water from east to west Petaluma so it would be good to have a groundwater reserve on the west side.

Voluntary Monitoring Program Planning

Objective: Receive AC feedback on design of voluntary monitoring program, including the following questions:

- *What should the GSA consider when designing the voluntary monitoring programs?*
- *What should outreach look like for the voluntary monitoring programs?*

Mitch Buttress presented an overview of the existing volunteer well monitoring programs and initial ideas for the design and expansion of voluntary monitoring program planning in the Petaluma Valley.

Buttress presented areas of data gaps for focusing volunteer well monitoring outreach efforts. With the GSA's limited funding and staff resources, it could make sense for the GSA to help organize and support community volunteer programs, provide outreach materials, and offer guidance on monitoring and data collection protocols for well owners to collect their own water-level measurements.

Permit Sonoma is setting up an online portal where well owners can input meter and water-level data. This portal could potentially be used for volunteer programs. Alternatively, the GSA could set up its own portal.

Questions/Comments

Engstrom – Why did DWR abandon two wells?

Buttress – They are doing that all over the state. If DWR don't have access agreements from owners, the wells are removed from the system.

Jordan Mahrt – Have you thought of giving anything back to the volunteers (e.g., water quality samples)? It could incentivize them.

Bertsch – I would love to volunteer my well, what are the parameters, qualifiers?

Strain – What is defining the limitations on the number of wells in the voluntary system?

Buttress – The number of wells is limited because of staff resource constraints. Maybe we could provide training, and volunteers provide samples/public data in return.

Bertsch – Integration on California State Groundwater Elevation Monitoring (CASGEM) process – is that still happening?

Buttress – CASGEM monitoring wells in the Petaluma Valley basin have been moved to the SGMA portal. The data is still in the same place on the state website. The same wells are monitored, but they are under the SGMA umbrella now.

Strain – Expressing the reason we want to monitor the water, would help.

Mahrt – I read that David Noren was providing monitoring equipment.

Trotta – That is something in the DWR grant we applied for – grant funds could be used for purchasing measuring devices, etc.

Mahrt – I think access to property is a big problem, it would be good to have more remote data.

Gary Mickelson – We need to make sure disinfectant is used on measurement equipment between well testing.

Public Comment

Mark Lewis – This discussion you had right now, are you just trying to ‘figure out’ volunteer monitoring?

Trotta – We are in initial planning stages.

Lewis – It doesn’t cost anything?

Trotta – There would be no cost to volunteers. This program is more focused on water level than water quality. There is also a voluntary monitoring program for water quality as we need to understand saltwater intrusion better.

Simone Weaver – I have a house in Petaluma and 37 acres of vineyards on Crane Canyon. Have you done any well monitoring on water near vineyards? My animals don’t even drink the water. I am hauling water. You are asking us to use our wells as guinea pigs.

Simone Weaver – I am being charged for water now, taxed on water. I am not volunteering for anyone to come on my property to check my well. I have lived there since the 80’s and have paid a lot over the years. I feel I am contributing to the recharge, I don’t believe in development, there should be a moratorium on development.

Gary Mickelson – Groundwater sustainability in the basin, is state mandated. If the state stepped in, it would cost ten times more.

Lindsey – The fee you are charged is not for your water use, it is for the benefit of our society to enable us to have groundwater for the next 50 years.

Simone Weaver – If that were true, then all the building in Petaluma and Santa Rosa, wouldn’t be going on. People won’t let you on their property, we don’t trust you. We won’t give you information to use against us.

Mark Lewis – I want to find out what is going with groundwater on my property. I have a well and need to monitor, I want to know what is happening with my water.

Simone Weaver – How much money is Marin County paying for water from Petaluma? They don’t pay anything for millions of gallons of water.

Potter – That is outside the jurisdiction of the GSA, so we don’t have the response right now.

Policy Options Study Kickoff

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

- *What policies are missing from the Policy Options Matrix that should be considered?*
- *Do you have concerns about any of the policies identified in the Policy Options Matrix?*
- *Does the initial implementation ranking in the Policy Options Matrix seem reasonable?*
- *What policies identified in the Policy Options Matrix do you think are the most important to implement first?*

Marcus Trotta gave an overview of the study including the process and scope of the study. The goal is to develop, prioritize, vet, and consider policies within the authorities of the GSA and local land use agencies that support and advance achieving the sustainability goal for the Subbasin.

There are a total of 16 policy options on the list grouped by primary benefits. This is a living list of options that will periodically be updated based on new information and GSA priorities.

Initial implementation Ranking

- 1a – Able to advance (funding available / 2 options)

- 1b – Able to advance (pending funding availability / 3 options)
- 2 – Able to advance pending consultation with adopting agency (3 options)
- 3 – Develop more information, reconsider later (5 options)
- 4 – Reconsider based on future potential need or additional information (3 options)

Trotta asked for input from the Advisory Committee on preliminary policy option approaches and implementation ranking.

Questions/Comments

Engstrom – Why are people hauling water if not for drinking? Construction?

Trotta – We are trying to get a better handle on usage, there is no data unless water is specifically hauled for drinking water.

Engstrom – How many discretionary permits are you doing now?

Trotta – About six, or less, per year in Petaluma Valley.

Rebecca Ng – I would prioritize the groundwater education and engagement program (currently 1b).

Mahrt – Water hook-up is complicated and difficult; it requires close coordination between the city and county.

