

Cordelia, Vacaville rural fire districts seek to merge

By [Todd R. Hansen](#) [From page A1](#) | July 19, 2017

CORDELIA — The Vacaville and Cordelia fire protection districts have taken the beginning steps toward consolidation, citing financial issues and the risk of not being able to provide adequate service as the primary reasons.

The boards of each rural fire district – Cordelia on May 18 and Vacaville on May 25 – adopted resolutions outlining the financial difficulties and the need to consolidate into a single district.

“ . . . (The) interests of the residents of the areas serviced by the Vacaville Fire Protection District and the Cordelia Fire Protection District are best served by the reorganization of the two districts into one entity or by certain functional consolidation . . . ,” the resolutions state.

Both resolutions cite declining revenues and increasing operations costs for the volunteer departments. The name of the consolidated district would be the Solano Fire Protection District.

Critical issues to address will be how the new district is financed, and how operations will be structured.

Chiefs Howard Wood (Vacaville) and Keith Martin (Cordelia) could not be reached Monday for comment. Messages were left with the district offices.

“Due to the complexity of issues that must be analyzed in advance of a consolidation of our districts, we are requesting the Solano LAFCO establish a reorganization committee to prepare a proposed plan for reorganization,” states a letter to commission Chairwoman Nancy Shopay. It is dated May 15.

That letter also states that the board chairmen of each rural fire district – Jeff Dittmer for Cordelia and Chris Calvert for Vacaville – have been authorized to work with the Solano Local Agency Formation Commission to “develop a roadmap to improve fire protection services to our respective jurisdictions.”

The commission on June 12 agreed to form a reorganization committee, but does not expect that committee to begin its work until new LAFCO Executive Officer Richard Seithel begins his duties Aug. 9.

“He has worked on fire district consolidation,” Roseanne Chamberlain, the interim executive officer, said Monday.

The employees of each district would come under the authority of the consolidated district, according to the resolution. All assets and liabilities also would come under the new organization.

Cordelia has two paid staff members, while the rural Vacaville district has eight, according to their respective websites.

“Any proposed reorganization would recognize and preserve the existing revenue source of the existing districts, with particular emphasis on Cordelia Fire Protection District’s Measure I,” the resolutions state.

Measure I, enacted in 2002, is a special tax that charges \$260 for each residential parcel, and has a host of other taxes ranging from \$150 to \$350 depending on land use. The idea was to provide a “stable source of supplementary revenue” for the Cordelia Fire Protection District. There is no sunset on the tax.

The resolutions state that the entirety of each district would become part of the new district, although there is language that suggests flexibility in that decision.

The Cordelia district covers 56 square miles and includes Green Valley, Rockville, Cordelia and Lower Suisun Valley.

The Vacaville Fire Protection District consolidated with Elmira in 1984. It covers 135 square miles.

The district wraps around the city of Vacaville along the Dixon fire district line to the north and northeast. It is bordered to the south by Travis Air Force Base and the Montezuma Fire Protection District, east of Fairfield, and is separated from Cordelia by the Suisun Fire Protection District west of Fairfield.

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Daily Republic

LAFCO has hired new, full-time executive officer

By [Todd R. Hansen](#) From page A3 | July 19, 2017



Solano LAFCO executive officer Richard Seithel

FAIRFIELD — The new executive officer for the Solano Local Agency Formation Commission will begin his duties Aug. 9.

Richard Seithel, of Antioch, was hired July 10. He will receive an annual salary of \$135,000.

“We are pleased to have Richard Seithel as our new LAFCO executive officer,” Nancy Shopay, chairwoman of the LAFCO board, said in a statement posted Thursday to the organization’s website.

“(Seithel) brings his experience and knowledge about city and county projects as well as his private interaction with members of the public, which will be a valuable asset to Solano County,” Shopay said in the statement.

The commission has been searching for a replacement for Elliot Mulberg, who left at the end of 2016. He had worked as a part-time contractor for three years, replacing what had been a full-time executive.

Roseanne Chamberlain, who has more than 20 years in LAFCO, has been the interim executive officer since January and will continue her duties as the part-time Amador executive officer.

She said she hopes to help Seithel in his transition into the job.

“I have to see what he wants me to do. . . . I just want to pass the baton so he has sufficient information to pick up where I left off,” Chamberlain said Monday in a phone interview.

Seithel is currently the chief of Annexations and Economic Stimulus Programs for Contra Costa County, and was critical in the development of the Northern Waterfront Economic Development Initiative, according to the LAFCO statement. Additionally, he has been responsible for negotiating annexations and property tax agreements.

He has been with the county for 15 years, including serving as senior deputy county administrator.

Prior to working for Contra Costa County, Seithel worked as an executive in the transportation and building materials sector, including more than 15 years with the Canadian Pacific Railroad, the LAFCO statement said.

He has two bachelor's degrees from the University of Missouri, and a master's in business administration from St. Mary's College-Moraga with honors in advanced strategic marketing, the LAFCO statement said.

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Water Deeply

Clean Water Plan for Long-Suffering San Joaquin Valley Towns Derailed

An innovative project would see seven Tulare County towns plagued by polluted wells sharing a water treatment plant, but political infighting stalled the proposal days before a funding deadline.

Written by [Mark Grossi](#) Published on σ **Jul. 20, 2017** Read time Approx. 7 minutes



Canal water from Sierra snowmelt moves through Tulare County, California. A plan to help seven nearby communities with polluted groundwater wells gain access to surface water for their drinking supply recently stalled after years of effort. *Tara Lohan*

SEVILLE, California – Fresh Sierra mountain snowmelt would make a better drink of water for rural Tulare County folk who currently rely on wells tainted by fertilizers, leaky septic systems and decades-old pesticide residues. Nobody argues with that here in California’s San Joaquin Valley.

The problem is obtaining even a tiny fraction of the average [1.7 million acre-feet of Kings River snowmelt](#) that heads mostly to farm fields each year. Even after securing the water, millions of dollars would be needed for a treatment plant, which is required for surface water.

But over the past several years, a rare opportunity has appeared for seven towns in northern Tulare County: Cutler, Orosi, East Orosi, Monson, Seville, Sultana and Yettem. The river water is available, and the state is willing to help build the treatment plant for the 17,000 people in these towns.

