

Meeting Summary

Petaluma Valley Groundwater Workshop

Monday, November 9, 2015

Luchessi Community Center

WELCOME

Petaluma Mayor David Glass welcomed people to the Luchessi Community Center. Sonoma County Supervisor David Rabbitt welcomed people to the workshop. He noted that the purpose of the workshop is to provide information on the new Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, to provide an opportunity for people to ask questions and for elected officials to hear people's thoughts and concerns.

PRESENTATIONS (please see pdf of the presentations for additional detail)

- Facilitator Gina Bartlett outlined the purpose and structure of the workshop, noting that additional workshops are being held in Sonoma Valley and Santa Rosa Plain.
- Sonoma County Water Agency Chief Engineer and Director of Groundwater Management Jay Jasperse reviewed the new Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), noting that it affects three groundwater basins in Sonoma County: Petaluma Valley, Sonoma Valley and Santa Rosa Plain. The first step in SGMA is the creation of Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) to manage groundwater programs in the affected basins. Tonight's workshop is focused on GSA options.
- Marcus Trotta, hydrogeologist, Sonoma County Water Agency, described the Petaluma Valley groundwater basin. The data on the basin is old, but a new study by the US Geological Survey is underway that will reveal much more about basin conditions.
- Tito Sasaki, representing North Bay Water District, described this agricultural district, which currently represents landowners in southern Petaluma and Sonoma valleys. He noted that NBWD is working with LAFCO to expand its boundaries to include additional ag lands in the valleys.
- Dan St. John, Public Works and Utility Manager, City of Petaluma, described the countywide effort to comply with SGMA through development of principles, presentations to councils/boards and creation of a countywide staff working group to discuss groundwater options.
- Leah Walker, Environmental Services Manager, City of Petaluma, described the public outreach efforts underway to inform people about SGMA and GSA formation.
- Gina Bartlett discussed the stakeholder assessment and described the recommendation of a "skeleton" Groundwater Sustainability Agency structure that includes one GSA and one Groundwater Sustainability Plan in the three basins, with some coordination between the basins.

SUMMARY OF QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

Petaluma Basin:

What determines whether the basin is a medium priority basin (and subject to SGMA)?

STAFF RESPONSE: California Department of Water Resources determine the basin priority, based on groundwater conditions, population and groundwater/surface water interaction.

Will the boundaries be clearly defined as to who is in and who is out?

STAFF RESPONSE: Yes, the basins will be clearly defined. Staff in all three basins are preparing to provide comments to DWR regarding technical basin boundary issues.

Can someone opt to be “out” of the basin?

STAFF RESPONSE: Individual landowners can't opt out of a basin.

How does the groundwater table in the Petaluma Valley compared to drought years of 1976-77?

STAFF RESPONSE: It's difficult to know the full picture, given the lack of data.

How will the GSA determine the difference between a natural drop in the basin due to things like droughts, versus drop related to heavy use?

STAFF RESPONSE: The Groundwater Sustainability Plan requires that a water budget is developed to determine whether the aquifer is being recharged. It will look at changes in land use, climate change and be based on computer modeling.

Shouldn't we be trying to recharge as much water as possible?

STAFF RESPONSE: Yes, recharge is critical. We need to manage for a sustainable basin, and that could include using groundwater when it's plentiful and Russian River water when it's plentiful to let groundwater recharge. Capturing stormwater and maximizing use of recycled water will help, too.

Water Sources/Problems:

Sonoma Mountain used to be the source of Petaluma's water, why can't the city use that again?

STAFF RESPONSE: Regulations have changed and the city needs a reliable source of water; apparently, this source wasn't always reliable.

Is there anything in the county General Plan to mitigate against loss of aquifers and the impacts of development?

STAFF RESPONSE: Yes, the General Plan has a Water Resource element that incorporates design features that reduce water use and that encourage water to infiltrate. The city has similar plans and the city maximizes its use of recycled water for irrigation.

Haven't seen any dry lawns in a long time, why aren't urban residents conserving more water?

RESPONSE: Petaluma has exceeded the state's conservation goal and many residents have replaced lawn with drought-tolerant landscapes by working with Daily Acts.

Other:

There needs to be additional information getting out to the public. Rural well owners need to be informed. There were also questions regarding public input.

STAFF RESPONSE:

- It was agreed that more outreach needs to take place. Unlike other areas, Petaluma is just beginning its groundwater study, and so there needs to be robust outreach to inform people about what is happening.
- Public input is encouraged through this workshop and through the website, www.sonomacountygroundwater.org.

GSA Formation:

There were several questions regarding staffing and budgeting, including whether new staff will be needed, estimates of costs and questions about the budgets in Sonoma Valley and Santa Rosa Plain.

STAFF RESPONSE: We are at the very beginning of this process, but are starting to develop draft budget estimates. Sonoma Valley and Santa Rosa Plain current groundwater efforts are staffed by two hydrogeologists, a part time facilitator and a part time consultant, but the new law requires a much more quantitative approach, so staffing needs will likely be different.

There were several questions regarding GSA structure, including who decides the structure, representation of rural landowners, questions about why cities that get their water from the Water Agency should be represented on GSAs, and questions regarding the North Bay Water District.

STAFF RESPONSE:

- The elected boards and councils of Sonoma County Water Agency, Sonoma County Board of Supervisors, City of Petaluma and North Bay Water District will ultimately decide the structure of the GSA and representation.
- Rural landowners are represented by their Sonoma County Supervisor.
- While Petaluma gets most of its water from the Water Agency, it is also a provider of recycled water and conducts water conservation programs.
- The five-member NBWD is elected by voters in the district for three year terms. It represents about 25,000 acres of agricultural land.

Several people commented that the GSA be as local as possible (representing Petaluma Valley interests). A show of hands revealed that most people supported the idea of one GSA representing the Petaluma Valley Basin and developing one Groundwater Sustainability Plan. Concern was raised regarding possible competition between the three basins.

STAFF RESPONSE: Staff noted that they were recommending coordination between the basins for things like grant applications and data management, to reduce competition and to increase efficiencies.