Mickelson – GSA to review well permits? What are the criteria for the GSA, and the timing?

Trotta – We are starting to learn that; we are required to do reviews for certain well permits. We have our first referral for review coming up now. Under the drought order, the GSA needs to establish the well won't impact the ability for the basin to achieve its sustainability goal.

Engstrom – How long does it take to review permit requests?

Trotta – Set up and procedure take time. Once the process is set up, it will be quicker.

Engstrom – It would be good to have a form/checklist, then you would have the information upfront.

Bannister – There is a form on the website now.

Bauer – Are GSAs doing this in other counties?

Potter – The Executive Order required that the GSA made the determination of well drilling during the drought, now the county has carried it over to the public trust area. We are hoping to streamline the process.

Trotta – The other possibility would be for the GSA to provide Permit Sonoma the types of questions we need answered.

Bertsch – One missing policy might be coordination with PRMD.

Send any additional input to Marcus within one week. The topic will be discussed again at our next meeting.

Public comment

Mark Lewis – How does hierarchy work in the county with development? Do you have a strong voice in the county or are you an advisory group?

Potter – We have a Board of Directors for the Petaluma Valley GSA made up of five elected officials. Two, David Rabbitt and Susan Gorin, are members of the Board of Supervisors. We work collaboratively with the other two GSAs and with Permit Sonoma and the county government. We are two separate agencies but there is a lot of overlap.

Simone Weaver –

- 1) Are you going to continue to sell Scott Nelson water so he can take water to his pot farm in Petaluma?
- 2) There are reports of filling water tanks on a vineyard and trucking it away. Supervisors David Rabbitt and Susan Gorin know about it but, nothing has been done.
- 3) Are you going to revisit well permits given to vineyards who said they were putting in residential wells but installed commercial wells?

Potter – The GSA doesn't issue well permits. This agency doesn't have a regulatory role on this issue. That is why we are trying to develop policies for the future to formalize relationships and have policies on water hauling, etc.

Weaver – We could help you, but you are villains to us, you want to monitor our wells, you want to tax us. I have been the best ambassador of environment that I can be, on my property. I have photos of neighboring water meters off the vineyards, 37 acres taking four million gallons, it is insane.

Potter – We appreciate the conservation and would like to work together. Thank you for coming to the meeting.

Weaver – Then stop taxing us. You don't pay for our equipment, electricity, etc.

John King – It is my understanding that Sonoma Water is obligated to almost triple its export to Marin County to 28 billion gallons. What year do you expect it to reach that target amount so they can build an additional 30,000 homes?

Trotta – I am not aware of tripling of exports to Marin County.

Standing Item: GSA Operational Updates

Objective: Provide progress updates on GSA administration and operations

The Administrator report is in the packet and includes details of the below.

- FY 23-24 Calendar – 3 AC meetings, 4 Board meetings, dates are in the packet.
- FY 23-24 Budget & Fee – Board of Directors approved the preliminary budget at their March meeting. They did this without having to raise the \$40 fee currently subsidized by the county. Many fee corrections have been made that affected our budget.
- Integrated Climate Adaptation and Resiliency Program (ICARP) Grant Opportunity – New opportunity for grant funding that focuses on resiliency.
- Legislative Advocacy for small GSAs. Senator Maguire asked for \$5 million support.
- Well Ordinance Updates Approved – Tomorrow, the new well ordinance goes into effect.
- AC Chair – Covered at the beginning of the meeting.

Questions/Comments

Engstrom – Do you have the Level 1 conservation measures?

Potter – They are on the county website; we can get them to you.

No public comment.

Summary of Action Items / AC Chair “Board Summary”

Sandi Potter once again thanked Heidi Bauer for her service and Heidi Bauer thanked the team for serving.

Sandi Potter acknowledged the members of public for attending and noted they might not have been familiar with the Question/Comment process. She also added that she has been working in local and state agencies since 2001 and has attended hundreds of meetings. She expressed her disappointment for the lack of respect at this meeting.

Questions/Comments

Mark Lewis – Are the transcripts available online?

Bauer – Meeting summaries are available online, but audio recordings are not. Please go to <https://petalumavalleygroundwater.org/meetings/>.

Heidi Bauer thanked everyone for participating and adjourned the meeting at 6:35 p.m.

The next Petaluma Valley Board meeting is Thursday, June 22 4:00-6:00pm and the next Advisory Committee meeting is Wednesday, September 27, 4:30-6:30pm.

Attendees

Advisory Committee Members - Attending

Clayton Engstrom
Gary Mickelson
Heidi Bauer
Jordan Mahrt
Lindsey Strain – departed 5:55 pm
Peter Kiel – departed 6:30 pm
Rebecca (Becky) Ng – departed 6:30 pm
Sarah Raker
Sebastian Bertsch

Advisory Committee Members - Absent

Eugene Camozzi

Staff / Presenters

Sandi Potter, PV GSA Administrator
Marcus Trotta, Plan Manager
Mitch Buttress, Technical Staff
Indigo Bannister, GSA Staff
Simone Peters, GSA Staff (recording meeting summary)

Other Attendees

Ryan Dunbar, City of Petaluma
Andy Rodgers, Administrator SRP - arrived 5:00pm
Mark Lewis, member of public
Monika Botta, member of public
Simone Weaver, member of public
John King, member of public
3 other members of public