Clustered together in a broad, rural citrus belt, the towns have been [suffering from contaminated wells](#) for at least two decades. Children here are taught not to drink from the tap, and families living below the federal poverty line have often been forced to spend up to 10 percent of their income on bottled water. When the drought hit, wells dried up, leaving people in more misery.

Now, after enduring years of contamination, a devastating drought and the scuttling of a similar project six years ago due to a legal technicality, these rural residents are on the verge of replacing polluted groundwater with unsullied river water.

A regional water treatment system shared among several rural towns would be a first for the San Joaquin Valley, but it is threatened by self-inflicted delays and local political slowdowns, including one that last month stalled the estimated \$30 million [treatment plant](#).

This time the conflict is a home-grown squabble over the benefits of the treatment plant. The two largest towns, Cutler and Orosi, stand together in pushing for the majority of the benefits in perpetuity, leaving the five smaller communities on the opposing side. People on both sides are deflated, but still dedicated to building the plant.

One of them is Argelia Flores, a resident in Seville, one of the smaller five towns. She served on the committee to set up the owner-operator agency for the treatment plant.

“This treatment plant is a very good idea, and probably a necessity in future droughts – it is so hard to live without water in your home,” she says. “We thought this was going well until last month. But we’re not giving up.”

River water instead of groundwater is perhaps the most elegant long-term solution to the chronic contamination of drinking-water wells in this farm belt. The state’s 2014 [groundwater sustainability law](#) won’t protect the groundwater supply for another two decades and treating the contamination is too costly for small communities.

Around the San Joaquin Valley, many rural communities with contaminated or dried-up wells are connecting with bigger cities. One example is the [Matheny Tract](#) just outside the city of Tulare.

The northern Tulare County towns aren’t close enough to connect with big cities, such as Visalia, which has a population of about 130,000. The smaller five of the seven towns have stopgap measures in place that would have served residents until the river water treatment plant was built.

The towns of [Seville](#) and Yettem are working together on a well. The town of [Monson](#) is getting a new well and distribution system, and soon will join nearby Sultana’s community service district. [East Orosi](#) is also working on a new well. Engineers say those projects are vulnerable to the same fate as other wells in the area – nitrate contamination from agricultural fertilizers. But folks were hoping to have the treatment plant built by 2020, to ensure a long-term solution.

Instead, Cutler and Orosi pulled out of the water treatment project talks just days shy of a deadline to acquire \$250,000 for planning through a \$7.5 billion state water bond, [Proposition 1](#).

What happened? According to the revised contract language circulated at a meeting among the attorneys, the lawyer for Orosi Public Utility District proposed the benefits of the water treatment plant should remain in perpetuity as they were initially allocated – proportionately by

population size. Cutler and Orosi have 80 percent of the 17,000 residents who would be served. But the numbers might change in future years as communities grow, opponents argued.

Before lawyers became involved in the negotiations this year, representatives of the seven towns had a tentative agreement to give Orosi and Cutler a majority vote on the board of a new agency that would own and operate the treatment plant.

But Orosi's lawyer, Moses Diaz, sought to add the language about water benefits, according to a source familiar with the negotiations. Diaz did not respond to requests for comment.

Ryan Jensen of the nonprofit [Community Water Center](#) in Visalia worked with the communities for many months, trying to set up the new agency. He says informal polls of the communities show 85 percent of the people in the area want the project, and many are surprised and disappointed.

"If local leaders can't take a strong project proposal and carry it through to develop shovel-ready projects, they won't be in a position to take advantage of new opportunities for construction funding," he says. "And the funding will pass by our valley communities."

Jose Guerrero, a board member for the [Cutler Public Utilities District](#), says there is talk of Cutler and Orosi moving forward with the project on their own. He says Cutler has been working on the water treatment concept since 2004.

"This is something the community needs," he says. "But there was a disagreement among the lawyers about how the treatment project should be shared. It's disheartening, but we have the greater population, and we have the greater need to serve more people."

If Cutler and Orosi move forward on the project together, it would leave the other five towns vulnerable to continued contamination and dried-up wells. During the drought, Monson residents Ben and Lazara Luengas saved water any way they could – which meant their landscaping died and water was rationed for bathing, laundry, dishwashing and other household needs.

"It's very hard," Lazara says. "They delivered water to a big tank for us to use. You shower every day and do laundry once a week. But there isn't much water left over for anything."

The water treatment idea has run aground before. In 2007, the local [Alta Irrigation District of Dinuba](#) designed a plan to use some of its own Kings River water for towns in the area. Orosi, which had long been pursuing the river water along with Cutler, would be the lead applicant for grant money from the state.

Funding efforts languished on the state's priority list until a highly publicized visit to the area from the [United Nations](#) in March 2011. A U.N. representative toured Seville, taking note of the crumbling, century-old distribution pipes and the town's only well, which was contaminated. The U.N. urged California to act quickly in cleaning up the water.

The state publicly agreed, but then quietly balked again, citing a funding technicality: The funding would not be high priority because the lead applicant, Orosi, had a water supply that was not currently out of compliance with standards.

Local engineers unsuccessfully argued it was only a matter of time before Orosi would be out of compliance again. Months later, the seven communities got together and tried to obtain funding with the county taking the lead, but the delays and false starts continued throughout 2012 and 2013.

It has been frustrating for residents, because Alta Irrigation District's plan to deliver about 23,000 acre-feet is still ready to go. The water would come from excess river runoff from wet winters, such as the latest wet season. The runoff would be allowed to percolate into two groundwater holding areas, which could be pumped for farm irrigation. The seven towns would get fresh river water that would not have to be sent to farms. State officials are confident Alta could make the deliveries even during droughts.

"In California, you always figure the tough part is getting the water," retired Alta general manager Chris Kapheim said last year. "Not this time."

The pain of the recent five-year drought changed minds. The state altered the management of funding for water fixes, making it more responsive to helping these impoverished towns.

Chad Fischer, Tulare district engineer for the California [State Water Resources Control Board](#), which is involved in funding, says he, too, was surprised the seven towns could not reach an agreement in June. But he says the door is not closed on funding.

"It is a good project, aligned with State Water Resources Control Board's approach," he says. "I want to see this go through."

Tulare county supervisor [Steve Worthley](#), who has been involved in the project, says the group of five smaller towns might improve their chances by finding a larger community to join their effort – perhaps [Dinuba](#), which has about 24,000 residents.

Would the state have to someday choose between a Cutler-Orosi application or an application from the smaller five? Fischer declines to comment. But he says, "We would prefer that the seven communities work together because it makes more sense for the region."

The Sacramento Bee

Let the lawsuits begin: Delta tunnels get official state green light

By Ryan Sabalow and Dale Kasler, July 21, 2017

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Gov. Jerry Brown's administration gave the official go-ahead Friday for his controversial plan to bore two huge tunnels through the heart of Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

The state Department of Water Resources said it had finalized the lengthy environmental review of the \$17.1 billion Delta tunnels project, officially known as California WaterFix. In what's known as a "Notice of Determination," regulators said building and operating the tunnels won't violate the California Environmental Quality Act or harm fish, wildlife and human health.

The move came as little surprise to those closely following the decade-long push to build the project. Brown's administration has long argued the tunnels would improve environmental conditions in the troubled Delta. By doing so, Brown has said the federal and state pumping stations in the southern part of the estuary will be able to deliver water more reliably to 25 million Southern Californians and Bay Area residents, and millions of acres of San Joaquin Valley farmland.

"Today, we have reached our next important benchmark in moving California towards a more reliable water supply," said DWR Acting Director Cindy Messer in a prepared statement. "With this certification, our state is now closer to modernizing our aging water delivery system in a way that improves reliability and protects the environment."

Friday's decision, more than any other, paves the way for a flood of litigation. Legal experts said the state's strict environmental law, known as CEQA, can often serve as a powerful tool for opponents to stand in the way of a project, at least temporarily.

"It does slow things down for sure," said George Hartmann, a Stockton lawyer who represents Delta farmers opposed to the tunnels. He said litigation is likely to begin "in short order."

Barbara Barrigan-Parilla of Restore the Delta, one of the project's fiercest opponents, added, "The bottom line is there are so many flaws in the project ... that we and other parties throughout the Delta and the state will prepare to litigate."

The official approvals don't mean the project is a certainty. The south-of-Delta water agencies that would have to pay for the tunnels still haven't signed off on the project. The powerful Metropolitan Water District of Southern California is expected to make its financial [commitment this fall](#). But other key water agencies are wavering. Farmers at the influential Westlands Water

District, which covers much of Fresno and Kings counties, said they remain unconvinced after hearing detailed [projections on cost](#) during a meeting earlier this week.

The state action comes less than a month after two federal fisheries agencies [gave their approvals](#) to the project. In a pair of long-awaited decisions, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service said the tunnels aren't likely to jeopardize the continued existence of Delta smelt, Chinook salmon, steelhead and other fish protected by the Endangered Species Act.

Days later, fishing groups and environmentalists sued in U.S. District Court.

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Water Deeply

Why Some Western Water Agencies Are Writing 100-Year Water Plans

Climate change is causing water managers to think long term about their resources. Several western agencies are planning a century in advance, but that's not without its headaches.

Written by [Jerry Redfern](#) Published on **Jul. 25, 2017** Read time Approx. 4 minutes



Water flows through one of the irrigation canals in Albuquerque, N.M., on Friday, March 31, 2017. A few water agencies across the West, including the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority, have begun writing 100-year water plans. *AP/Susan Montoya Bryan*

In February of this year, the largest water district in a state with little water enacted a plan that attempts to manage that increasingly fickle resource for 100 years.

The plan, [Water: 2120](#), is the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority (ABCWUA) in New Mexico's blueprint to direct water procurement, protection and use for the next century.

"This really came out of eight to 10 of us sitting around in a room every Wednesday morning and talking this through," said Katherine Yuhas, water resources manager at ABCWUA and one of the lead planners on the project.

It's common for water agencies to develop plans looking 20 to 40 years ahead, or in some cases 50 to 60 years. And ABCWUA, of course, has had planning documents in the past, the last one looking 60 years out. But "this is the first one to take into account climate change," Yuhas said, and "it's the first one to look out 100 years." Plus, it covers everything from watersheds to infrastructure to household use.

Other Western water groups are also working on long-range plans. Santa Fe is looking closely at Water: 2120. Next year, Austin Water plans to unveil [Water Forward](#), which it calls, “a water plan for the next century.” And in Arizona, the [Office of Assured and Adequate Water Supply Program](#) at the Department of Water Resources requires new developments in certain metropolitan areas to show they have physical and legal access to water for 100 years.

Last year, the United States Environmental Protection Agency published “[What Climate Change Means for New Mexico](#),” with a blunt assessment: “The changing climate is likely to increase the need for water but reduce the supply.” The future is predicted to be hotter, drier and subject to “extreme precipitation events.” Plus, population is growing. The ABCWUA serves more than 700,000 people today and before 2060 that number is expected to top 1 million.

Climate-change predictions were the prompt for the extensive plan, Yuhas said. “One hundred years seemed like about as far out as we could push.”

The plan calls for increased water conservation through groundwater management (including recharging the aquifer beneath Albuquerque), surface-water management (including protecting current water rights and buying more in the future), [watershed restoration](#), water recycling and reuse programs and stormwater capture and storage.

Kimery Wiltshire, chief executive of Carpe Diem West, a nonprofit group that works on water issues in the Western U.S., said the plan is “a very smart thing for them to do” because it’s “really taking into account that climate change is going to be with us for a very long time.”

But it’s tough to plan that far into the future. Wiltshire noted. “There’s no standard for writing a water plan under climate change. There is no checklist.”

Tony Pulokas, a developer and senior engineer with HydroLogics, a firm that develops large-scale water resource models for government groups around the globe, sounds a note of caution about plans that contain multiple threads of uncertainty – namely: climate, water supplies, population and government itself.

“In general I think it’s wise to be looking well ahead in the future,” he said. “It’s also true that there is a great deal of uncertainty as to what the demand for water will be in 100 years, what the effects of climate change might be, and really, what sort of changes there might be to the whole legal framework as for how water is managed.”

The New Mexico plan sounds “more ambitious than usual,” Pulokas said.

“We feel very confident about what we’re going to see over the next 10 years,” Yuhas said. “We feel far less confident about what we’re going to see 90 years out. But the goal of this plan is to update it every 10 years. So as we get better and better information ... we will be updating the plan.”



A trickle of water left in the Rio Grande is pushed downstream by the wind near the chili-growing community of Hatch, N.M., in March 2013. Concerned about the impact of climate change on water resources, the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority has written a 100-year blueprint for managing its water. (AP/Susan Montoya Bryan, File)

Sterling Grogan is a watershed ecologist who spent eight years at the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District as a biologist and planner, and 10 years before that as a graduate fellow at the University of New Mexico in biology. He sees the plan's long-term strength [in its trees](#). "The way that the plan deals with watersheds I think is very important," he said. That's because the plan connects the dots between customers' taps and the upstream forests that naturally gather and store the water. Protecting those forests is a key part of the plan for securing water for future generations.

Grogan calls it progressive, "in terms of connecting watersheds with their water customers. And that's the big connection – the big important connection that is going to allow these utilities to be resilient in the face of the inevitable effects of climate change."

Some scientists say New Mexico's plan could be a global model. "Other regions of the world can look to New Mexico's growing leadership on planning for water-resource stress periods and increasing drought-resilient renewable energy sources," according to a report issued by the Union of Concerned Scientists, "[Confronting Climate Change in New Mexico](#)."

The ABCWUA might be in front of a coming wave of climate-change lawmaking in response to the Trump administration. Since Trump announced the U.S. would withdraw from the Paris agreement, [state](#) and [local governments](#), as well as [companies](#), have pledged to act on climate regardless.

Yuhas said she is also hearing from other water managers in the West in the wake of Water: 2120. "Yes, there is interest beyond New Mexico," she said. "They have said, 'This is great. Tell us about how you did this. What did it take to get this done?'"

Climate change may confuse and confound water planners, but the goals are clear. "One hundred years isn't forever, but it's several generations out," Yuhas said. "You're now talking about your great-great-great grandchildren who will benefit from this program."

Published July 26th, 2017

Total devastation in Lafayette Circle fire

By Nick Marnell



100 Lafayette Circle after the fire Photo courtesy ConFire

employee who assisted Rossi then left, and Assadi locked up the restaurant, noticing nothing at all out of order. "Whatever happened after that, I have no idea," Assadi said.

Whatever happened after that, arrived in a fury from the depths of hell.

"I've never been close to a wildfire or any kind of serious fire before, but I'll tell you the sound it made was mind-boggling. It sounded like a jet taking off, or a tornado. I've never seen or heard anything quite like it before," Lafayette resident Mark Robinson said.

By the time Capt. Jared Palant and his ConFire engine company arrived at the scene near midnight, the building at 100 Lafayette Circle was completely engulfed in flames.

"We knew instantly this was huge by the number of 911 calls we got," Marshall said. "Unless we had been there 30 minutes earlier, there was no way we were saving that building."

Palant immediately called for a third alarm. "A wood-sided building, with a shake roof, surrounded by two-story apartment buildings and another two-story commercial building, a eucalyptus tree - our goal was to contain the fire to the building of origin," he said. "We had to prevent large chunks of ash from landing on the roofs of the neighboring buildings."

Crews pumped water out of five hydrants to fight the fire, requiring thousands of gallons of extra water from the East Bay Municipal Utility District; a typical fire would need one hydrant. "It was the biggest fire I've ever seen as the captain of a first-responding unit," said Palant, an eight-year ConFire veteran.

"I was afraid the whole town would go," Marilyn Finn, a 101 Lafayette Circle resident, said. "It's a miracle that they held it to that one building."

Nearly 50 firefighters contained the blaze within two hours, and several fire personnel remained on the scene throughout the day. The fire caused an estimated \$1.1 million in damage with no reported injuries. Stunned tenants and residents caught their first glimpse of the devastation Thursday morning, the historic building constructed in the 1970s burnt to the ground.

Assadi heard the news at 6:30 a.m. "I'm in shock," he said. "I just don't understand. How could a fire spread that quickly?" Assadi said he wants to reopen La Finestra as soon as possible, and he is searching for a suitable location in the city.

He praised, and expressed pain for, his employees, particularly server Tony Lavino, whom he called a local icon. "I want to have my people back," a crushed Assadi said.

"All of our work was saved in the cloud," said Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Jay Lifson, scrambling to help displaced tenants find new locations. He landed a temporary home for the Chamber at Stanley Middle School and an additional meeting location at the Stanley Smith Insurance agency.

Marta Chavalas of Skincare by Marta said finding a new location has been difficult because of the tight real estate market. "I would like to stay in Lafayette, if possible," she said.

One business owner at 110 Lafayette Circle, unaffected directly by the incident, was moved by the response of Lafayette residents. Heidi Simarro of Phoenix Skincare and Waxing said that nothing was even singed at her building, and other than parking problems because of the newly fenced-off area, she was doing OK. "Competitors called and offered me space," she said. "I almost cried when I heard that."

Lifson plans a meeting with the displaced tenants to go over his attempts to secure government loans and Workforce Development assistance from Contra Costa County.

According to Lafayette Chief of Police Eric Christensen, the property has been released to its insurance company which will conduct its own investigation. After the investigation the property manager, Wells and Bennett of Walnut Creek, will handle removal of the debris. Christensen estimated the process will take several months.

Lafayette City Manager Steve Falk said he will set up a meeting with Lafayette Circle property owners to discuss reasonable and appropriate land use opportunities in the area, an area to be long remembered as the site of one of the city's most spectacular structure fires.



The morning after. Photo Nick Marnell



The Lafayette Chamber offices and other businesses in flames. ConFire

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Published **July 26th, 2017**

Morale plummeting at MOFD due to board actions

By *Nick Marnell*



Capt. Mark McCullah shares his frustrations with MOFD board. Photo Nick Marnell

Intent on putting the district on the road to financial viability, the Moraga-Orinda Fire District board voted to slash district operations, with one director telling a room full of firefighters that everything was in play for future cuts, including the closure of a fire station.

Fire Chief Stephen Healy presented a revised 2017-18 MOFD budget to the board July 18 that eliminated \$500,000 in operational expenses, including overtime, but even those cuts did not totally satisfy Director John Jex.

"Our general reserve is grossly inadequate, and will be at the end of this year, even with this," Jex said, stressing that MOFD is not in good enough financial shape to operate long term and to meet its obligations. With the budget changes, the district projects its general fund reserve to reach \$4.8 million this fiscal year, though as of 2016 MOFD recognizes more than \$64 million in net pension liability, a pension obligation bond and retiree health care liability.

"You need to increase revenue, or make operational changes like eliminating a fire house," Jex said. "You have to make those kinds of determinations."

Director Steve Anderson pleaded for the board to keep the district on track with its mission to provide the highest possible level of emergency and public service to the community. "In the last 60 days, we are at the lowest morale that I have seen in this organization. These people have lost their leader and they have no confidence in their board," Anderson said, referring to Healy's announced September departure and urging passage of the original budget. "There is a toxic environment going on here, and we've got to fix the morale now."

Three directors remained unmoved, as Jex, Craig Jorgens and Brad Barber voted to pass the revised budget, with \$100,000 added back for the chief to use for contingencies. Anderson and board President Kathleen Famulener voted against the cuts.

Firefighter-paramedic Lucas Lambert, district union representative, lashed out at the board's decision to reduce operating expenses. "The MOFD board of directors has created an unnecessarily chaotic environment at our meetings. This type of chaos is not conducive to the high level of service that we aim to provide and the professional environment we pride ourselves on," Lambert said, urging the public to pay close attention and not stand for service cuts in the community.

Local 1230 President Vince Wells said he understands the need for MOFD to be financially responsible, especially with the district history of financial mismanagement, but he said there needs to be a proper balance between financial restraint and providing adequate service. "A couple of new board members have financial backgrounds, and are putting financial stability ahead of fire service, and that has the troops concerned," Wells said.

Wells also talked about the soon-to-begin 2018 labor negotiations. "I'm concerned," Wells said. "Because of the actions this board has taken so far, we expect it will push for reduced resources. With this group, it seems everything is on the table, and that makes everyone uneasy."

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East Bay Times

Changes to rules for controversial Antioch development might be tabled

Critics jumped on proposed revisions to the document guiding construction in the Sand Creek Focus Area, where the city plans to build up to 4,000 homes



Courtesy Joel Devalcourt

Antioch's planning commission might table proposed changes to the city's General Plan, which guides development of the controversial swath of open space known as the Sand Creek Focus Area.

By [Rowena Coetsee](mailto:rcoetsee@bayareanewsgroup.com) | rcoetsee@bayareanewsgroup.com | Bay Area News Group

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ANTIOCH — Residents and environmental groups concerned about plans to develop Antioch's largest remaining swath of open space are closely scrutinizing proposed changes to the document that describes what this growth will look like.

If those revisions materialize, it likely won't be any time soon, however.

A flurry of letters that stakeholders submitted only hours before last week's planning commission meeting prompted city officials to postpone the matter, and now they're suggesting that commissioners table the matter [indefinitely](#).

Antioch Planning Commission is set to meet at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday at City Hall, 200 H St.

The commission is scheduled to recommend that council members [amend](#) some of the policies in the city's General Plan, which lays out long-term goals pertaining to various aspects of life that are affected as the population expands, such as traffic, noise and public safety.

In particular, the focus is on how the General Plan describes the type, density and location of construction that's envisioned for approximately 2,712 acres at the city's southern end known as the Sand Creek Focus Area.

Whatever action planning commissioners take won't be ramrodded through, said Forrest Ebbs, the city's community development director.

“This is a big deal,” he said, noting the importance of properly planning Antioch’s final large-scale development. “This is the last great neighborhood, the end of the frontier.”

Approved in 2003, the General Plan allows for up to 4,000 homes in the Sand Creek Focus Area.

The city already has given two developers the green light to build 1,174 residential units between them: It approved 533 units known as Aviano Farms in fall 2015, and an additional 641 homes that comprise the Vineyards at Sand Creek project in February 2016.

A third development is on the city’s radar: Richland Communities wants to build 1,307 homes and the company has applied for the various approvals it needs before it can start.

With the goal of updating and clarifying the General Plan, one of the suggested changes is to remove the mention of a golf course; the city already has one and the sport isn’t as popular as it used to be, Ebbs said.

Another possible revision would define the term “hilltop” as the top 25 percent of a slope and identify that area as off-limits to development, leaving “hillsides” available to builders.

Instead of leaving developers guessing how close to Sand Creek they can build, one potential edit would create a 125-foot buffer zone on each side of the tributary.

Whereas the current General Plan sets a minimum lot size of about 10,000 square feet for nearly all residential construction, the amended version would lower it to 7,000 square feet, Ebbs added.

He describes the potential change as a win-win: Developers still would be able to achieve economies of scale by building the number of homes they planned without having to spend as much on installing sewer lines, sidewalks and other infrastructure. And because the projects would have a smaller “footprint,” more open space would be saved.

“(Builders) are happy that it’s been lowered down somewhat,” Planning Commissioner Kerry Motts said.

The revised General Plan also would specify how many homes a developer can build on a particular property; the existing map doesn’t show where open space ends and residential areas start, which creates uncertainty for builders, Ebbs said.

Regardless of whether the Planning Commission likes or disagrees with the proposed changes, its vote is non-binding; council members will make the final decision.

Commissioners originally were also expected to decide at Wednesday’s meeting whether to recommend that the City Council approve an amendment to the environmental impact report that was done before the General Plan was adopted.

Some critics of the city's plans for the Sand Creek Focus Area want the city to undergo another complete environmental review, however, arguing that the proposed changes to the General Plan would affect the area in ways that the original report did not consider.

Their comments have prompted Ebbs to suggest that planning commissioners hold off on a vote until he has determined how much a full environmental review would cost and, in light of that expense, whether it's still worth pursuing revisions to the General Plan.

Ebbs also noted that the City Council might want to wait to change the General Plan until it has decided whether to approve Richland Communities' application to build The Ranch.

East Bay Times

Grant will bring big improvements to Bay Point Regional Shoreline



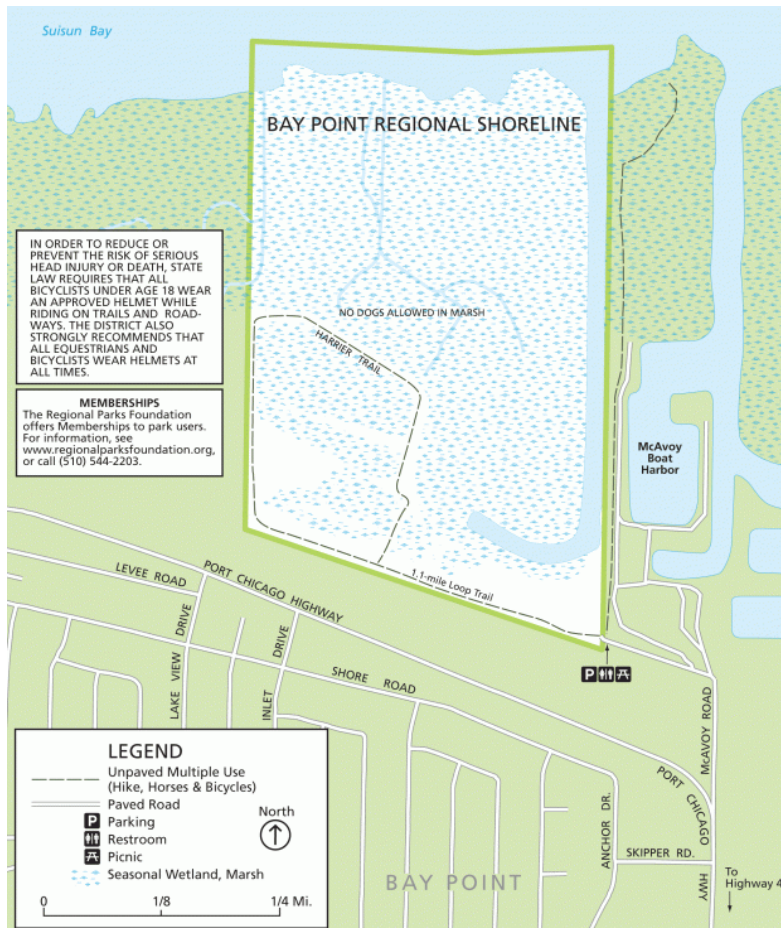
The East Bay Regional Park District has received a grant that it will use to make improvements along the Harrier Trail. (Dan Honda/Bay Area News Group)

By [Aaron Davis](#) | aarondavis@bayareanewsgroup.com | Bay Area News Group
PUBLISHED: **July 27, 2017** at 1:55 pm | UPDATED: July 27, 2017 at 2:58 pm

BAY POINT — The Bay Point Regional Shoreline struck it big this week with the announcement of a \$750,000 grant awarded to the park to improve access and prepare the trails for rising sea levels.

The 150-acre park will see new drinking fountains, walking and hiking trails, signage and enhanced access for the disabled.

The announcement came on Wednesday that East Bay Regional Park District was one of 22 recipients in the country for the National Park Service's Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership program, which is awarded to projects that will improve parks in urban areas.



A trail map for the Bay Point Regional Shoreline. (Map provided by East Bay Regional Park District.)

“We’re excited about this project and the ability to improve parks in East Contra Costa County,” said Dave Mason, public information supervisor for the EBRPD. “This grant is for putting improvements in areas that may not have as much access to nature.”

The grant comes from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, which is funded through royalties from oil and gas drilling. The Bay Point Regional Shoreline project received the maximum amount considered for projects. Past recipients from the fund include the Tidewater Park trail in Oakland’s Martin Luther King Jr. Regional Shoreline and Visitacion Valley Greenway in San Francisco.

On top of the NPS grant, the Bay Point Regional Shoreline has also received a \$200,000 grant for trail improvements from the California Department of Parks and Recreation.

With the help of the state grant, the 1.1-mile Harrier Loop Trail will be raised, as much as 5 feet in some areas, to prevent the trail from flooding in the future.

Although the trail currently floods in the winter time, the newly elevated trail [will stay dry for the next 60 years.](#)

The Press Democrat

Santa Rosa's plans to annex Roseland head for key vote

KEVIN MCCALLUM

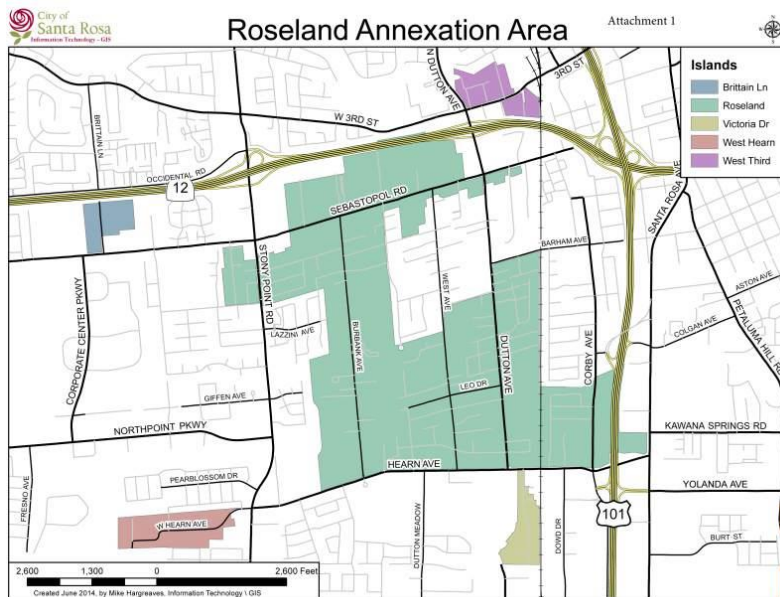
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT | July 29, 2017, 5:53PM

Santa Rosa annexation plans

If Santa Rosa is allowed to annex Roseland, it will be taking responsibility for five county islands totaling 714 acres of land in 1,614 parcels. Roseland itself is by far the largest island, comprising 85 percent of the annexation area. Here's the breakdown.

Area Acres Parcels

- Roseland 621 acres, 1,417 parcels
- Victoria Drive 19 acres, 47 parcels
- West Third Street 23 acres, 80 parcels
- Brittain Lane, 17 acres, 21 parcels
- West Hearn Avenue 34 acres, 49 parcels



LAFCO meeting on Roseland annexation
2p.m. Wednesday, Board of Supervisors chambers, 575 Administration Drive

When Santa Rosa began talking seriously about annexing Roseland decades ago, most current City Council members weren't yet involved in local government and politics. Two weren't even born.

The year was 1977, and a group of civic-minded Santa Rosa residents concerned about growth in the unincorporated areas southwest of Santa Rosa formed an organization called "Concerned Citizens of Roseland for Better Government."

Forty years later, the city says the time for better government in Roseland has arrived.

The City Council last year agreed to annex the remainder of the Roseland neighborhood and four smaller unincorporated islands in southwest Santa Rosa.

The move would bring 714 acres and 7,400 residents into the city and be the single largest expansion of the city limits in its history.

"It's a big deal," Mayor Chris Coursey said. "This is something that's long overdue."

The annexation will be far larger than the 1997 agreement that brought 300 acres of Roseland under city control, making instant city dwellers out of 4,700 residents of unincorporated Sonoma County. It will even top the 1955 annexation of Montgomery Village, which made city residents out of an estimated 7,100 residents of the neighborhood and shopping center prominent developer Hugh Coddling built in east Santa Rosa.

Seeking approval

But before its police officers can begin patrolling Roseland streets, its engineers can start designing new streets or its inspectors begin ensuring buildings are up to code, the city needs the approval this week of an obscure government agency known as the Sonoma Local Agency Formation Commission.

The mission of LAFCO, as it is known, is to make sure local government services are efficient by ensuring their boundaries are "sensible and coherent."

The board will meet Wednesday at 2 p.m. to consider the city's annexation request. LAFCO staff are recommending approval and think it highly likely the board will agree.

"I think it's teed up completely and ready to go," Mark Bramfit, LAFCO's executive director, said of the city's application for annexation, which it submitted in April.

The seven-member board is chaired by Petaluma Vice Mayor Teresa Barrett, and includes county Supervisors Susan Gorin and Lynda Hopkins. The meeting takes place at the Board of Supervisors chambers, 575 Administration Drive, Santa Rosa.

Bramfit said he thinks approval is likely because the city and the county have made thorough preparations.

They include, over the past three years, hammering out a financing agreement with the county, performing detailed environmental studies, pre-annexing all the parcels so people know what their new zoning regulations will be, and hosting dozens of outreach meetings with residents.

The financing agreement with the county presented some delicate negotiations, but resulted in a deal providing the city about \$12 million toward its increased costs for roads, parks and policing in Roseland over the next decade. It also included a permanent tax-sharing deal that kicks the city an extra amount — starting at \$226,400 and adjusted annually.

Costly proposal

The city is still going to bear the brunt of the costs, however. A 2015 city report estimated that Roseland would need to invest at least \$80 million in parks, roads and storm drains to bring the area up to the same level as the rest of the city.

While the LAFCO board decision is crucial, Roseland residents get the final say.

They could block the annexation one of several ways, all of them long shots.

If LAFCO approves the expansion, a 30-day reconsideration period follows during which residents can request the board change its mind. If passed on Tuesday, the reconsideration period would run through Sept. 1.

Then there is a protest period during which property owners and registered voters in Roseland can formally protest the annexation.

This provision is important because past opposition by residents has long been cited as one of the reasons the city never pursued full annexation. Significant underground pollution in the area from historically leaky underground storage tanks and dry cleaners has also loomed as another legacy the city would have to confront in an expansion.

Expressing opposition

LAFCO staff are proposing the protest period open Sept. 5, and run from 30 to 58 days, depending on the board's preference. That would close the protest period on Oct. 4 or Nov. 1.

If less than 25 percent of the registered voters within the area or less than 25 percent of property owners who own at least 25 percent of the total assessed value of the parcels being annexed protest, the annexation is approved.

If more than 50 percent of the registered voters in the area protest, the annexation is blocked. If somewhere between 25 and 50 percent of voters or property owners protest, then an election is held, with annexation being decided by a majority vote of Roseland residents.

You can reach Staff Writer Kevin McCallum at 521-5207 or kevin.mccallum@pressdemocrat.com. On Twitter @srcitybeat.

East Bay Times

Contra Costa Elections puts campaign, financial docs online

By [Sam Richards](#) | srichards@bayareanewsgroup.com | Bay Area News Group
PUBLISHED: July 31, 2017 at 9:29 am | UPDATED: July 31, 2017 at 11:38 am

MARTINEZ — In the name of a more transparent process, the Contra Costa County Elections Division has posted all campaign and candidate financial documents on its website (www.contracostacore.us) for real-time viewing.

“We want to make it easier for voters to be fully informed and know who lawmakers receive financial contributions from and where they spent campaign money,” said Joe Canciamilla, Contra Costa Clerk-Recorder and Registrar of Voters. “The goal of the database is to promote transparency and voter confidence.”

Previously, those interested in viewing many of these documents had to come to the Elections Division office in downtown Martinez to view paper records. Elections officials have been working since early 2016 on scanning paper documents from previous years to make them available online.

The documents posted online date back seven years for most offices, and at least 20 years for the Board of Supervisors.

The online system features enhanced search capabilities. Users can search for information by candidate name, committee type, election date or candidate identification number.

The online data allows users to search for items such as how much companies or political groups support various candidates with independent expenditures, or search for levels and sources of support for individual candidates, searchable by name.

The Contra Costa Elections Division handles financial disclosure documents for all committees and campaigns pertaining to county offices, fire districts, water districts and school districts throughout the county. These records have been posted on the elections website in real time since early 2016.

To get to the specific page to find these records, click [here](#)

Cities administer financial documents for their own elected officials. Direct links to these websites for some Contra Costa cities can also be found on the improved county elections site. For more information, contact the Election Division at 925-335-7800.

Water Deeply

House Bill Redirects River Flows From Fish to Farms

A bill passed in the U.S. House of Representatives would loosen restrictions on Delta water diversions, halt restoration projects and weaken the Endangered Species Act.

Written by [Alastair Bland](#) Published on Aug. 2, 2017 Read time Approx. 5 minutes



A grove of young pistachio trees near Porterville, California, in August 2016. H.R. 23, supported by agricultural groups in California, would help direct more water to farms. *AFP/ROBYN BECK*

Republican-backed federal legislation with strong support from agricultural communities in California aims to eradicate salmon from much of the San Joaquin River. It will nullify numerous laws protecting wetlands and waterways in order to provide farmers south of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta with more northern California water.

Environmentalists and fishery advocates are characterizing the bill, H.R. 23, or the Gaining Responsibility on Water Act of 2017, as one of the most aggressive attempts ever taken by the political allies of farming interests to divert maximum flows of water south from the Delta.

The 134-page bill strikes from existing laws a multitude of provisions that currently require water for fish and replaces them with measures that would redirect flows toward farmland.

“In this bill, they’re just saying, ‘Let’s turn the [Sacramento and San Joaquin] rivers into canals and forget about keeping fish alive and the many other natural benefits of rivers,’” said John McManus, the executive director of the Golden Gate Salmon Association. He says the bill benefits a small group of landowners “at the expense of the entire rest of the state.”

The bill, which was sponsored by Rep. David Valadao (R-Hanford), was passed on a party line vote in the House of Representatives last week. If the Senate approves the bill, it will loosen restrictions on Delta water diversions, stop river restoration projects and weaken the Endangered Species Act, all of which at times limit how much water reaches farmers in areas without reliable supplies of their own. The bill would also hasten the review processes for several proposed dams.

Kern County Water Agency staff confirmed that the agency supports the bill. So does the Fresno County Farm Bureau, whose executive director Ryan Jacobsen was quoted by the San Francisco Chronicle as saying, “This is the bill we need.” Jacobsen did not respond to multiple requests for comment. Neither did Valadao’s office or Westlands Water District.

A July 12 press release from Valadao’s office calls the bill “an effort to restore water deliveries for struggling communities.”

But according to Barbara Barrigan-Parrilla, director of the group Restore the Delta, which advocates for protection of the San Francisco-Bay Delta, the familiar story of unemployment in farming communities is being used as part of a ruse to get more water delivered to prosperous landowners.

“These are some of the richest farmers in the country,” she said. “We now have a million acres of almonds in California. Acreage of almonds in Westlands Water District and Kern County has doubled since 2010.”

She says diverting more water to areas chronically stricken by job shortages will not alleviate economic hardships. “These communities will be challenged by unemployment whether the water is running or not,” she said.



Fingerling Chinook salmon swim in a holding pen after they were transferred from a truck into the Mare Island Strait on April 22, 2014, in Vallejo, California. A new bill that passed the U.S. House of Representatives would seek to divert more water from fish to farms. (Justin Sullivan/Getty Images/AFP)

One of Valadao’s bill’s key features is the abandonment of a years-long, ongoing project aimed at reviving the San Joaquin River and restoring its depleted runs of Chinook salmon. The language of the bill explicitly forbids reintroducing salmon to the San Joaquin and would require fish and wildlife agencies to remove any Chinook salmon that find their way into upstream lengths of the river. “No salmonids shall be placed into or allowed to migrate to the Restoration Area,” the bill reads. “If any salmonids are caught at the Hills Ferry Barrier, they shall be salvaged to the extent feasible and returned to an area where there is a viable sustainable salmonid population of substantially the same genotype or phenotype.”

“Not only that, it would completely dry up 60 miles of river and divert every last drop of water to agriculture – that’s the author’s vision of California’s rivers,” said Doug Obegi, a staff attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council.

The bill expressly promotes converting parts of the San Joaquin into a “warm water fishery” environment – a type of ecosystem biologists warn is inhospitable to most native species and friendly toward invasive ones, like black bass and sunfish. It also adjusts the state’s water rights system by deprioritizing deliveries to wildlife refuge areas – generally characterized by vast

expanses of seasonally flooded wetland – and instead making the water more available to farmers.

The bill's backers have said in media interviews that habitat restoration efforts, especially those allowing water to flow through the river and eventually out to sea, have had marginal success in reviving fisheries while causing economic harm in agricultural communities. The Fresno County Farm Bureau's executive director told the San Francisco Chronicle that restoring the San Joaquin River's salmon runs is a hopeless prospect.

Valadao's bill would rewrite parts of 1992's Central Valley Project Improvement Act, or CVPIA, which sought to double naturally produced populations of salmon by requiring that "water dedicated to fish and wildlife purposes by this part [of the CVPIA] is replaced and provided to Central Valley Project water contractors."

It also would shift control of water resources from state agencies that manage water, fish and wildlife to the federal government – what California attorney general Xavier Becerra argued in a press release is an unconstitutional infringement on state sovereignty.

The bill will face some close scrutiny from at least two Democrats in the Senate.

"We're really lucky to have [Kamala] Harris and [Dianne] Feinstein opposing this," Barrigan-Parrilla said.

Feinstein has been an ally of San Joaquin Valley farmers in the past. In December, she coauthored a successful bill – S. 612 – that brought aid to residents of Flint, Michigan, but also allowed increased diversions from the Delta unless biologists could prove that doing so would harm endangered fish – something critics have said is difficult to do.

But Feinstein has stood up in opposition to H.R. 23. "California's Central Valley helps feed the world," Feinstein and Harris said in a statement released July 10. "It deserves sensible and responsible water solutions – this measure doesn't even come close to meeting that test."

Valadao, they said, is "giving the Trump administration greater control over water management in our state."

Harris and Feinstein also warned that H.R. 23 undermines the Endangered Species Act. The bill would do this by liberating river management policy from the constraints of the most recent biological opinions drafted about nine years ago by federal fisheries and wildlife agencies for the management of endangered Delta smelt and winter-run Chinook. The senators said Valadao's bill would revert management of these and other species to outdated scientific standards established in the 1990s.

"We will fight to defeat it in the Senate," Harris and Feinstein said in their statement.

Obegi doubts the bill will receive the 60 votes it will need to pass the Senate, mainly because both senators from the only state affected by the bill oppose it. He believes the Senate's vote will reflect what he thinks to be general public consensus.

"I don't think the people of California want to see their rivers dry up and their native fish and wildlife go extinct," he says.